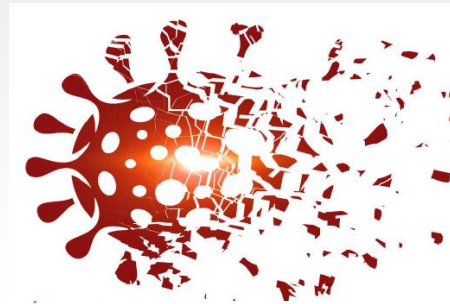


## *UJ-HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey*



**The Covid-19 Pandemic: Class,  
Mental Health and Human Rights**

# Not in the Mood: How lockdown has affected the mental health of South Africans

**Date: 4 June 2020**

# Background: The hidden struggle

- The Covid-19 pandemic: societies, governments, citizens under duress
- Internationally, **concern has been mounting** about the mental health consequences of long-term high-level lockdown.
- The full or partial lockdown in response to the Covid-19 epidemic been described as “**the largest psychological experiment in the world**”. It is an experiment few would volunteer to join.
- April 2020 [academic article](#) warns: “It appears likely that there will be **substantial increases in anxiety and depression, substance use, loneliness, and domestic violence**”.
- Globally, such emphatic assessments have contributed to calls for a calculated easing as soon as feasible and relatively safe.

# South Africa: An unequal struggle?

- As one of the world's most unequal societies in the world, the circumstances of South Africans caught up in the confinement differ dramatically
- The poorest depend on child support grants, grandparents' old age pensions, and remittances.
  - Economic effect of confinement has been devastating. This has been painfully visible on TV in the lengthening queues for food-parcels.
- Way these factors impact on our population's mental health received relatively little statistical attention locally.
- An HSRC-led research consortium has indicated that South Africa is in a **“moment of psychological crisis”**.

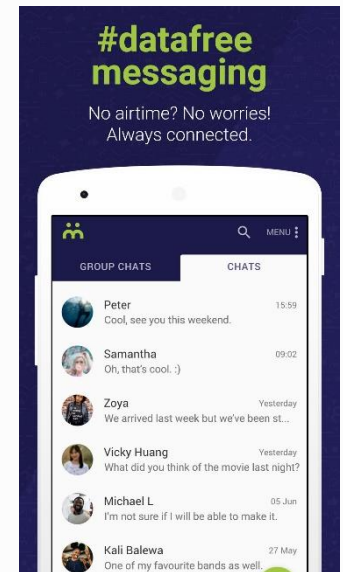


# Providing evidence

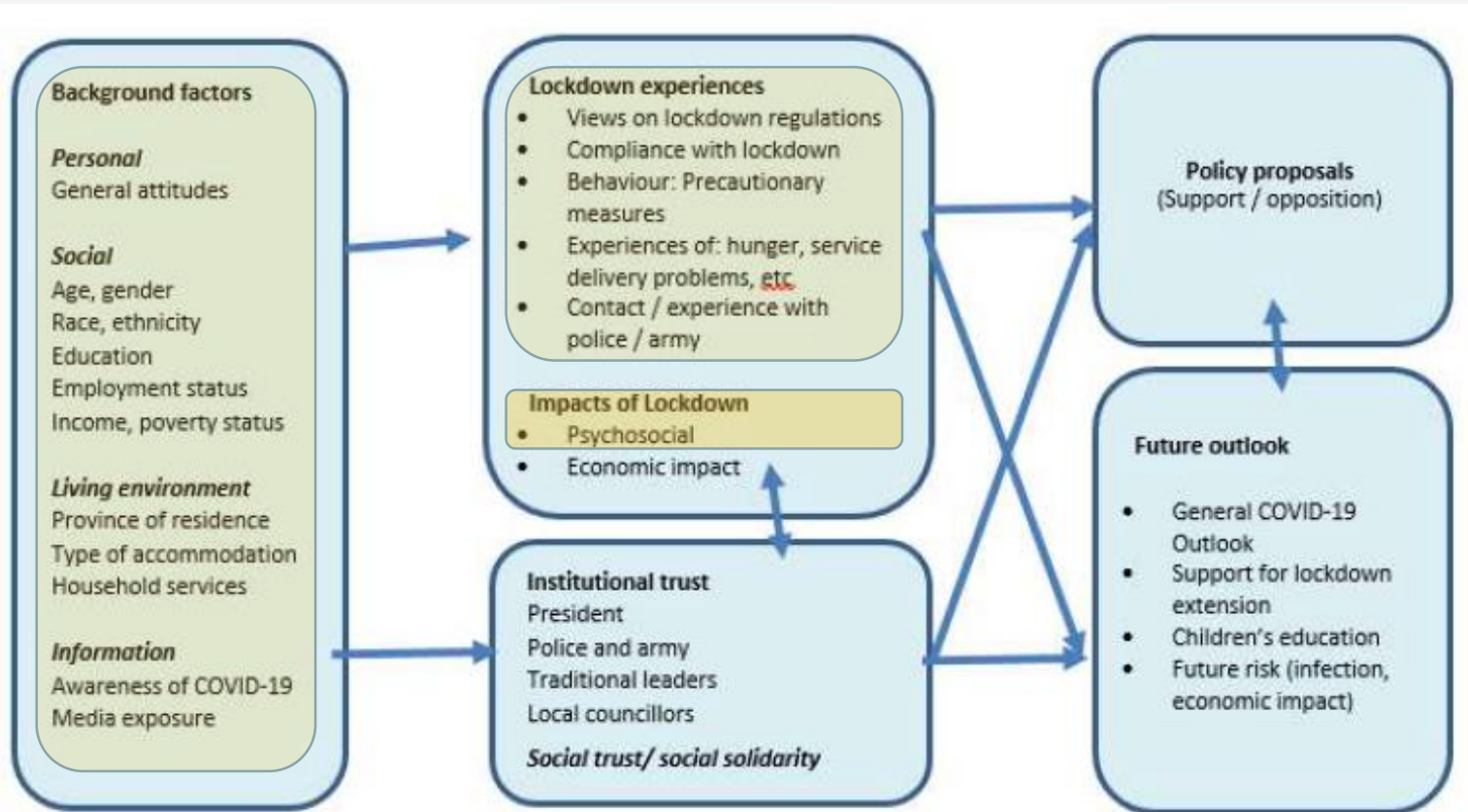
- **Critical need:** Developing an evidence-based psychological profile of the mental health and its determinants of South Africans under lockdown
- Presentation focuses on a number of variables related to mental health in UJ-HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey.
- Specifically, respondents were asked the following to capture different aspects of their psychological state:

**“Now we want to ask you a question about the effect of the lockdown on you emotionally. Which of the following emotions have you felt often during the past week?”**

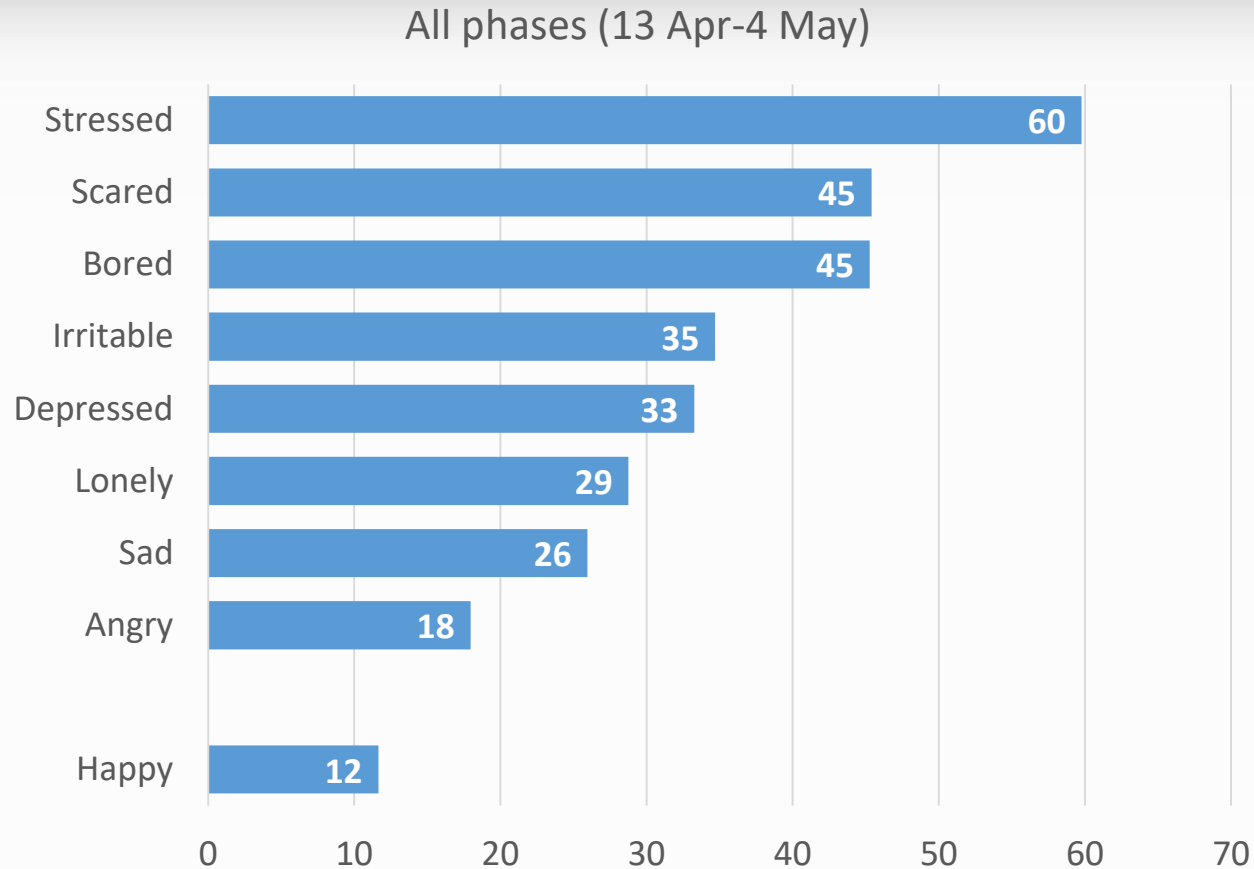
This was followed by a list of nine different emotions to which they answered yes or no.



# Conceptual framework

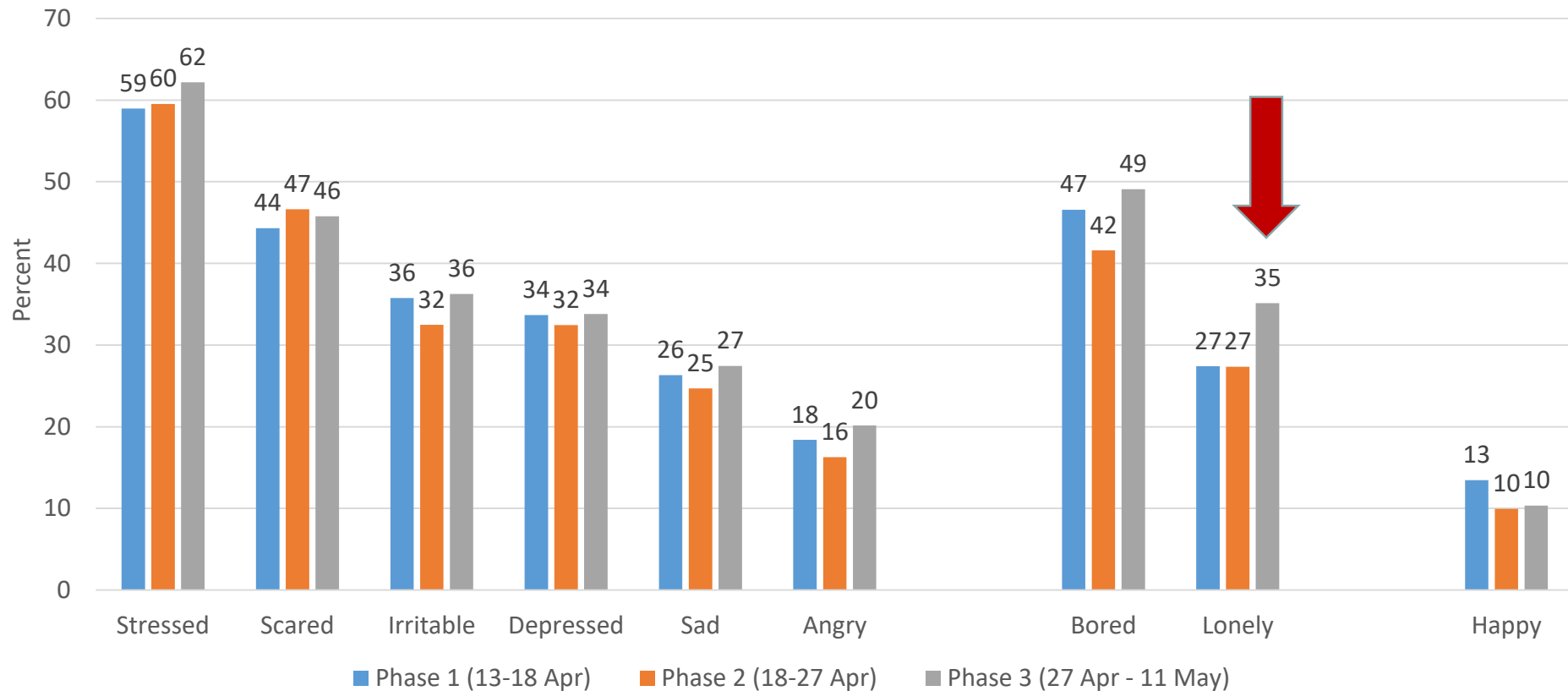


# The pattern of emotional experiences under lockdown



Source: UJ/HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey, opt-in survey, 12,312 respondents weighted to population

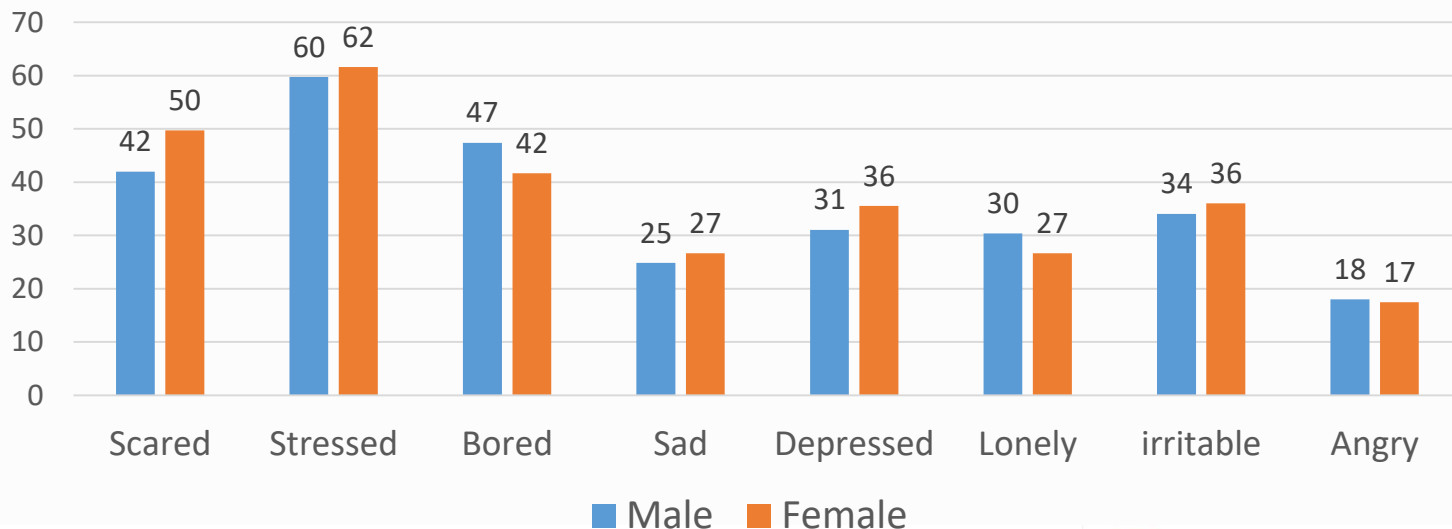
# The pattern of emotional experiences under lockdown, by phase of survey (%)



Source: UJ/HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey, opt-in survey, 12,312 respondents weighted to population

# Differential emotional experiences under lockdown

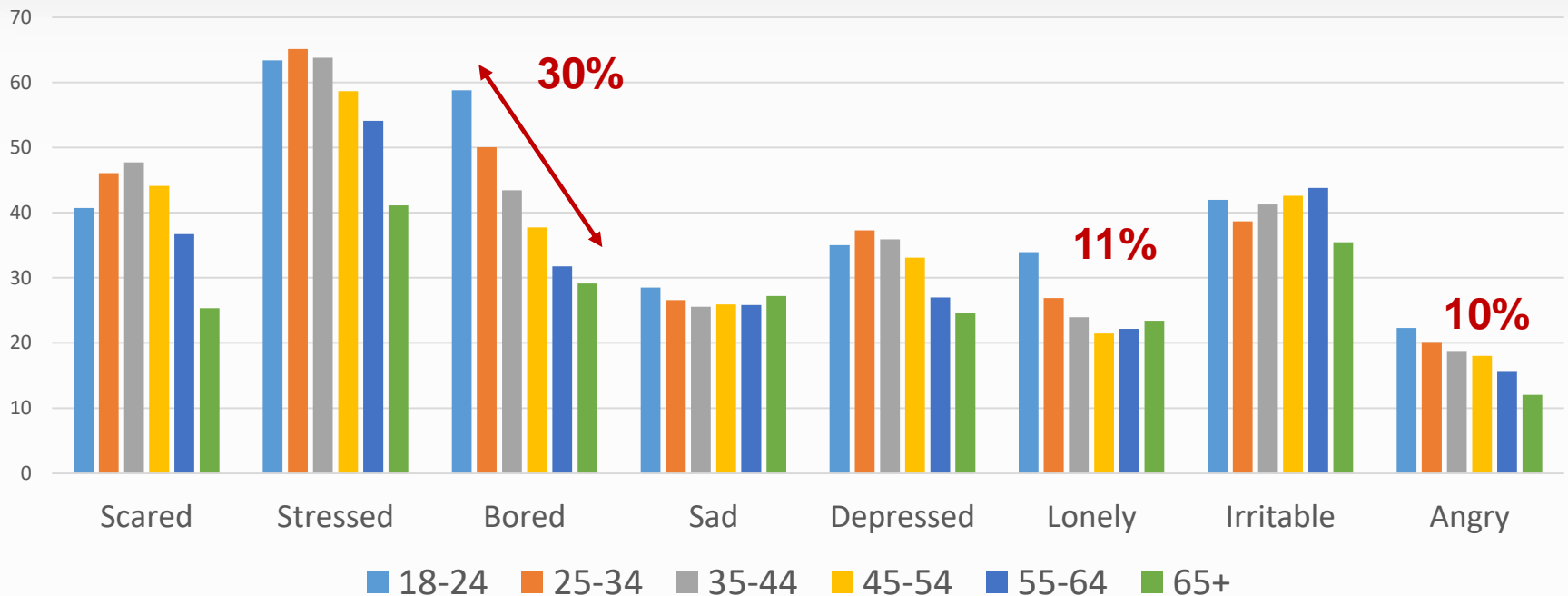
- Relevant nuances underlying this national pattern of negative emotional experiences.
- **Women** may be psychologically affected differently from men by some aspects of lockdown.
- More **depressed than men (36 vs 31%)**, more **apprehensive (50 vs 42%)**. May be because they almost certainly bear the brunt of extra child-care.
- **Somewhat less lonely (27 vs 30%)**, perhaps for the same reason. And they are not more stressed, irritable, angry or bored.
- Percentage differences not large but are statistically significant, and “add up”.





# Generational differences in emotional experiences under lockdown

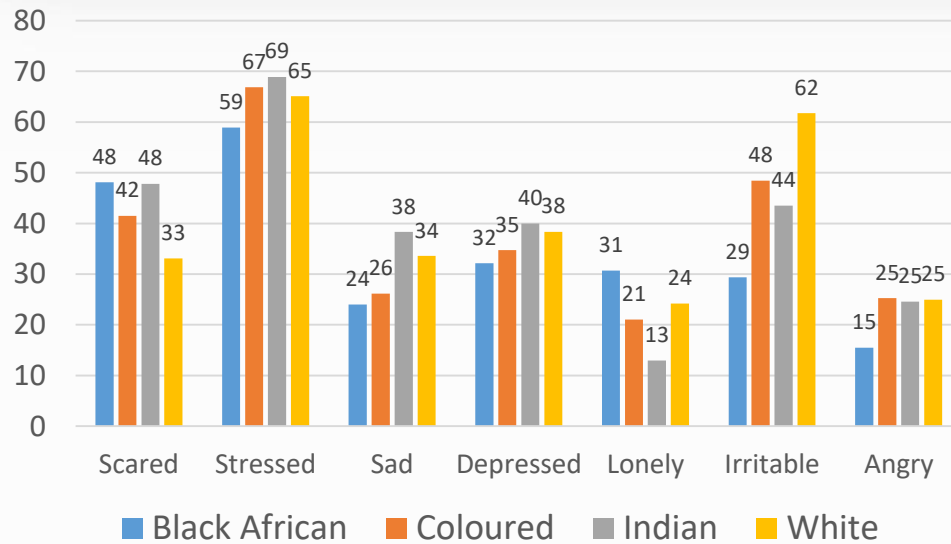
Average, phases 1-3 of survey (% experiencing emotion)



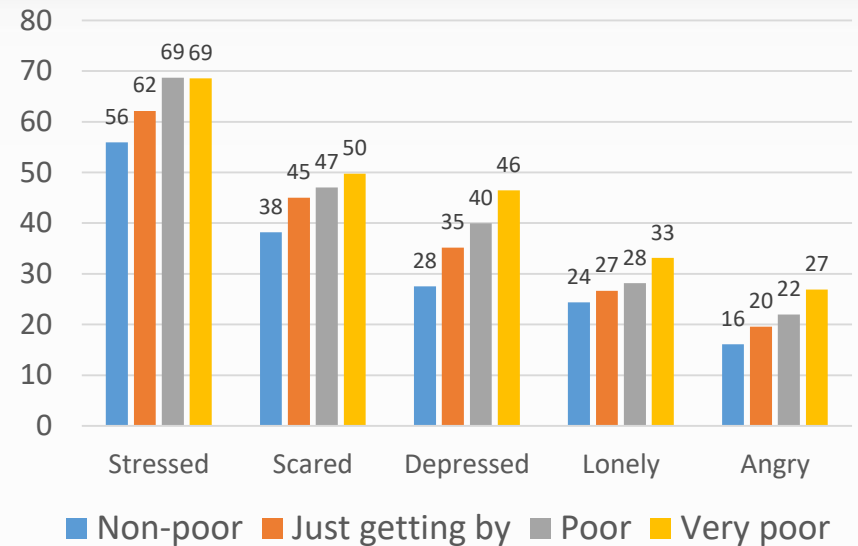
- Young South Africans more prone to boredom, loneliness and anger than older adults.
- Suggests that the psychological effects of lockdown are being experienced differentially by age group.

# Differential emotional experiences under lockdown: race, class

Population group



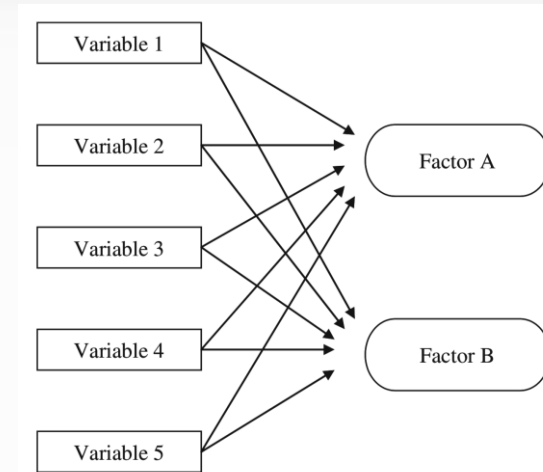
Subjective poverty status



- There are other important variations to disentangle reflecting our rainbow nation.
  - 53% of white respondents reported household incomes above R10,000 per month, compared to merely 6% of black Africans. That, sadly, was expected.
  - Yet only 29% of black African adults reported irritation, half that among white adults (62%)!

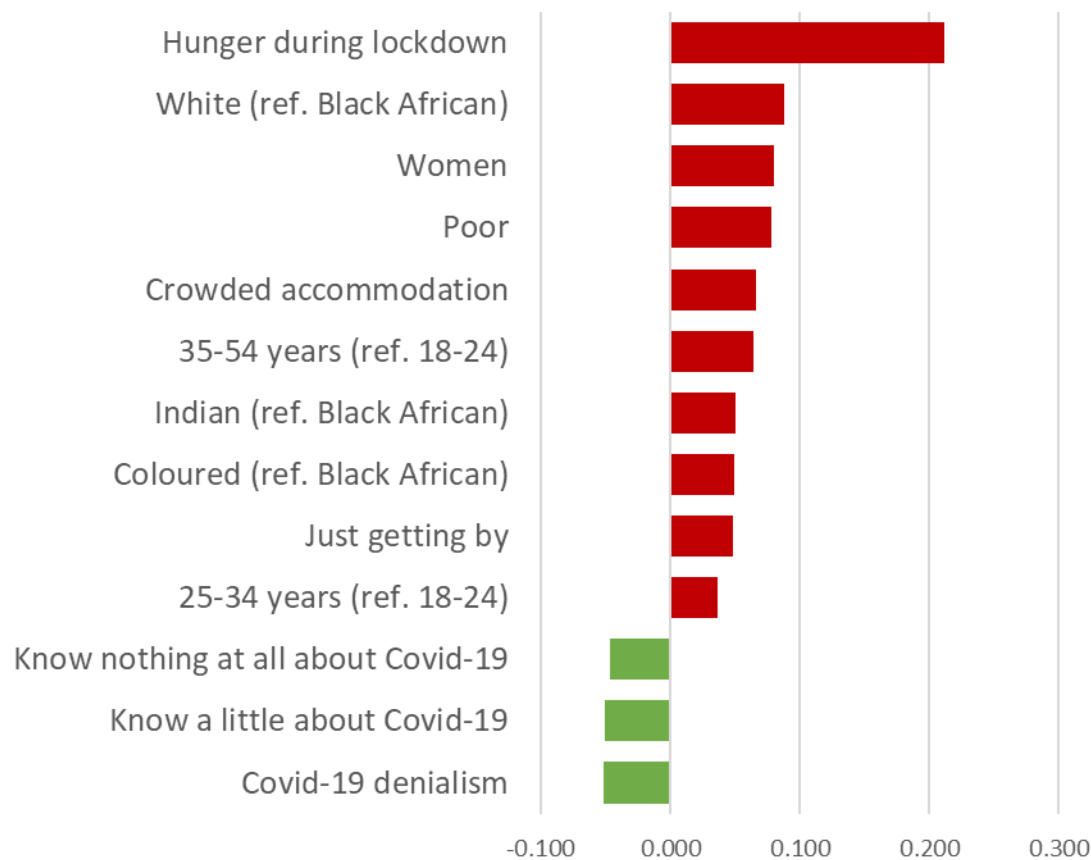
# Factor Analysis + Regression Analysis

- Eight variables: a handful to analyse at once. Need to simplify!
- **Factor analysis:**
  - Two underlying psychological factors at work
  - **Factor 1: Psychological distress:** comprises the six conditions – including being scared, depressed, sad, and irritable.
  - **Factor 2: Isolation:** boredom or loneliness
- **Regression analysis:**
  - Using composite measures to tackle a key issue...  
What are the chief drivers of these phenomena, so that their components may be mitigated?



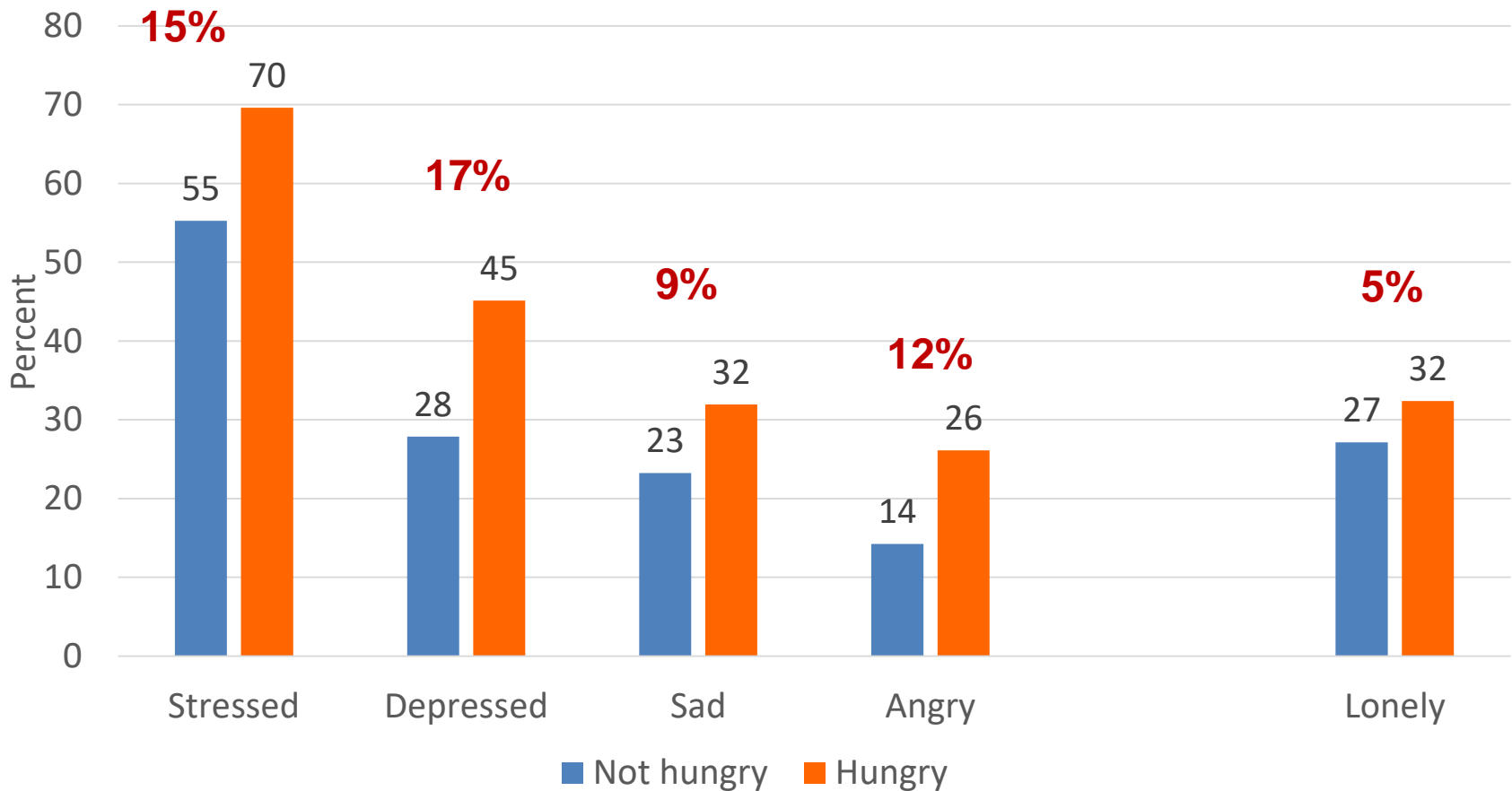
# Determinants of psychological distress

Psychological distress (standardised betas)



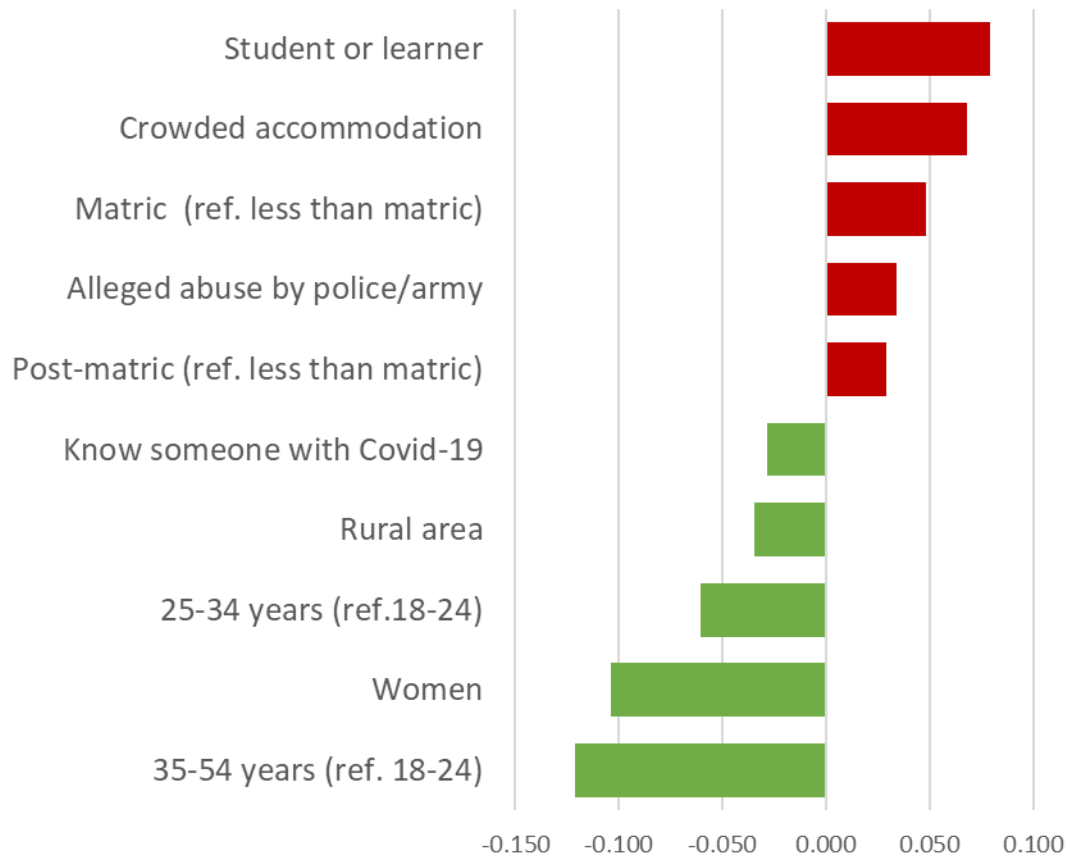
- Strongest predictor of composite psychological distress: **sheer hunger**.
- This is, tragically, no surprise. Survey points to alarming extent of the problem.
- **“Worst thing” about lockdown:** most frequent response (31%), not having enough food to eat
- “I am an unemployed mother of three kids and I don’t know where my next meal is coming from”; “I am living with a granny and hunger is killing us”; “Hunger and the fear of dying out of hunger since no income.”

# Determinants of psychological distress



# Determinants of isolation

Isolation (standardised betas)



- **Age seems to be a critical factor** underlying feelings of isolation
  - Those 18-24 more likely to report this than those 25-54
  - Students and learners feel more isolated than FT employees
- **Educational attainment** also seems to matter
- **Alleged abuse of authority** more common among those feeling isolated.
- Lower levels of reported isolation among **women** and **rural residents**

# Outcomes of psychological distress and isolation

- **Institutional trust**

- Psychological distress and isolation both negatively associated with **trust in President, police, army**

- **Support for lockdown**

- Psychological distress and isolation positively associated with both **conditional support and opposition to lockdown extension** (relative to unconditional support)

- **Outlook**

- Psychological distress and isolation positively associated with a **more sombre outlook** (worst yet to come)
- Psychological distress (but not isolation) positively associated with **worry about Covid-19 impact on child's education**



# Concluding remarks

- Patterns among data such as those highlighted are potentially powerful because...
  - they are representative of South African adults;
  - and may therefore be persuasive and helpful to democratically accountable authorities in their decision-making.
- But their force is greatly enhanced if they are “ground-truthed” by authoritative eye-witness testimony....



# Concluding remarks

“Consults are taking a lot longer because people are so lonely, so bored, so stressed... People who have lived alone for seven weeks with no interaction. They are not okay. Moms who are desperate. People who have been told that this is their last salary and then it's UIF, if they can access it. The fear, the anger, the depression... It is so real and really scary.”

**“ Please remember that there is both physical health and mental health. Too much stress is just as dangerous as the virus”**

“Please can you remove the lock down... Pretty please Sir... I am mentally ill and struggle being inside for too long. I am having mental health issues being cooped up inside... Please”

**“I just wish you had organized with varsities to let students stay in res because now many of us will not have access to the internet for online learning, we are being abused at home and are now suicidal. It sucks seeing myself in this dark mental space.**

“Please make means for psychological help or Therapeutic help for the citizens of South Africa who need it the most because the lockdown affects people mentally”

**“I am unemployed and my mental instability has proved to be my worst nightmare during this lockdown”**

# Concluding remarks

- This scary, unavoidable worldwide experiment will end.
- But as both our President and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group have warned, it requires concerted attention and the correct measures.
- Mental distress and isolation, no less than their prime socio-economic determinants, must be part of the mix.



# Research Team

<b>University of Johannesburg</b> Centre for Social Change	<b>Human Sciences Research Council</b> Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES)
Prof. Kate Alexander Prof. Carin Runciman Dr Mark Orkin Mr Martin Bekker Ms Boikanyo Moloto Ms Thandeka Mcameni	Prof. Narnia Bohler-Muller Dr Benjamin Roberts Dr Yul Derek Davids Dr Stephen Rule Dr Charles Hongoro Mr. Ngqapheli Mchunu Ms. Thobeka Radebe Ms. Yamkela Majikijela

# Thank you



**DCES**  
Developmental, Capable  
& Ethical State

