Scottish Centre for Social Research

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# From aspiration to reality

Tracking the transitions of Scotland's young people from 14 to 20

growing up in Scotland



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# The loneliest generation: What it is like to grow up in England today

# What is GUS?

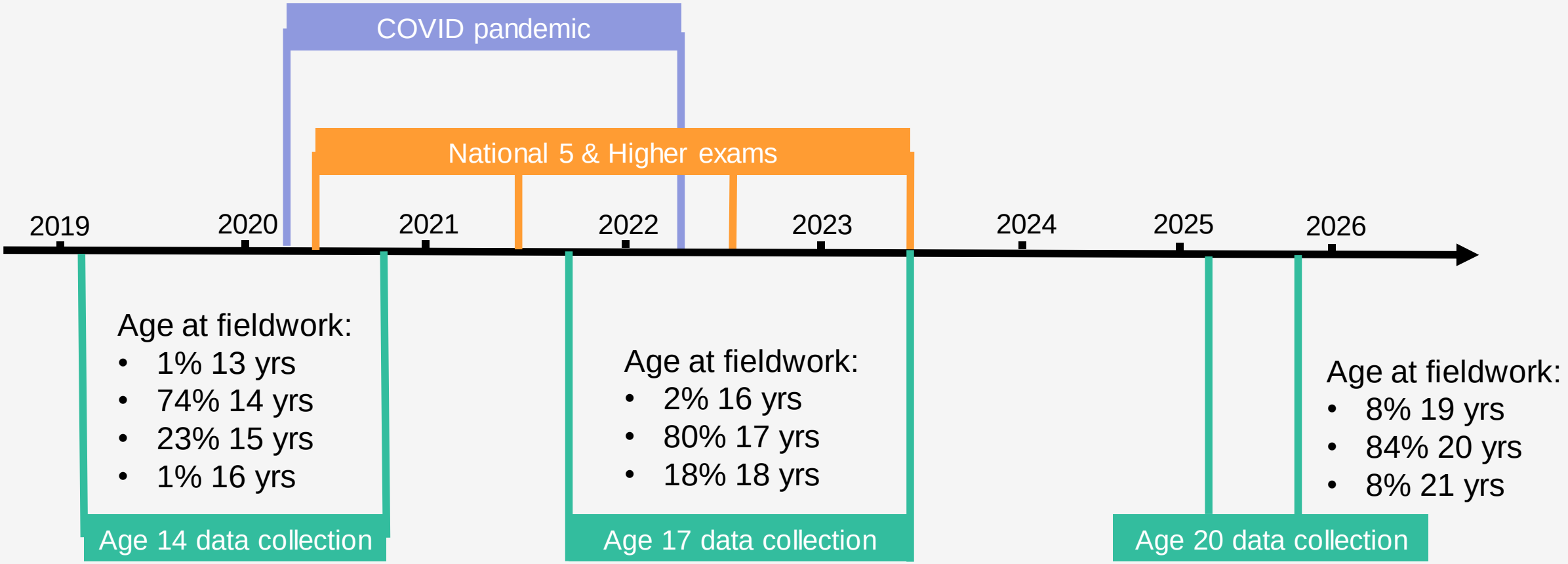


- Large-scale longitudinal birth and child cohort study involving national samples of children living in Scotland
- Three cohorts:
  - Birth cohort 1: 5217 children, born 2004/05, aged 10.5 months at 1st interview
  - Child cohort: 2859 children, born 2002/03, aged 34.5 months at 1st interview
  - Birth cohort 2: 6127 children, born 2010/11, aged 10.5 months at 1st interview
- Commissioned by the Scottish Government and running since 2005

# Ages and stages

| Child's age | Cohort/Year of data collection | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Child cohort | Birth Cohort 1 | Birth Cohort 2 |
| **10 months** | | 2005/06 | 2010/11 |
| **Age 2** | | 2006/07 | |
| **Age 3** | 2005/06 | 2007/08 | 2013 |
| **Age 4** | 2006/07 | 2008/09 | |
| **Age 5** | 2007/08 | 2009/10 | 2015 |
| **Age 6** | 2008/09 | 2010/11 | |
| **Age 8** | | 2012/13 | |
| **Primary 6 (Age 10)** | | 2015/16 | |
| **S1 (Age 12)** | | 2017/18 | |
| **S3 (Age 14/15)** | | 2019/20 | |
| **Age 17/18 (S6)** | | 2021-23 | |
| ***Age 19/20 (S6)*** | | *2025* | |

# Timeline of data collection, exam diets and COVID restrictions



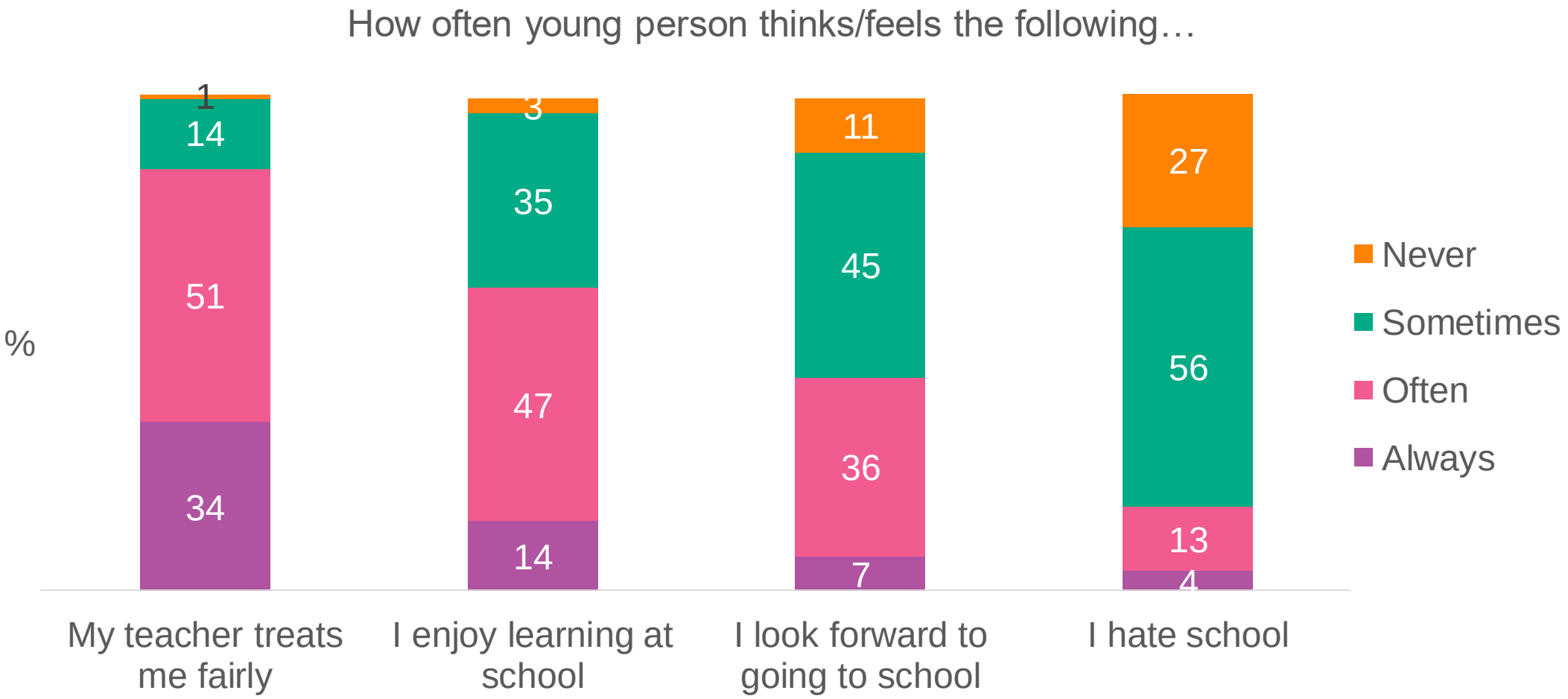
# GUS topic coverage

- Household composition
- Employment
- Income and financial management
- Parental demographics
- Child health and development
- Other household parents
- Childcare and pre-school
- Parental health
- School and Further Education
- Anti-social behaviour
- Parental support
- Parenting and parent-child relationships
- Parent and child social networks
- Neighbourhood and community
- Activities
- Food and nutrition
- Parental relationships
- Housing and accommodation
- Technology
- Health behaviours

# Sources of information at each age point

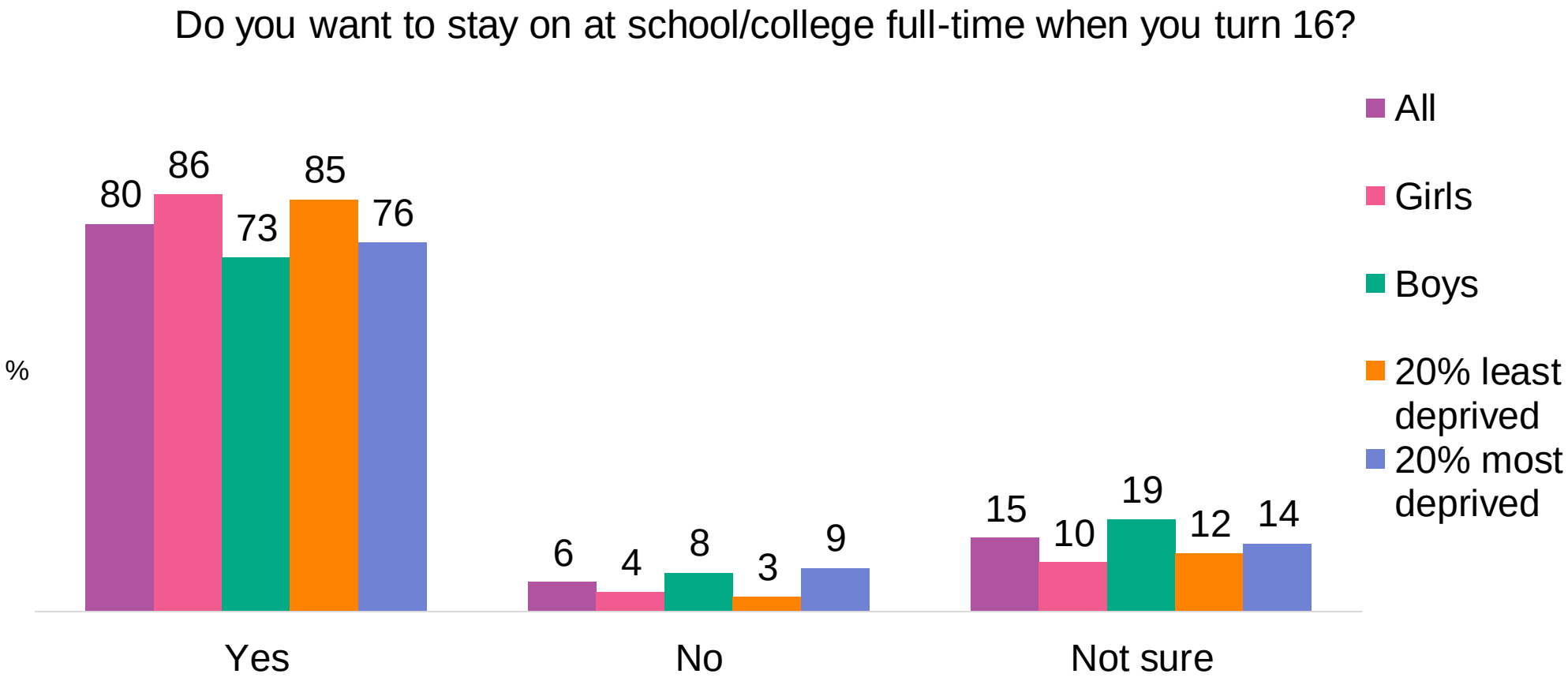
| Source of data | Cohort member's age/school stage | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10mth | 2yrs | 3yrs | 4yrs | 5yrs | 6yrs | 8yrs | 10/P6 | 12/S1 | 14/S3 | 17/S6 | 20yrs |
| Main carer interview | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Partner and Teacher questionnaires | | *Partner* | | | | | | *Teacher* | *Partner* | *Partner* | | |
| Cohort member questionnaire | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child H&W measurements | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cognitive assessments | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Admin data - health records | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Admin data – school records | | | *Pre-school* | | *Primary School* | | | | *Secondary* | | | |
| Admin data – SQA and post-school | | | | | | | | | | | | |

# Young people had broadly positive views about school at age 14



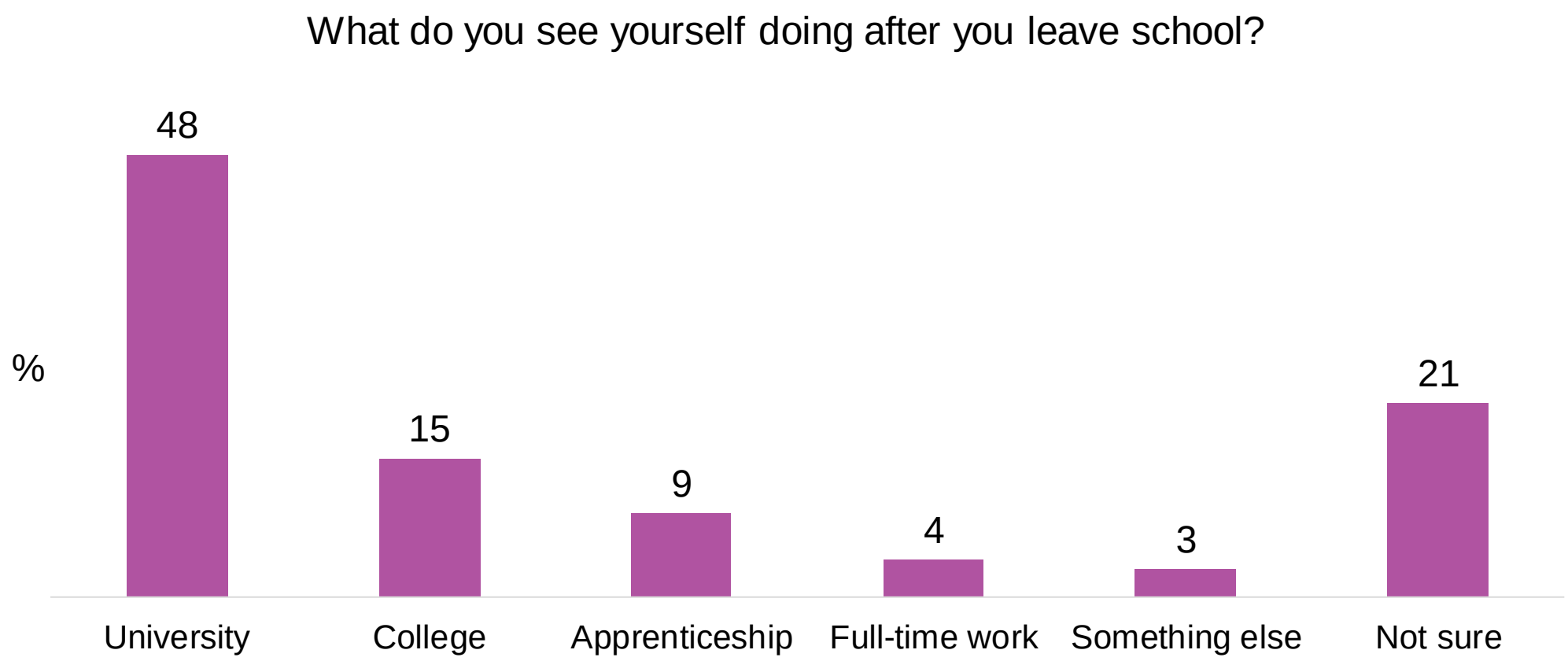

*Base: Age 14. All young people currently attending school (2595)*

# These positive experiences translated into strong aspirations at the same age for staying in education…



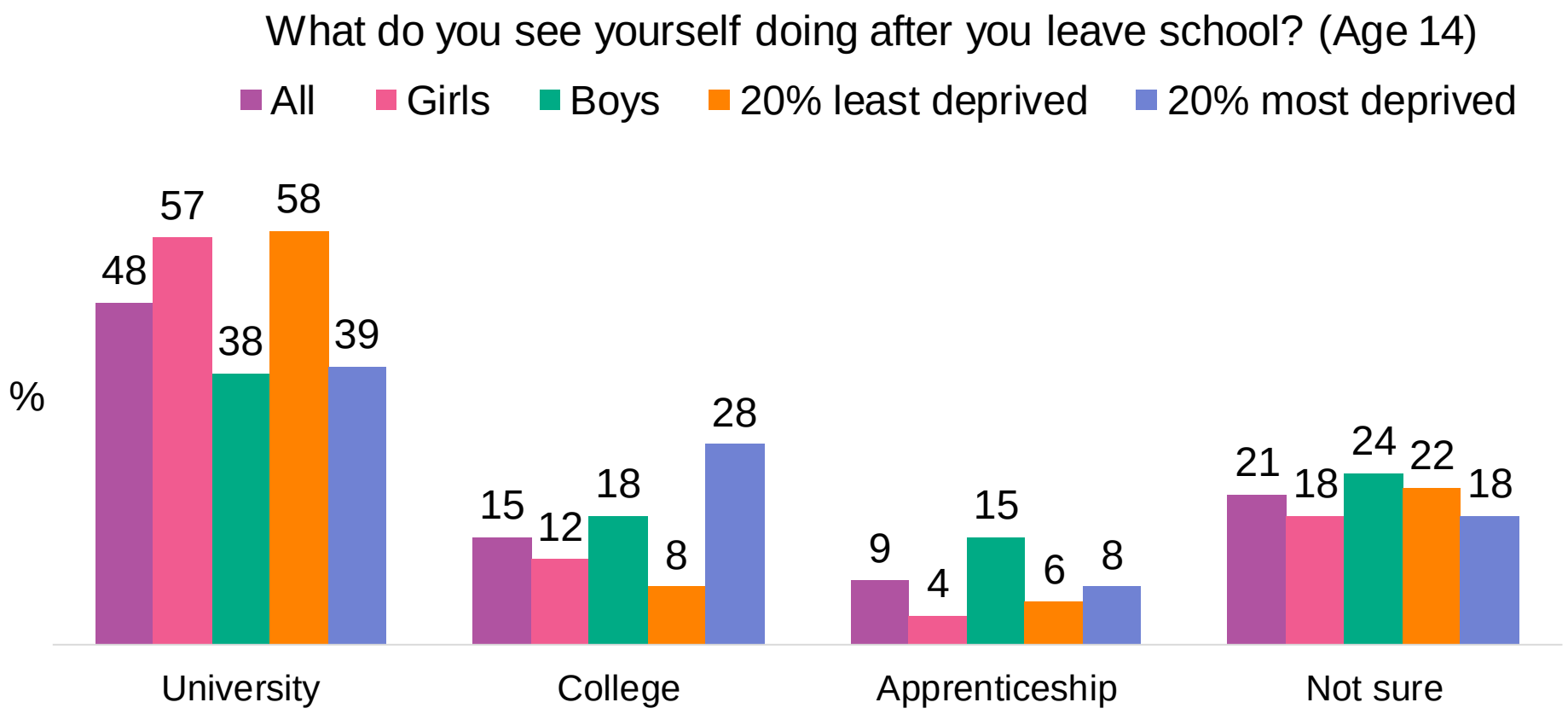

*Base: Age 14. All young people currently attending school or home schooled (2601)*

# …and beyond. Though not everybody was certain about what they wanted to do



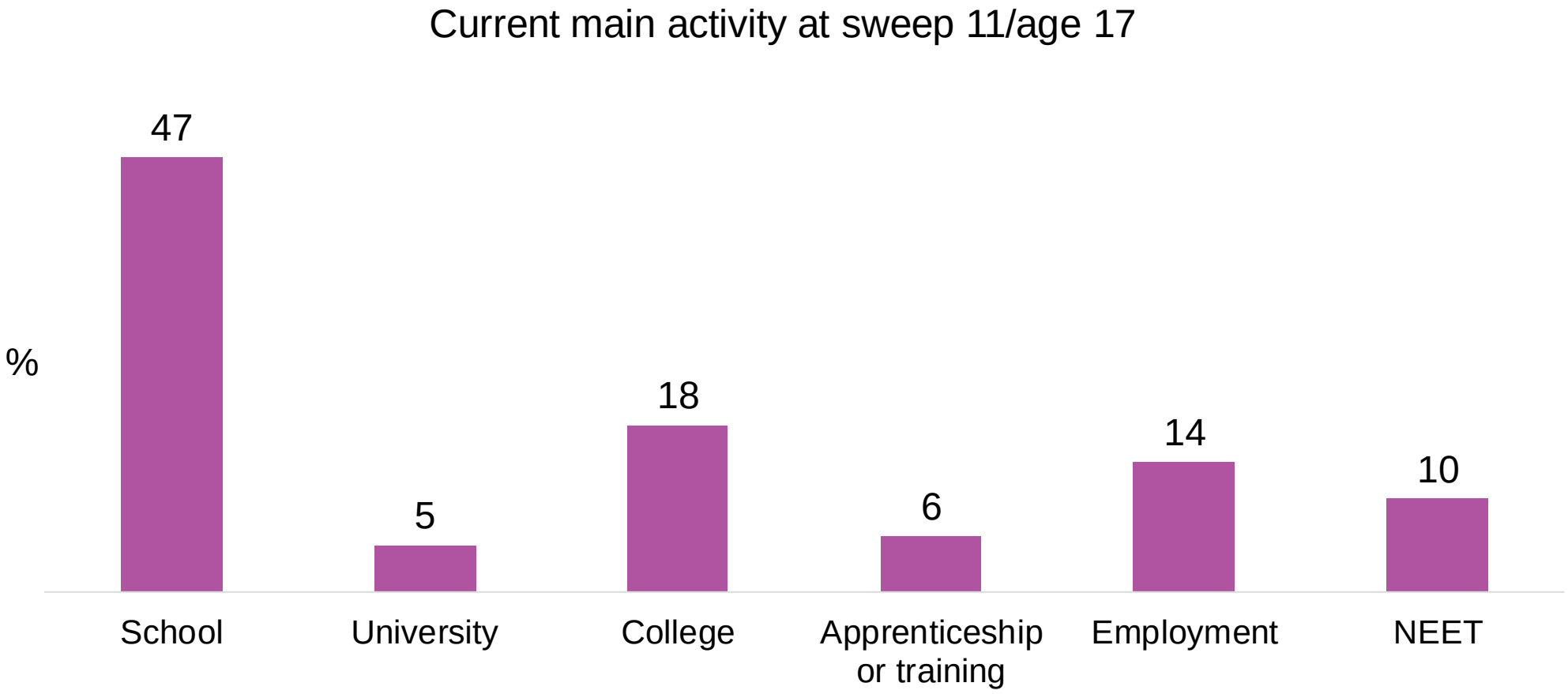

*Base: Age 14. All young people currently attending school or home schooled (2601)*

# Although higher for some groups, university was the most common destination aspired to by all



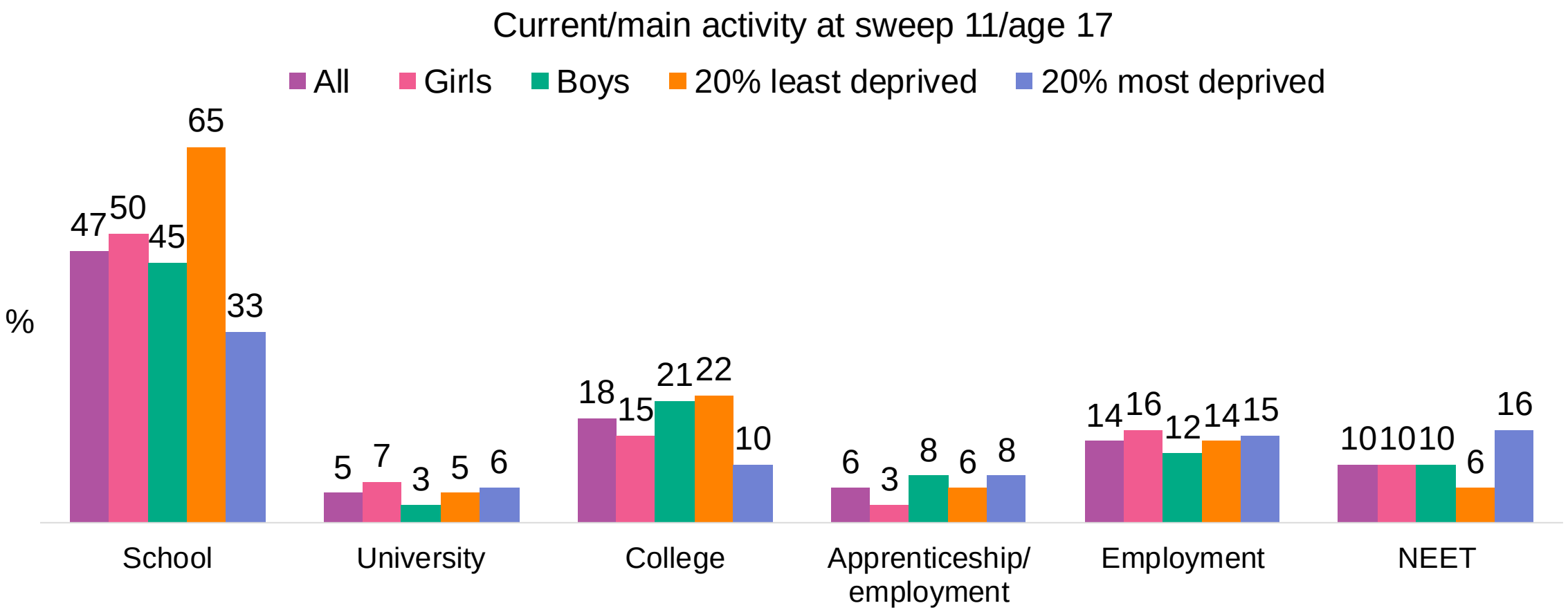

*Base: Age 14. All young people currently attending school or home schooled (2601)*

# By age 17, many had left school – most to continuing education or employment. One in ten are NEET



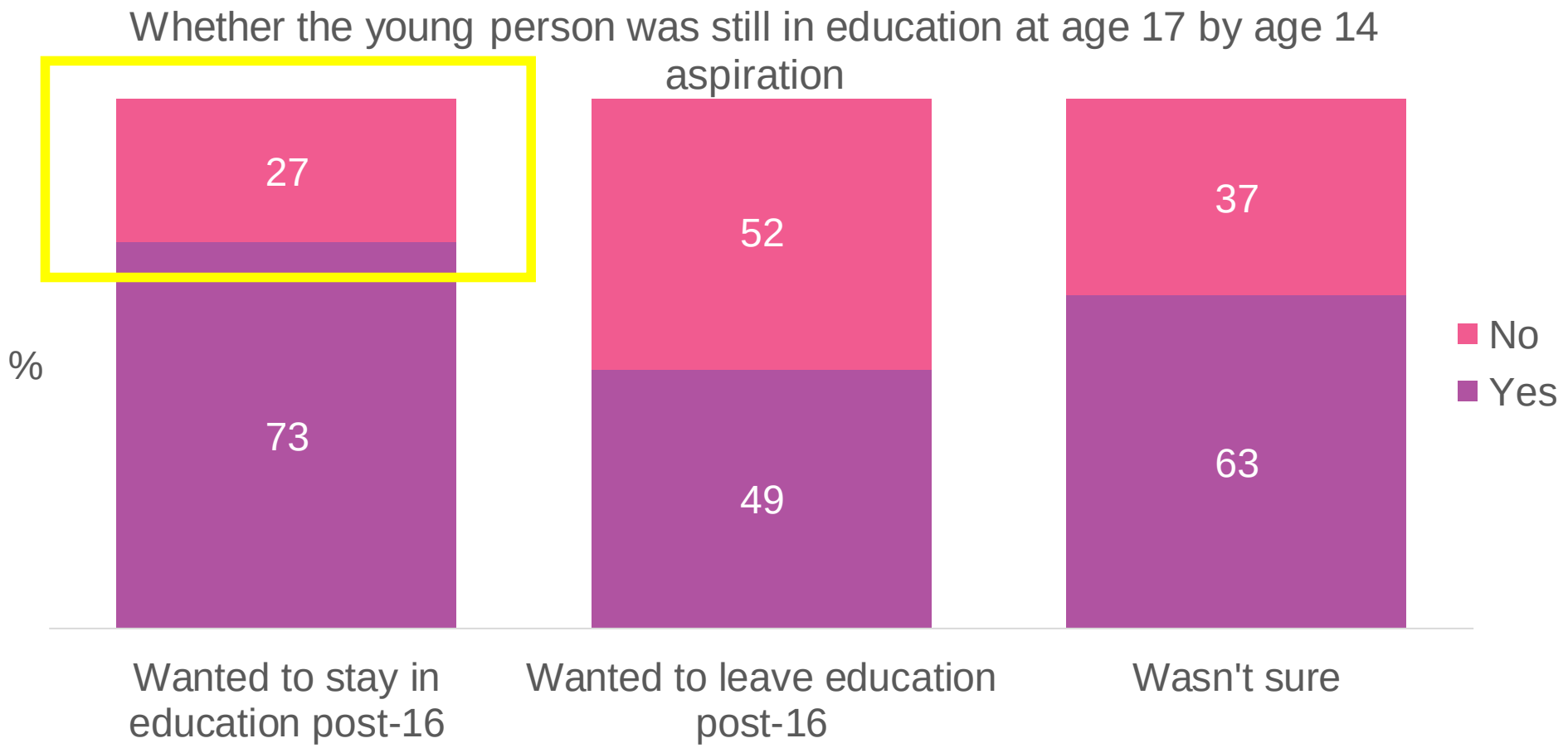

*Base: Age 17. All young people (2333)*

# With some notable differences emerging by sex and income



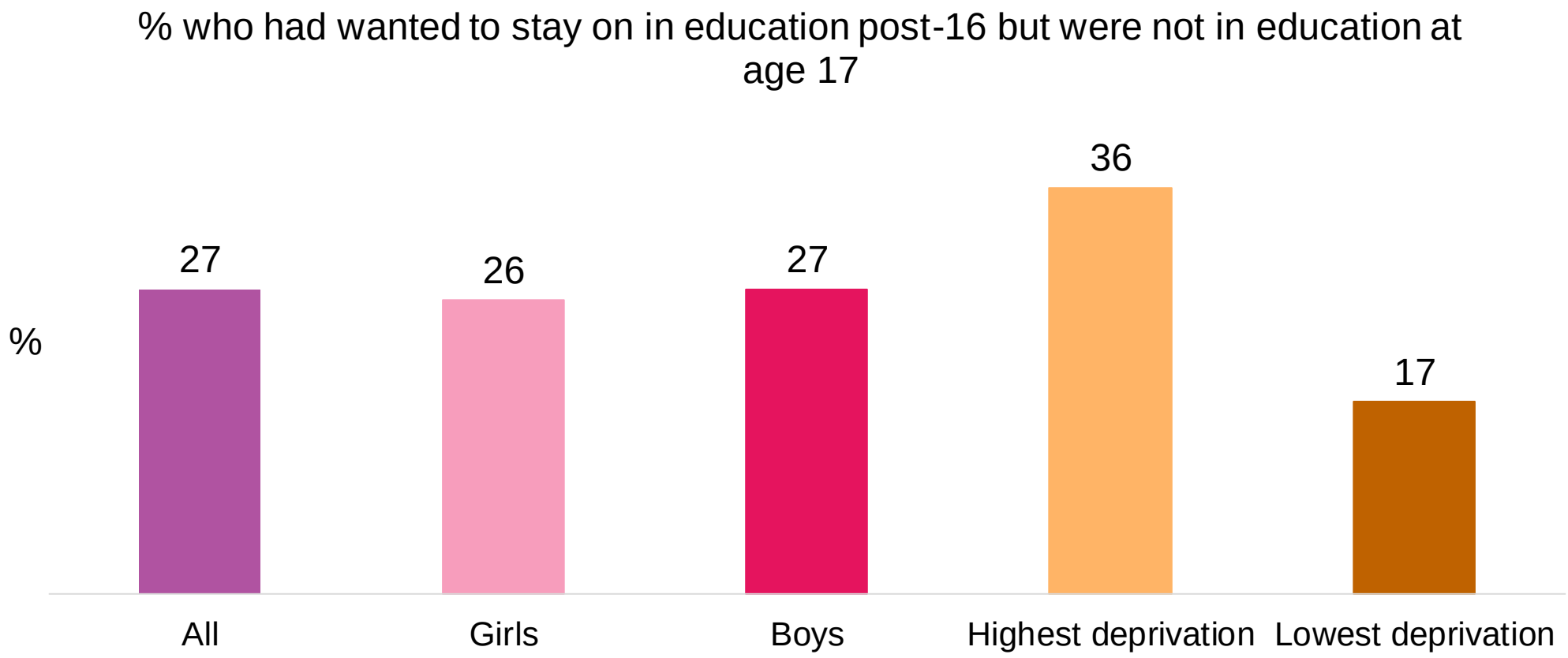

*Base: Age 17. All young people (2333)*

# By age 17, educational aspirations are aligned for many but have not been met for some



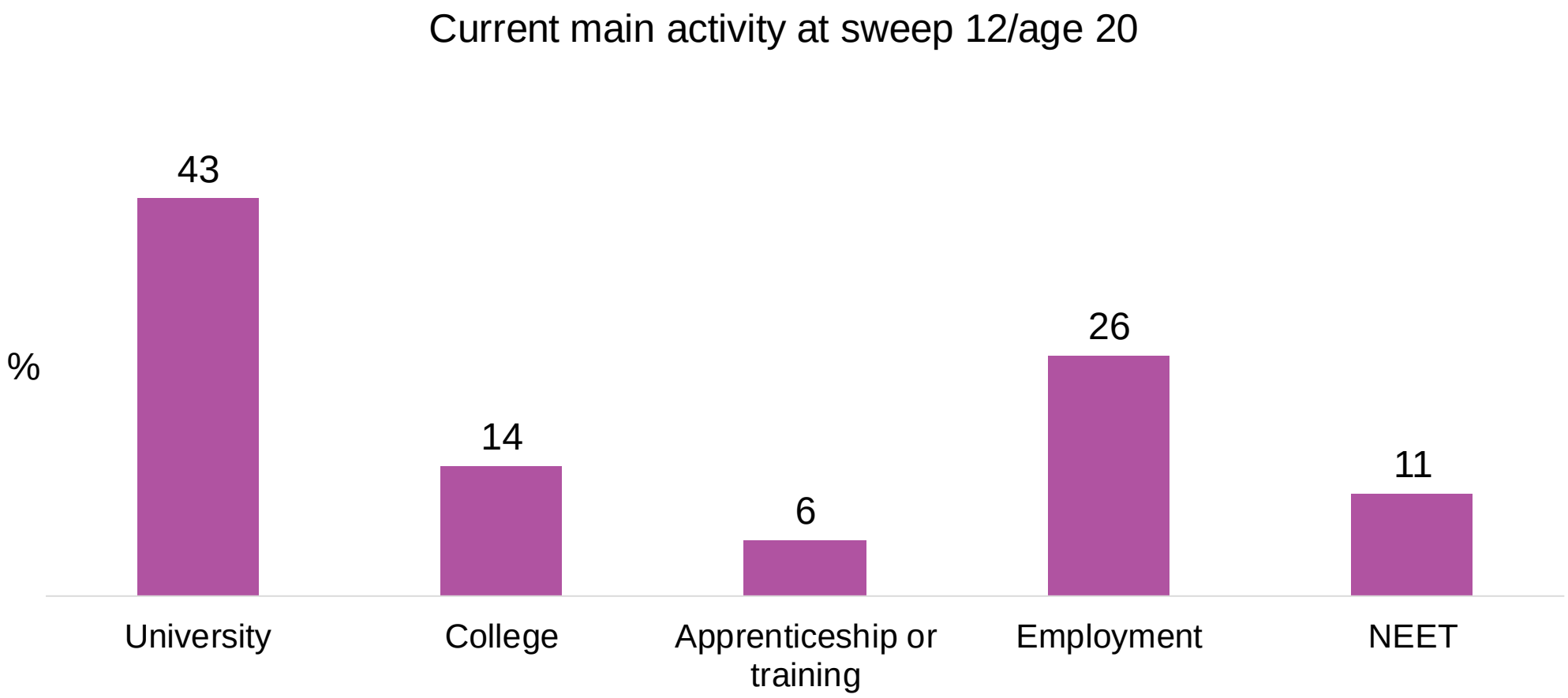

*Base: Age 17. All young people who also had data at age 14 (1992)*

# Some indication that young people from more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to have missed this goal



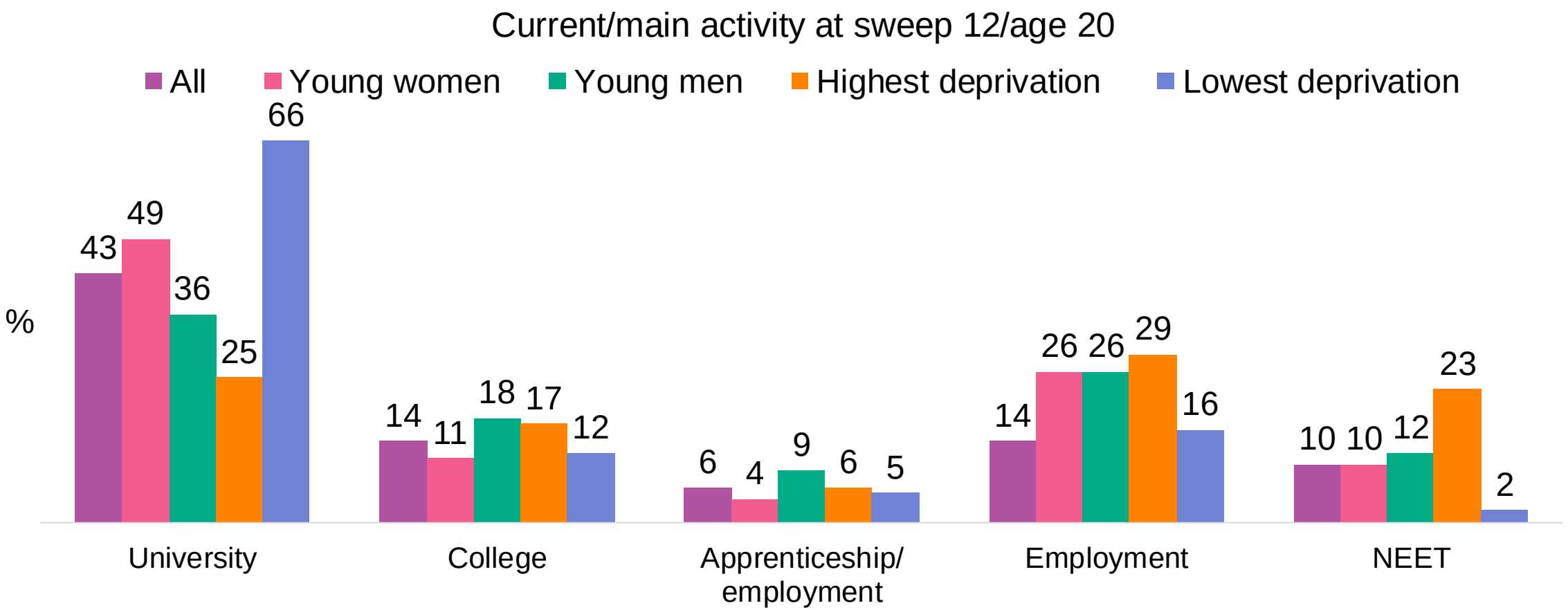

*Base: Age 17. All young people who also had data at age 14 (1992)*

# At age 20, university is the most common activity, but many are also working



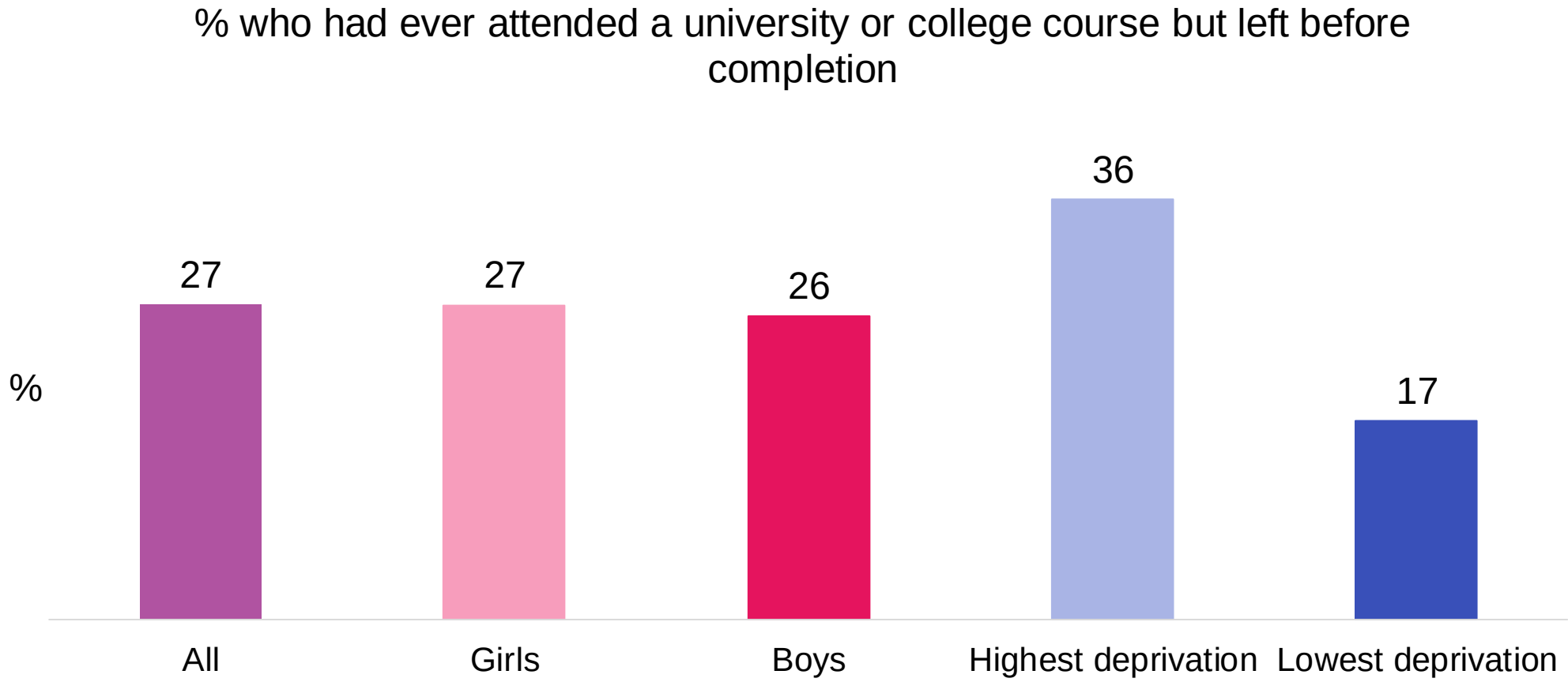

*Base: Age 20. All young people (2205)*

# There are striking differences in university attendance and NEET by deprivation



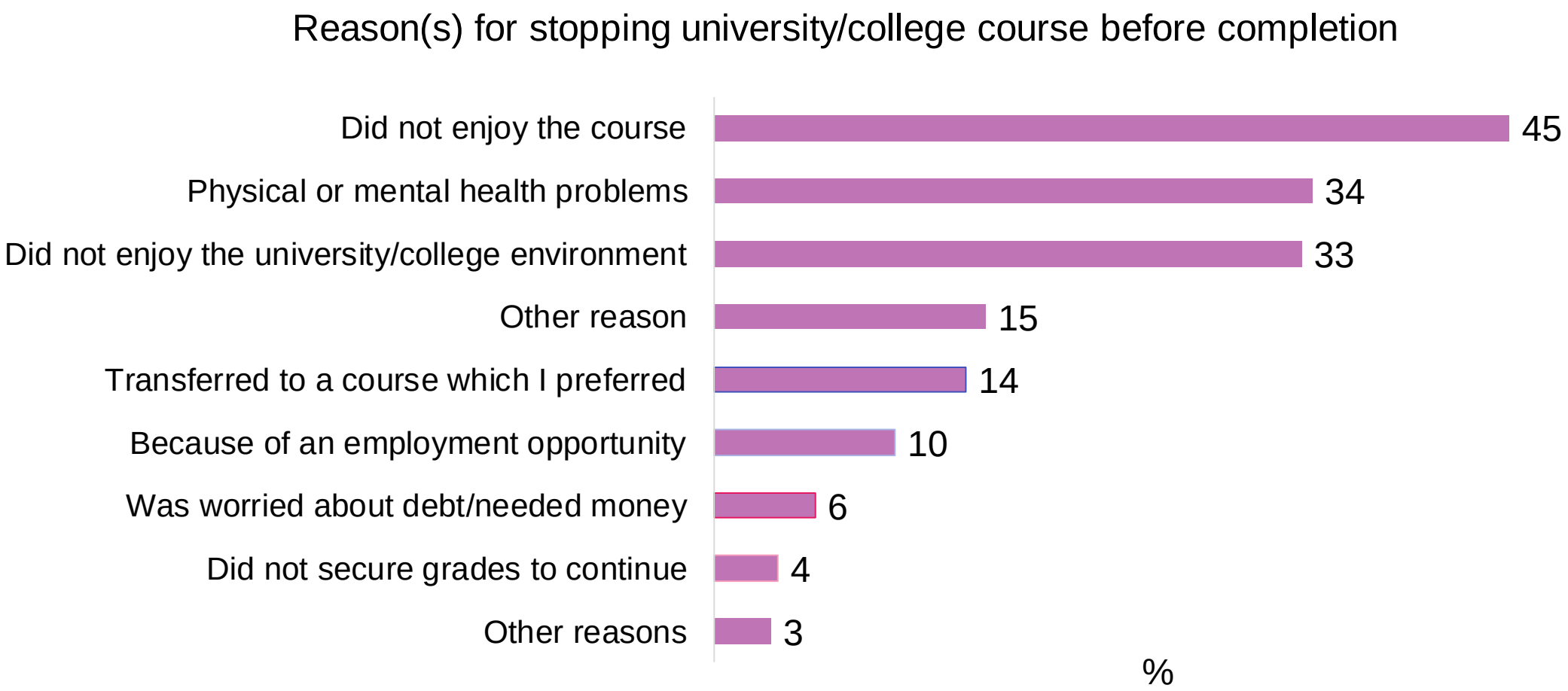

*Base: Age 20. All young people (2205)*

# Course drop-out is also socially graded



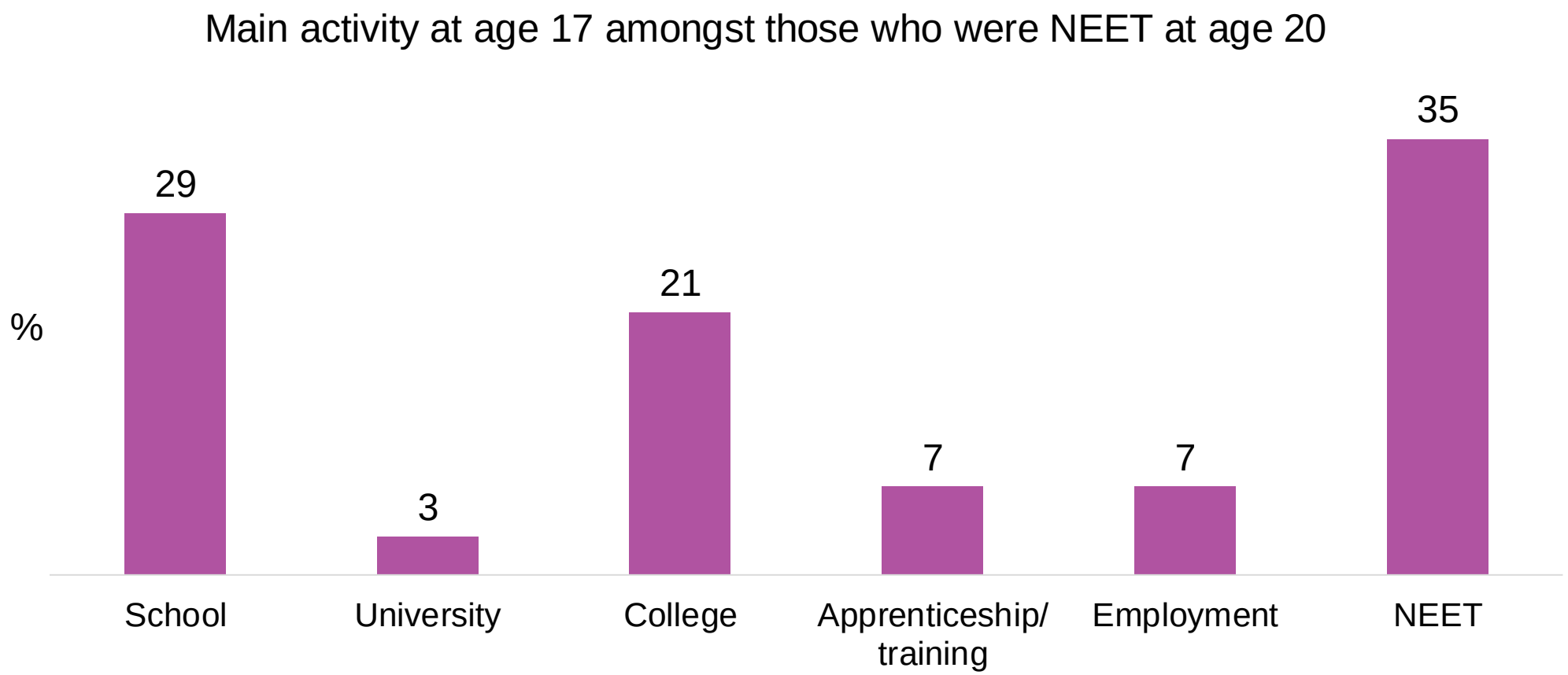

*Base: Age 20. All young people (2202)*

# Physical or mental health issues are a prominent reason for drop out



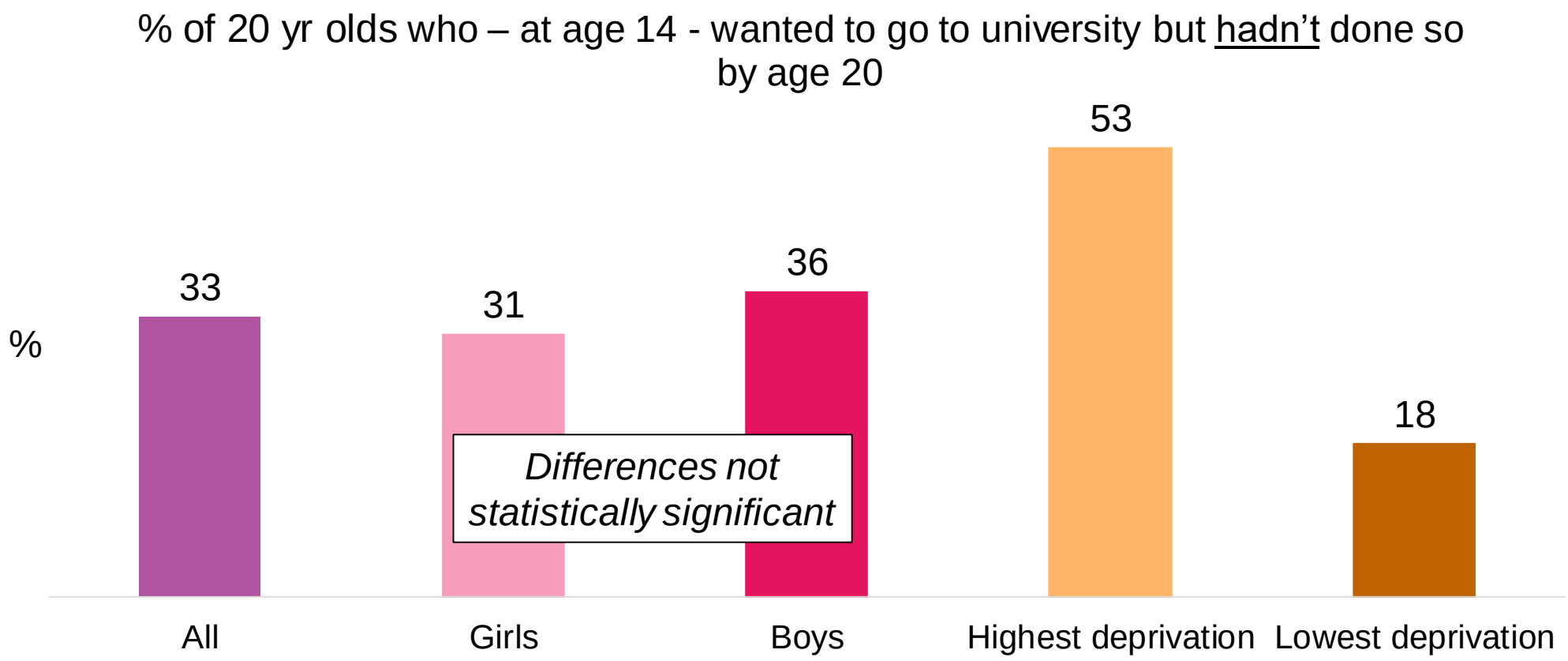

*Base: Age 20. All young people who had left a university or college course before completing it (543)*

# NEET at age 20 has been persistent for some



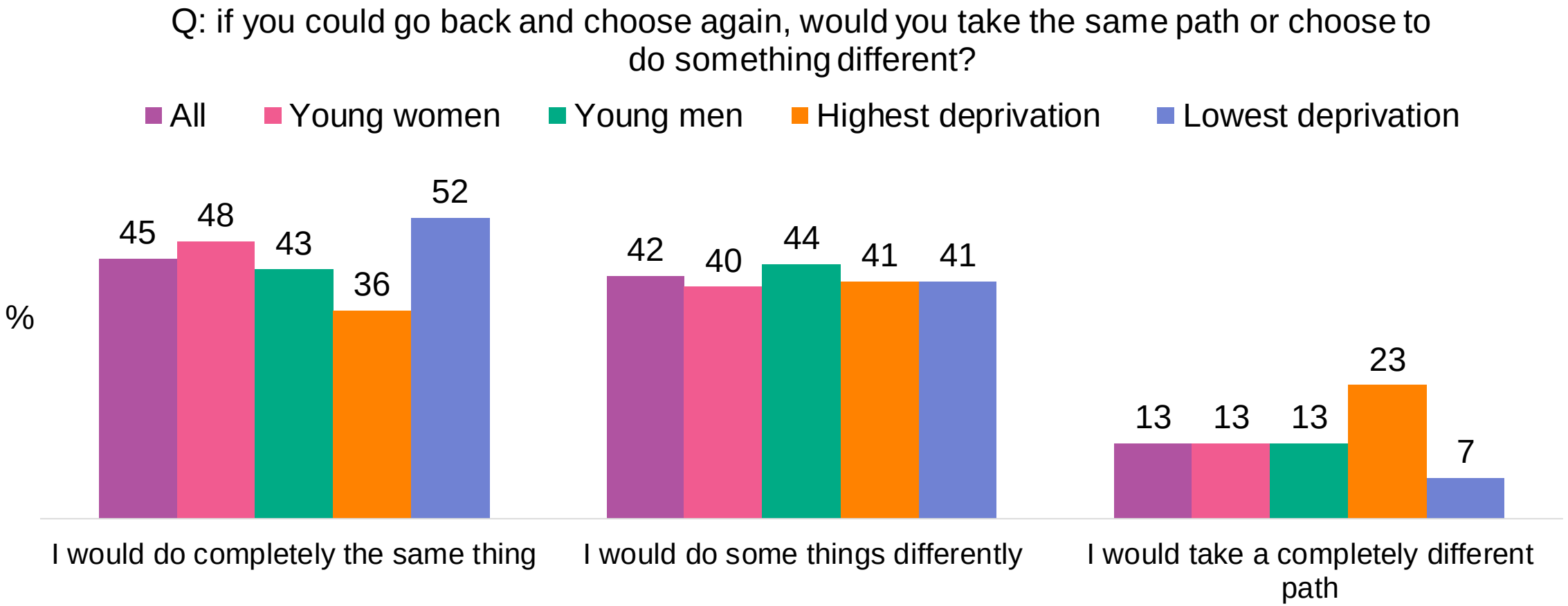

*Base: Age 20. All young people who were NEET at age 20 and had data at age 17 (179)*

# The majority of those who aspired to go to university at age 14, had done so



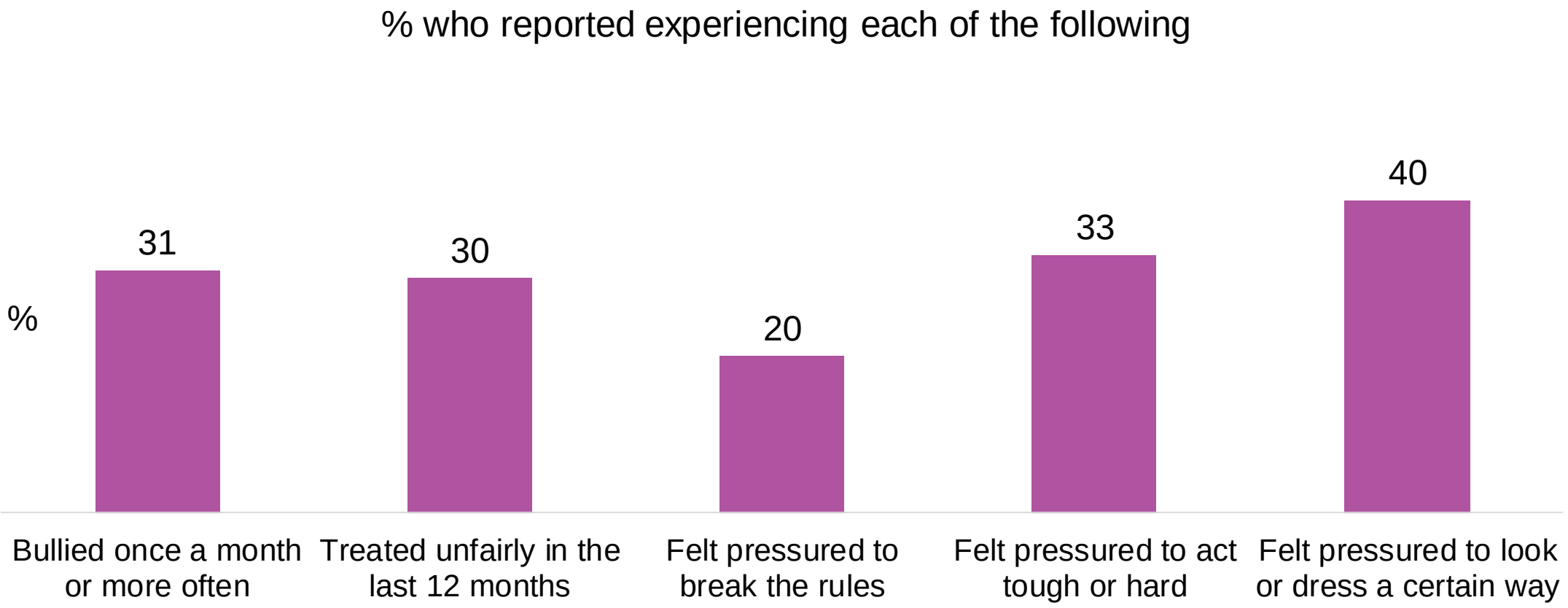

*Base: Age 20. All young people who – at age 14 – said they wanted to go to university (1002)*

# On reflection, most at age 20 would have done at least some things differently



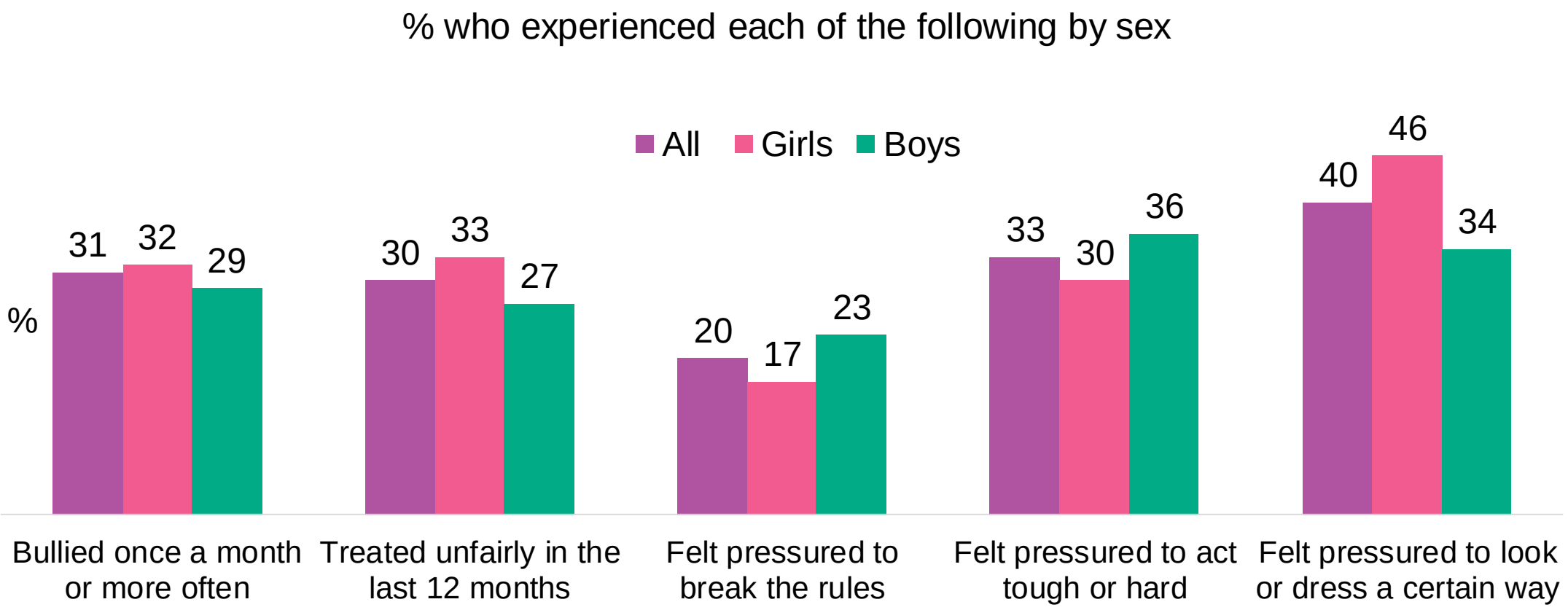

*Base: Age 20. All young people (2194)*

# Emerging vulnerability – being 14 can be tough



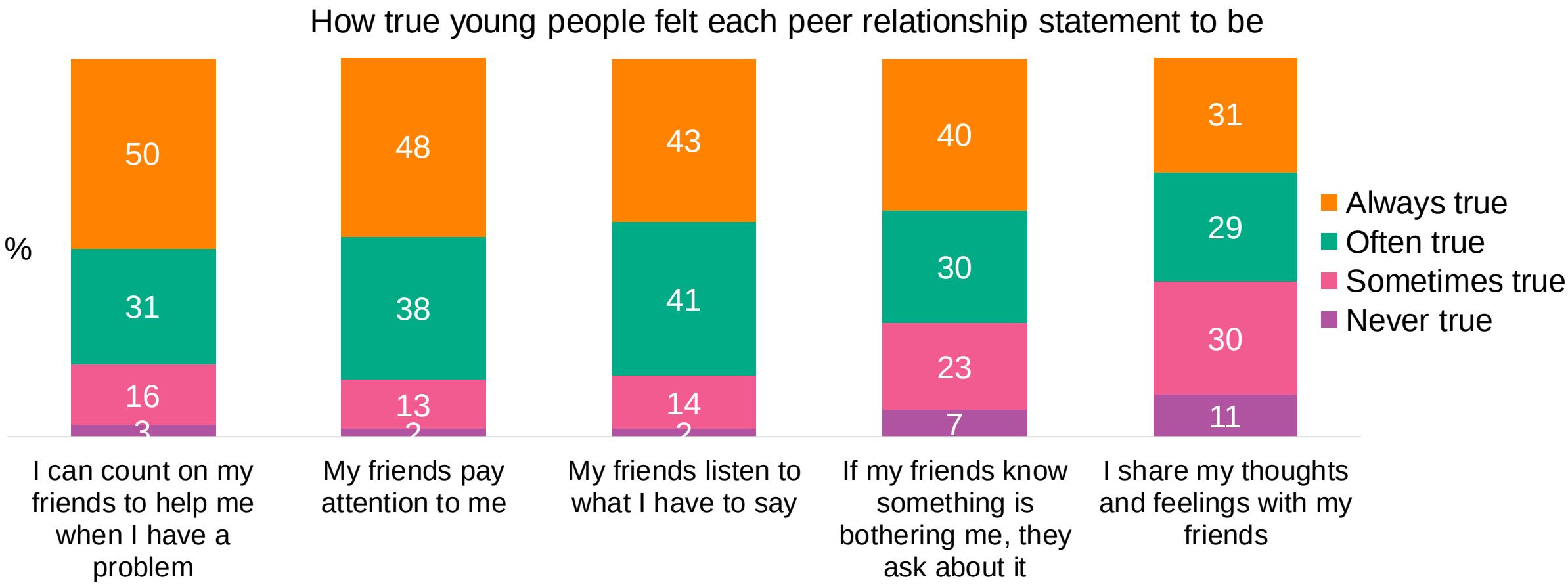

*Base: Age 14. All young people (2626)*

# Emerging vulnerability – being 14 can be tough



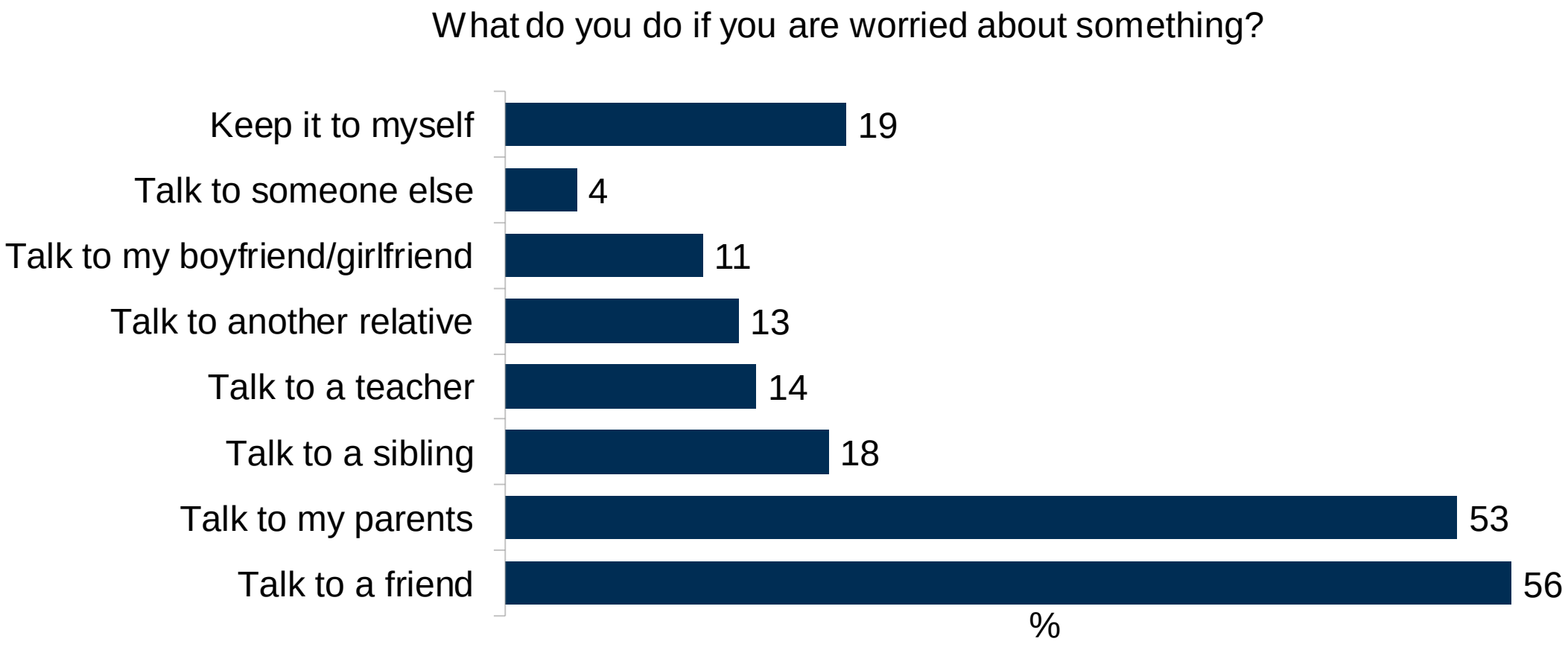

*Base: Age 14. All young people (2626)*

# Friendships are mostly strong



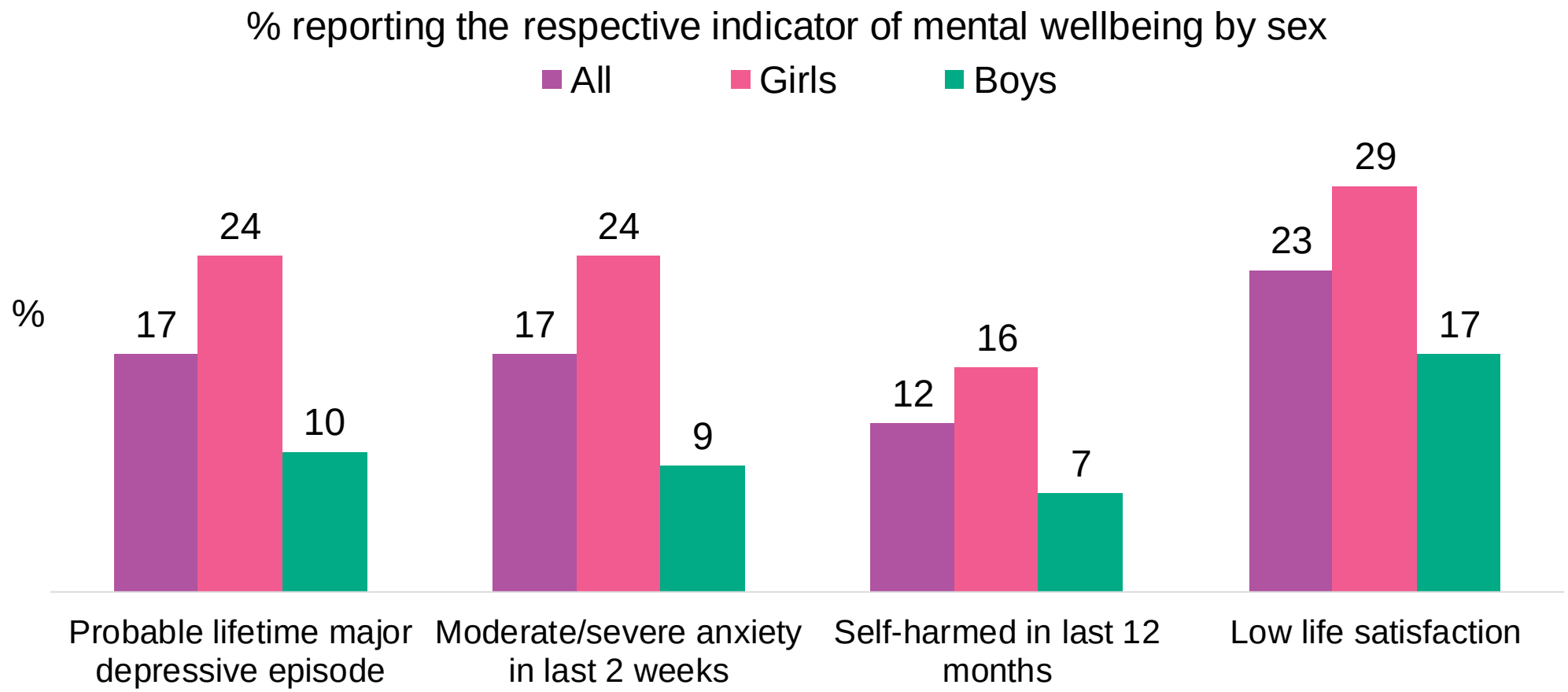

*Base: Age 14. All young people (2632)*

# And wider social support is evident, but limited for some



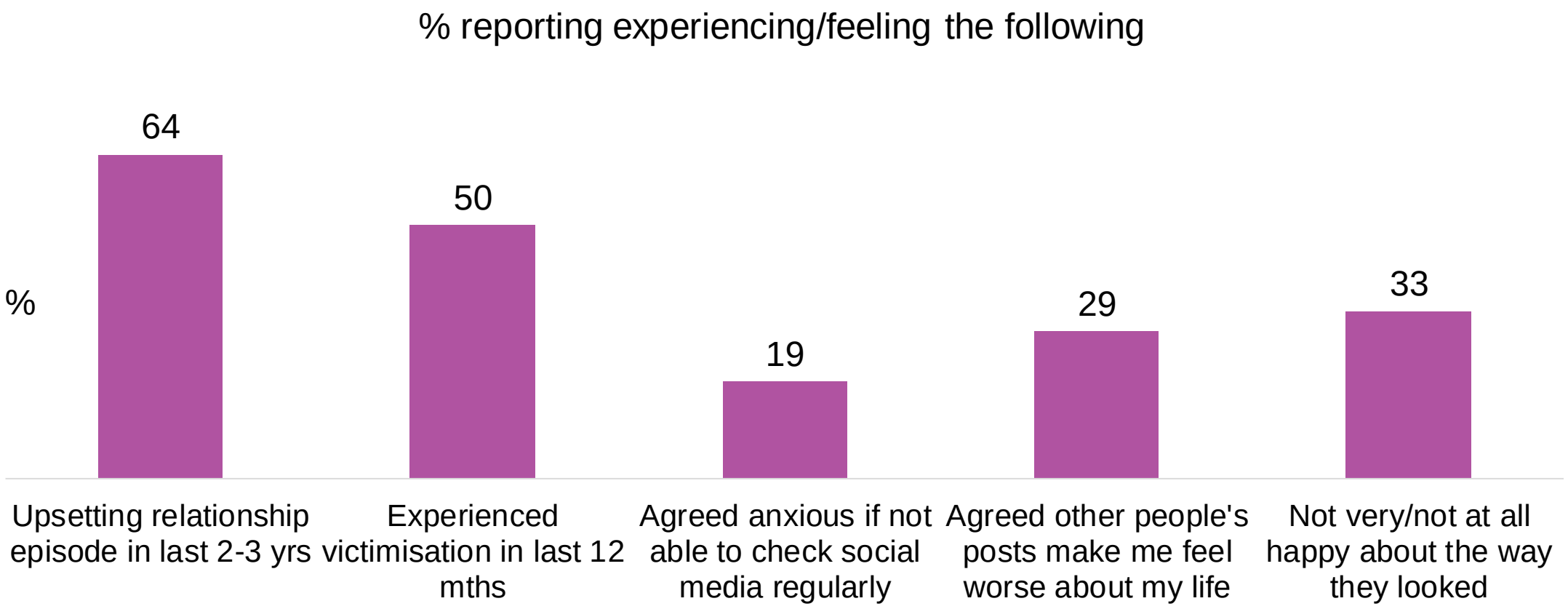

*Base: Age 14. All young people (2645)*

# At age 14, significant minority with low mental wellbeing across a range of indicators with notable differences by sex



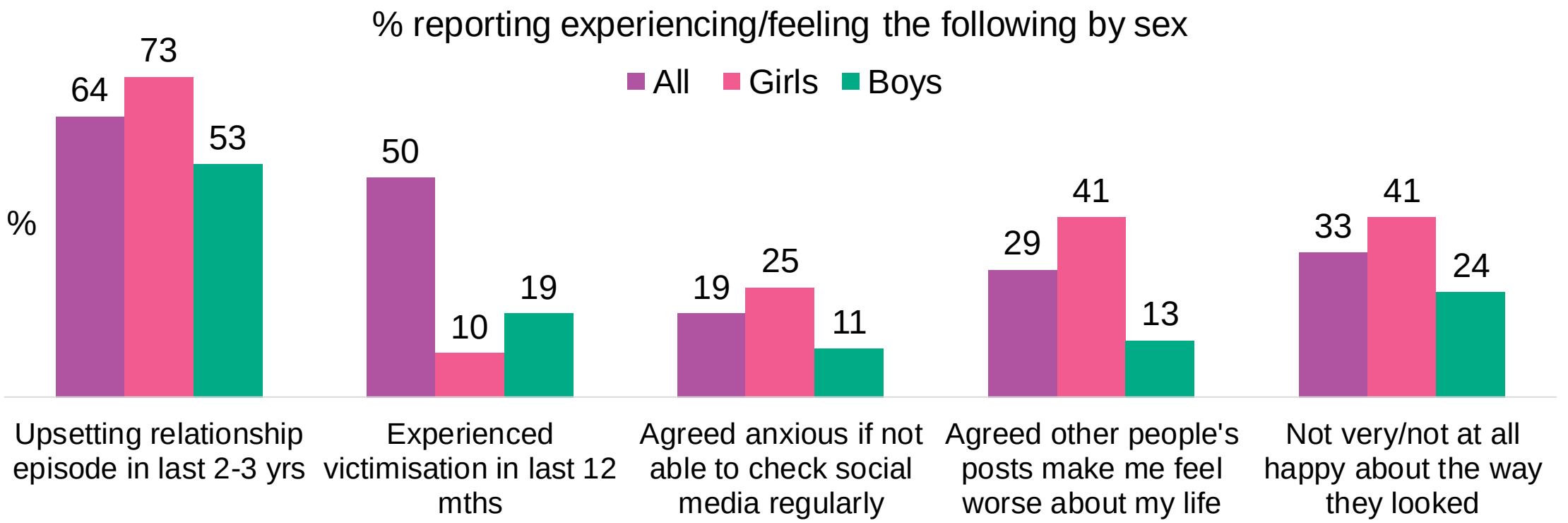

*Base: Age 14. All young people (2645)*

# Continuing emotional challenge at age 17



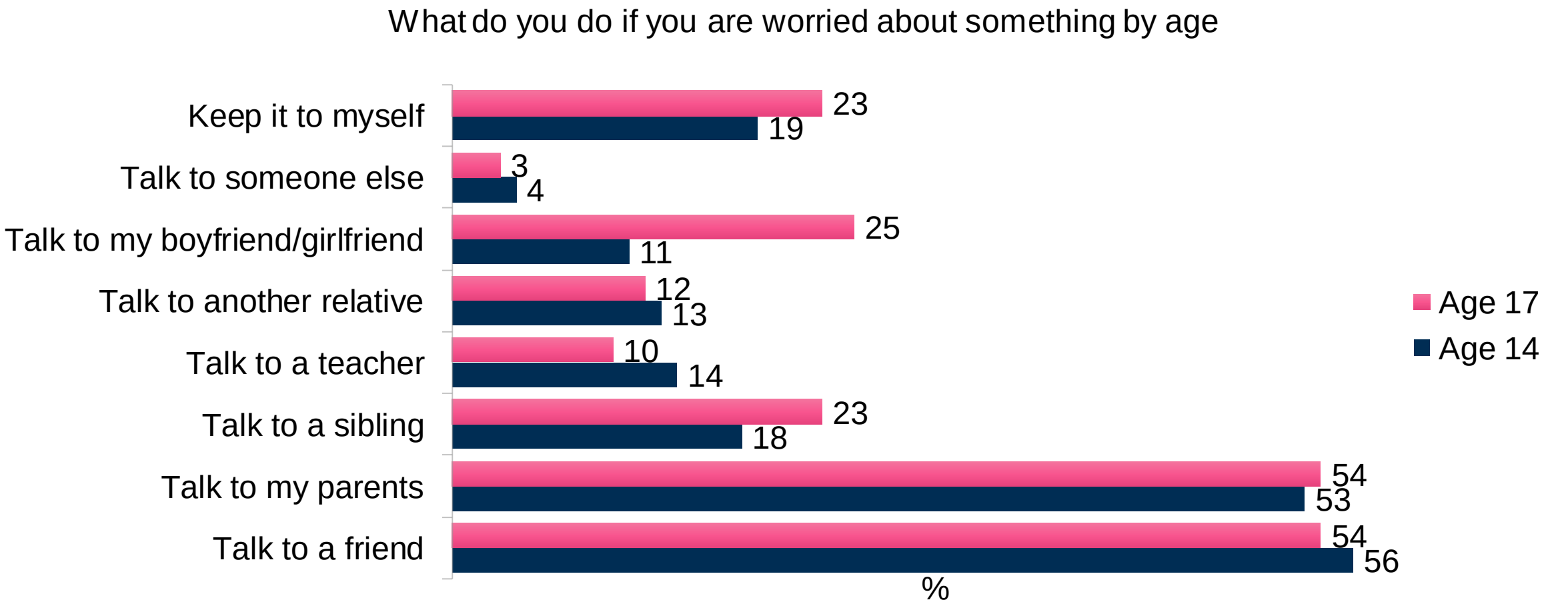

*Base: Age 17. All young people (1924)*

# With significant emerging differences between girls and boys



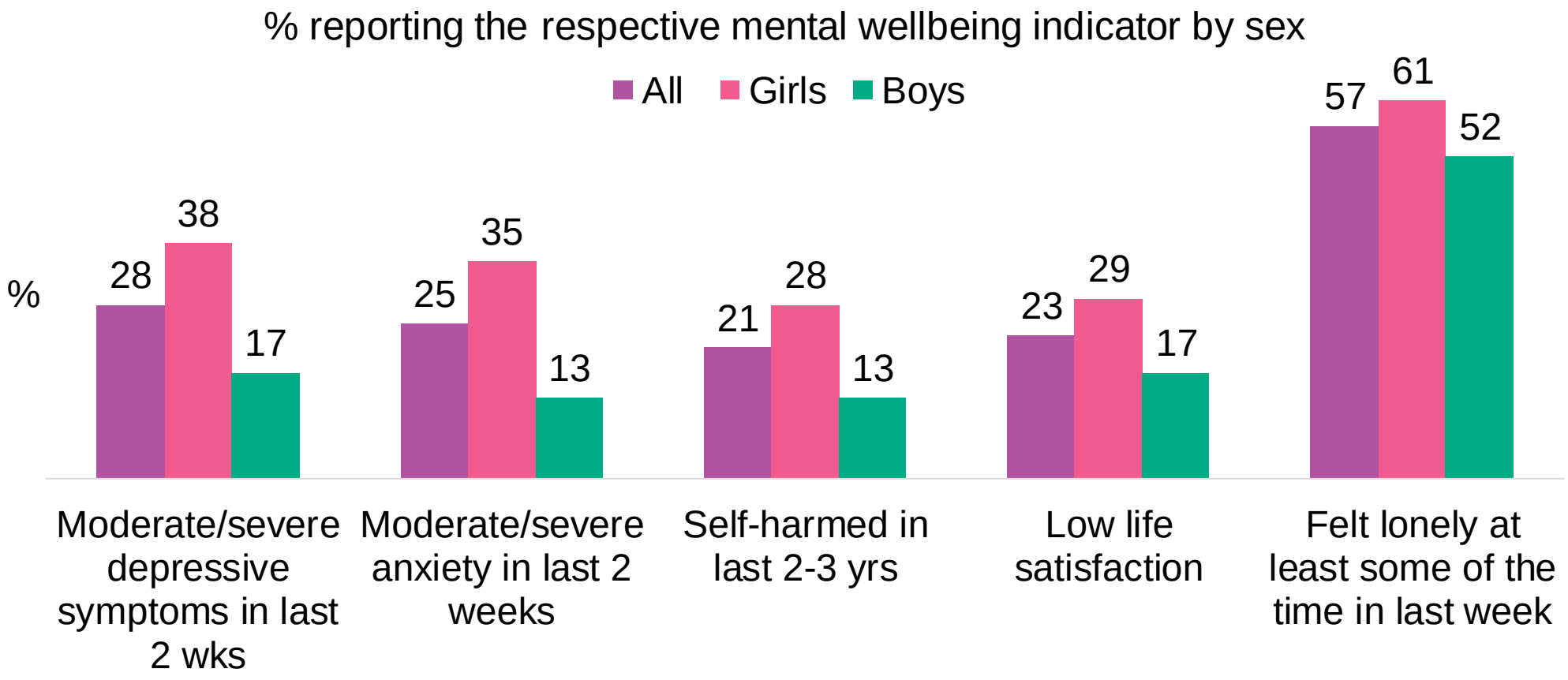

*Base: Age 17. All young people (1924)*

# Wider social support persists, increased role for romantic partners



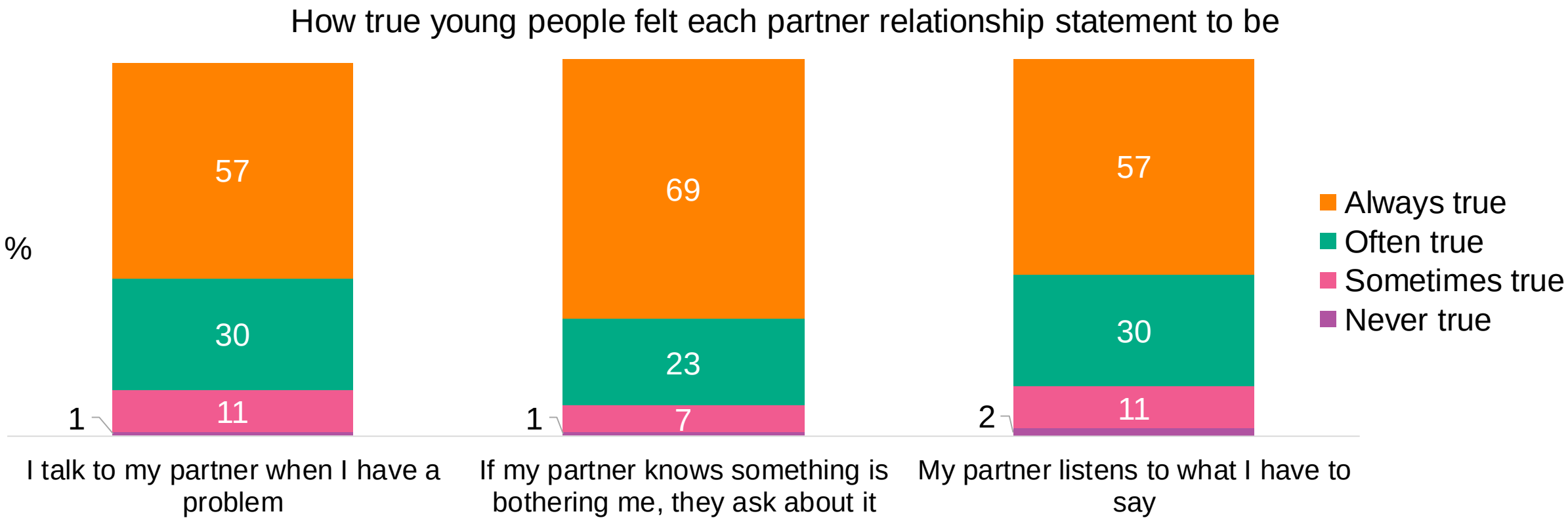

*Base: All young people - Age 14 (2645); Age 17 (1912)*

# Age 17 - continuing minority with low mental wellbeing across a range of indicators, again with notable differences by sex




*Base: Age 17. All young people (1886)*

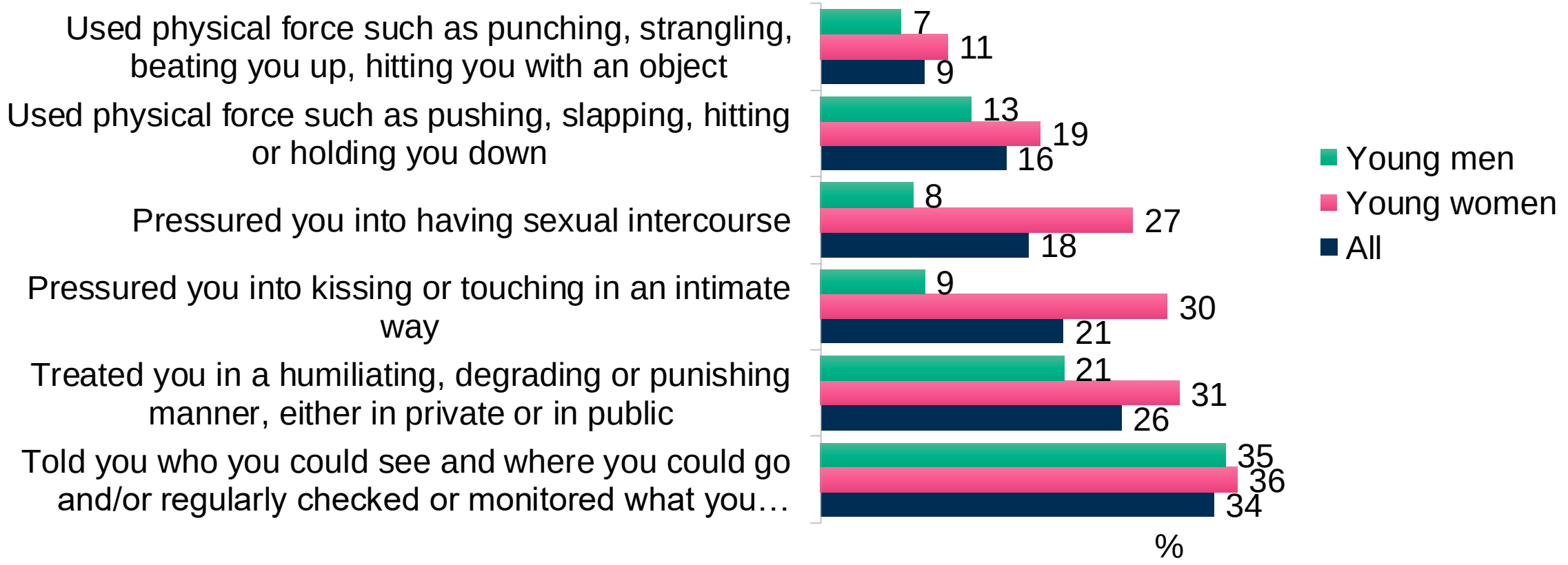
# At age 20, we saw mostly strong relationships with partners




*Base: Age 20. All young people who were currently in an exclusive relationship (1143)*

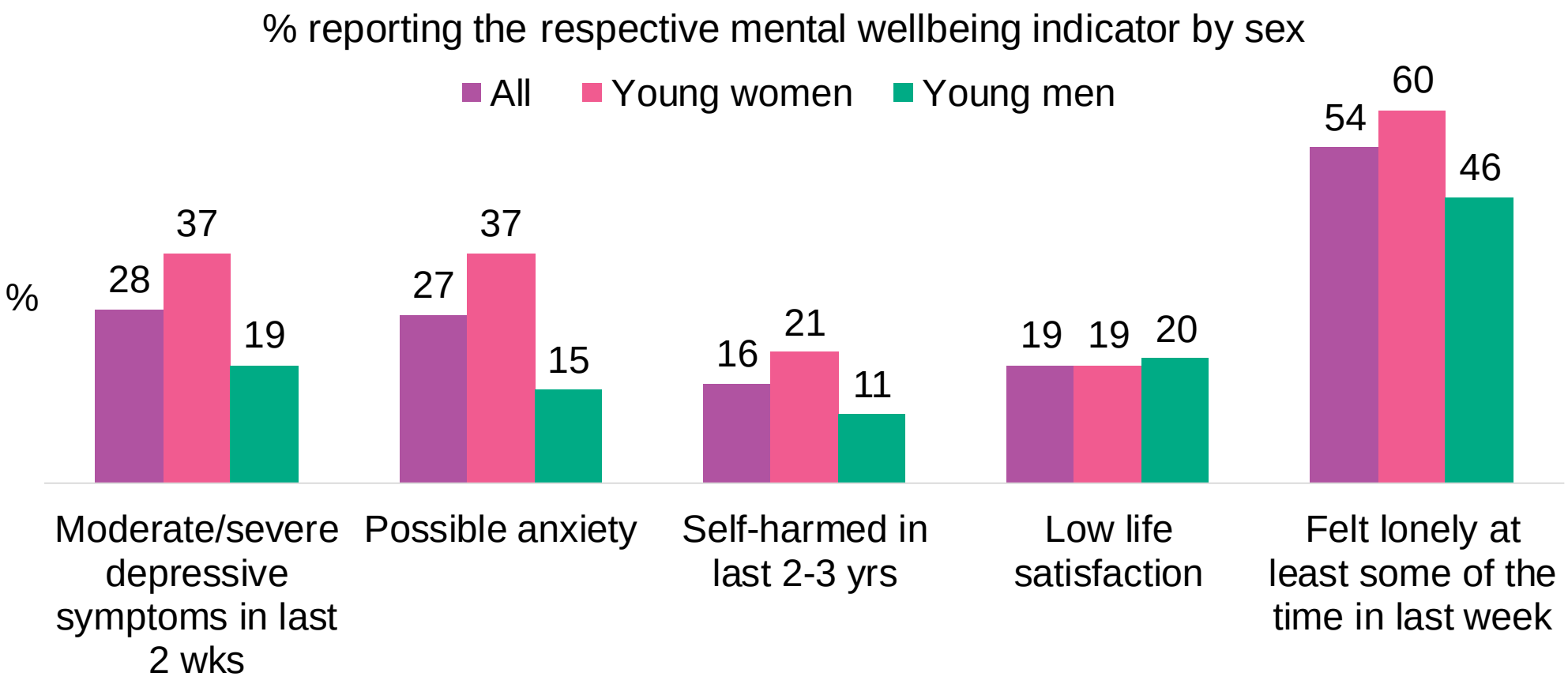
# But inter-personal violence is alarmingly present, particularly for young women

Ever experienced partner doing the following by sex



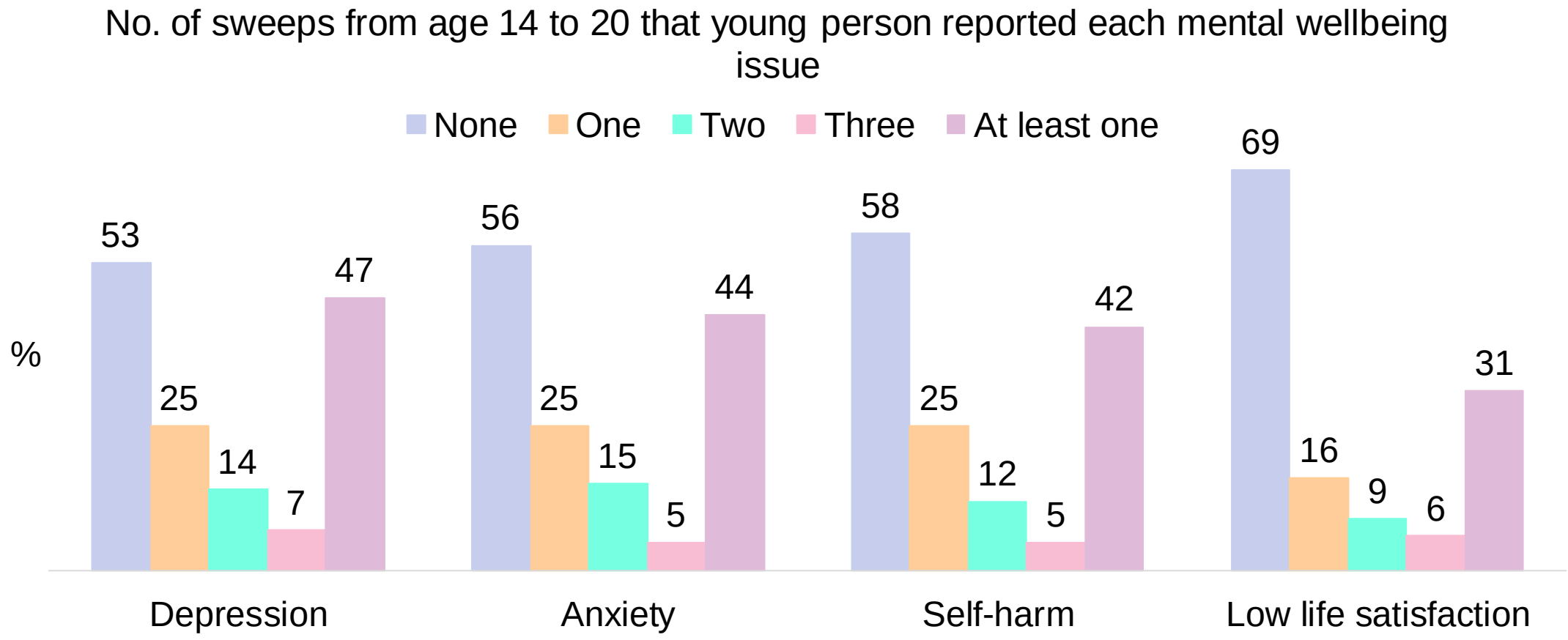

*Base: Age 20. Respondents who currently have a partner or have ever had a partner (1753)*

# Age 20 - low mental wellbeing persists for a minority and particularly for young women



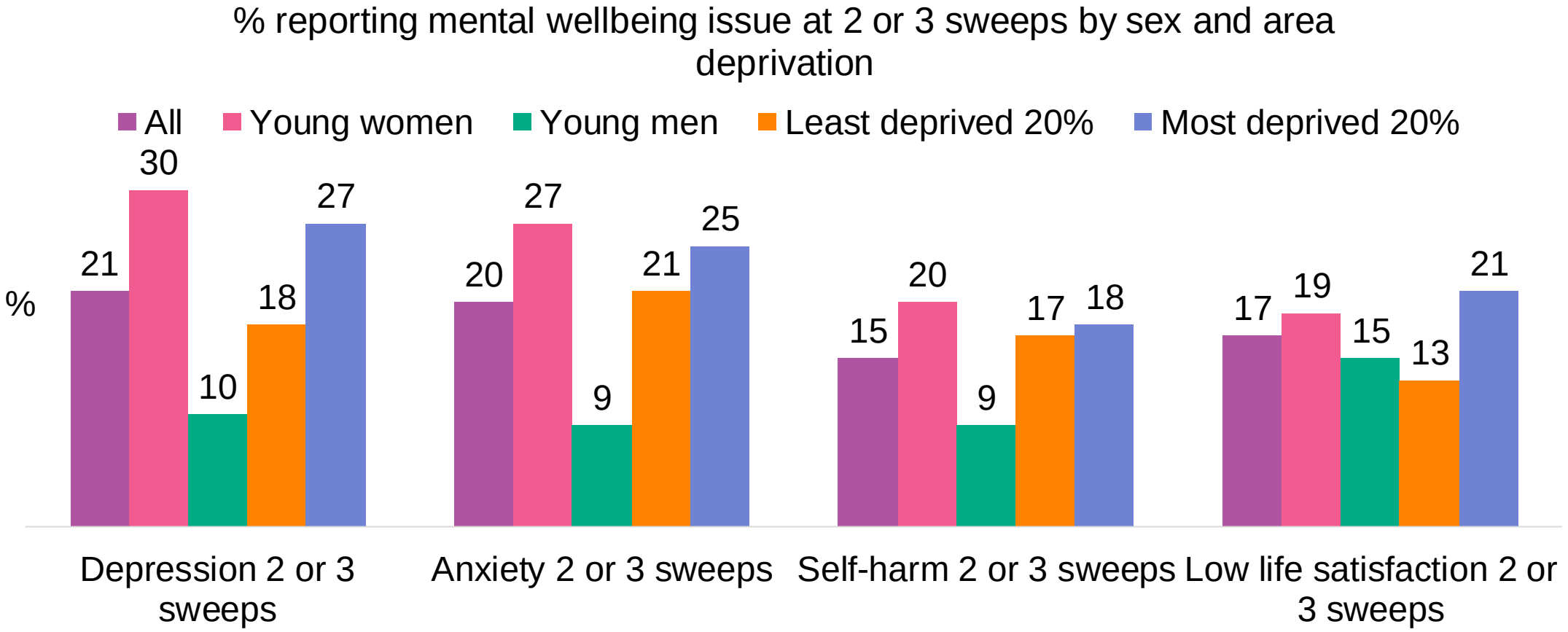

*Base: Age 20. All young people (2126)*

# Longstanding poor mental wellbeing is evident for a small minority



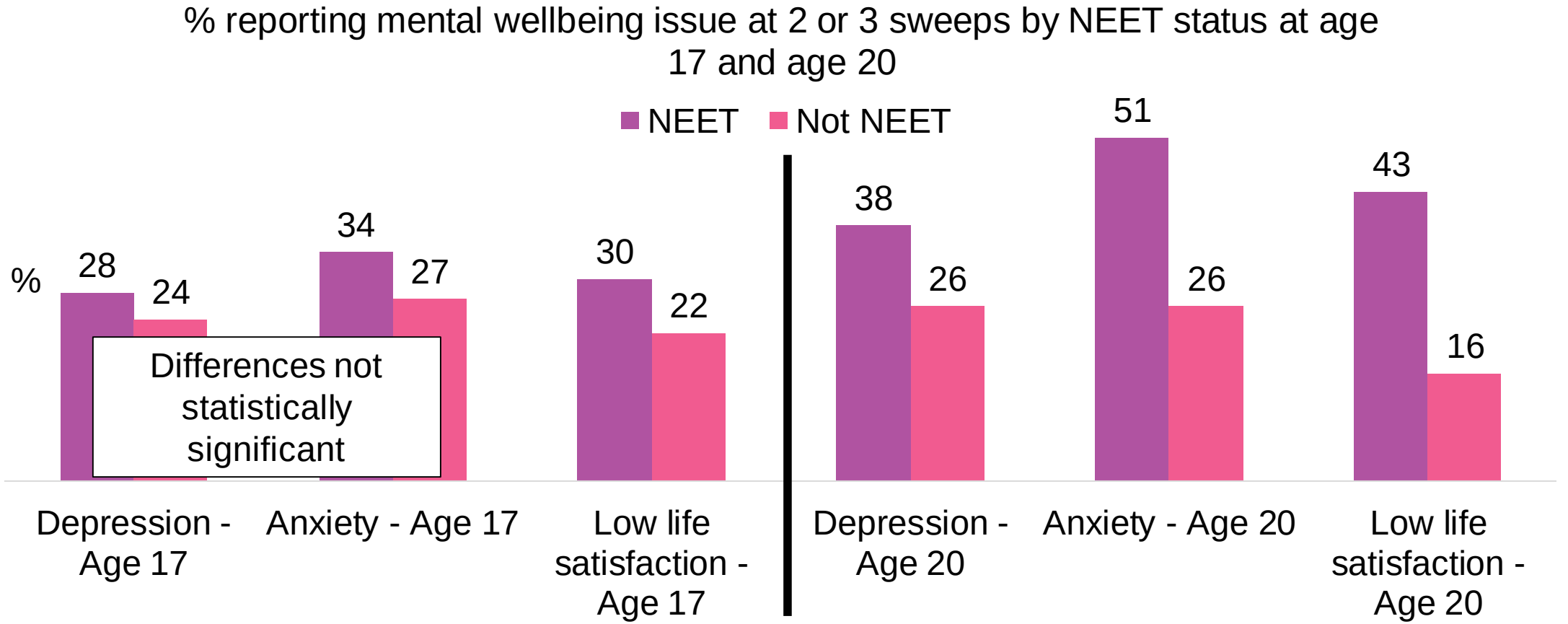

*Base: All young people with mental health data at all three sweeps (1303)*

# Differences in longstanding issues by sex are not unexpected, variations by deprivation also evident



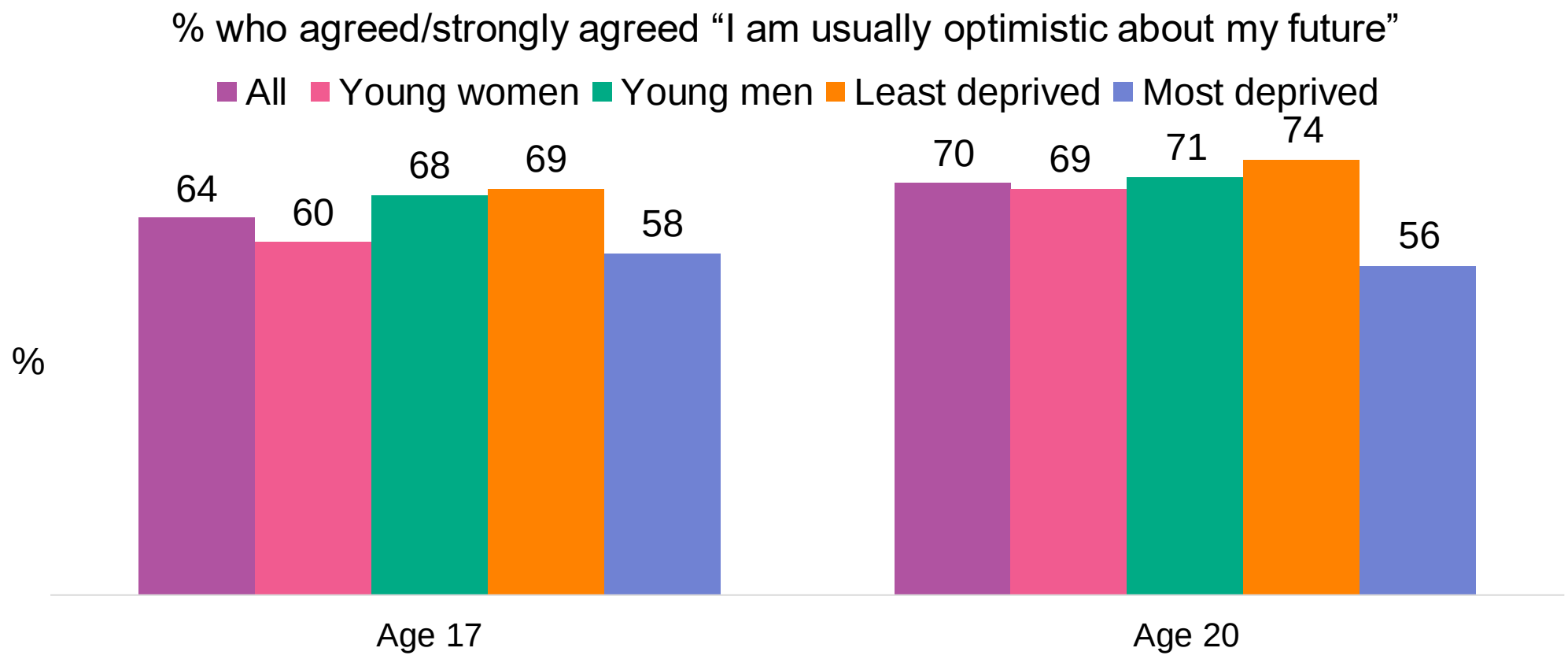

*Base: All young people with mental health data at all three sweeps (1303)*

# Mental health is also associated with economic inactivity, especially at age 20



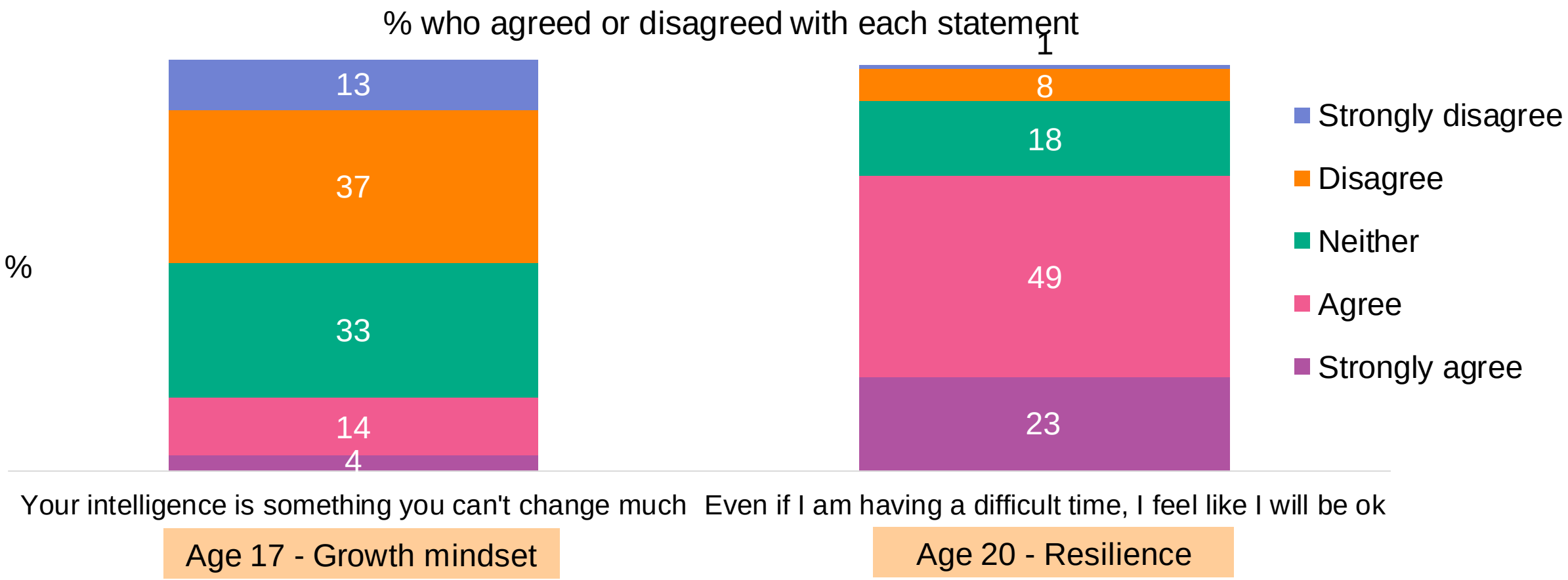

*Base: All young people with mental health data at all three sweeps. Age 17 (1299). Age 20 (1362)*

# Optimism, resilience and growth mindset remain




*Base: All young people. Age 17 (1868); Age 20 (2128)*

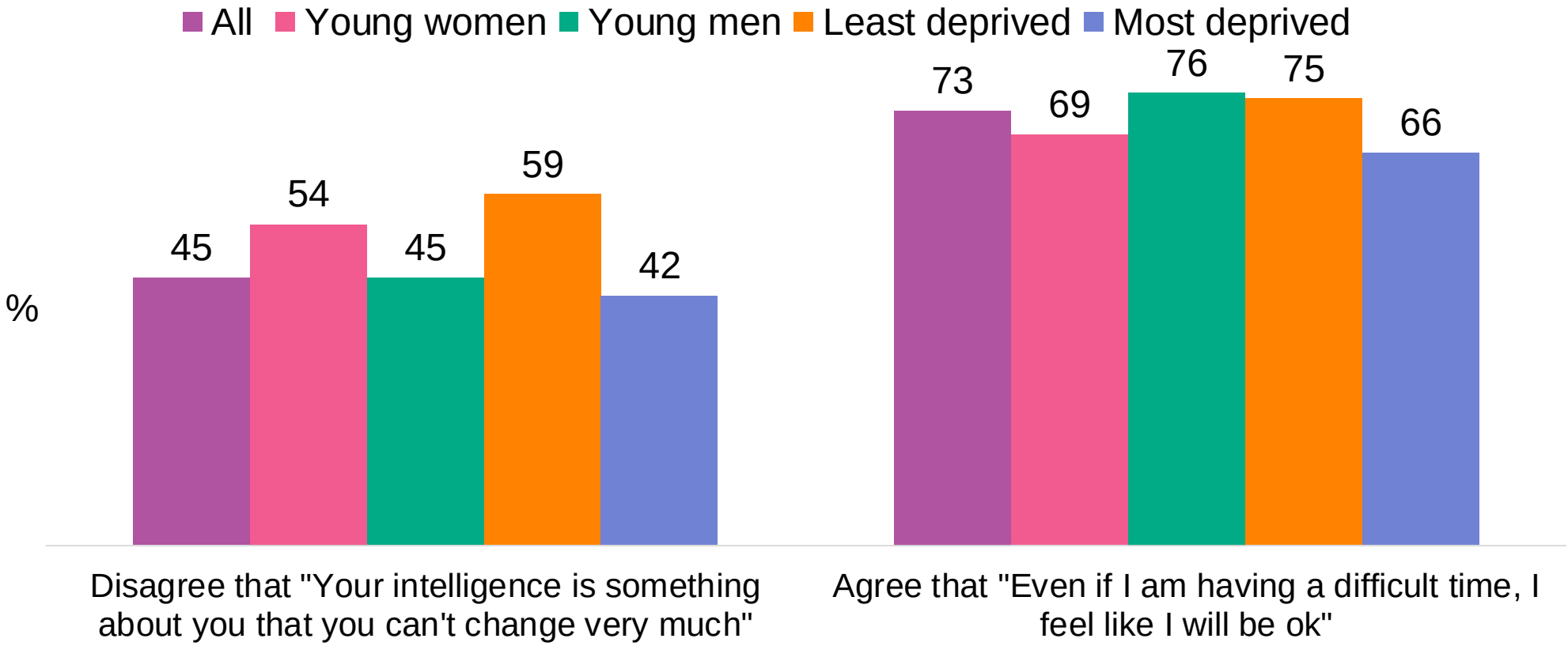
# Yet optimism, resilience and growth mindset remain




*Base: All young people not currently attending school (1185)*

# These positive attributes are evident across young people with different characteristics with some notable differences

% who disagreed or agreed with each statement respectively




*Base: All young people. Age 17 (1931); Age 20 (2127)*

# Summary: from aspiration to reality

1. **High aspirations at 14, across all groups** – eight in ten wanted to stay on in education; university was the most common goal. This is not a generation lacking ambition.

2. **Aspirations met for many – but pathways diverge sharply by deprivation** – at 20, 66% vs 25% at university; 2% vs 23% NEET (least vs most deprived).

3. **Transitions are fragile** – course drop-out is socially graded, and most of those NEET at 20 had been in education or work at 17.

4. **A significant minority have poor mental wellbeing from 14 to 20** – persistent for around one in five; highest for young women and those in deprived areas and linked to drop-out and inactivity.

5. **Yet optimism, resilience and growth mindset remain evident for most** – though less so in more deprived areas. A foundation to build on.

# Conclusion: from evidence to action

## Act early – and through the transition

Better preparation for life after school, careers guidance and direction, and follow-up support beyond the first 'destination'.

## Needs-led mental health support

Help without waiting for a diagnosis – in schools, colleges, universities and communities, bridging child and adult services.

## One joined-up offer

Health, education, skills, employment and welfare working as a single system – e.g. IPPR's proposed 'New Youth Contract'.

## Re-open routes into work and alternatives to university

Increase entry-level jobs and apprenticeships; employment support that reflects health barriers and is geared to participation.

## Tackle drivers of distress and inequality

Financial insecurity, loneliness, social media and inter-personal violence – targeted at deprived areas and young women.

## Invest in longitudinal evidence

To understand what happens between aspiration and outcome – and what works for whom.

# Thank you

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