

The Health Foundation COVID-19 Survey

A report of survey findings on the use of health services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Ipsos MORI, Public Affairs

June 2020

Ipsos MORI



1. Background, context and methodology

Background, context and methodology

The Health Foundation commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a representative poll of the general public in Great Britain to understand opinion on a range of issues. **This report focuses on the public's experience and perceptions of using NHS services during the pandemic.**

The survey was conducted by telephone on the Ipsos MORI CATI Omnibus survey, a weekly telephone omnibus survey of a representative sample of people aged 18 and over in Great Britain. Fieldwork took place between 1 and 10 May 2020. A total of 1983 people were interviewed. Quotas were set on age, gender, government office region and working status. Data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age within gender, government office region and working status and social grade.

Throughout the report findings will highlight, and make reference to, different sub-groups based on responses to certain questions. When interpreting the survey findings, it is important to remember that the results are based on a sample of the population, not the entire population. Consequently, results are subject to margins of error, and not all differences between sub-groups are statistically significant (i.e. a real difference).

A follow-up report will be launched that explores how the findings differ based on ethnicity.

Summary of key insights

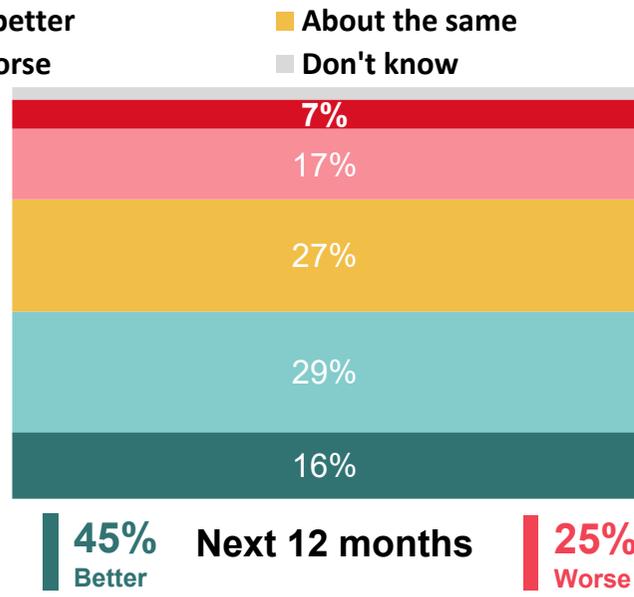
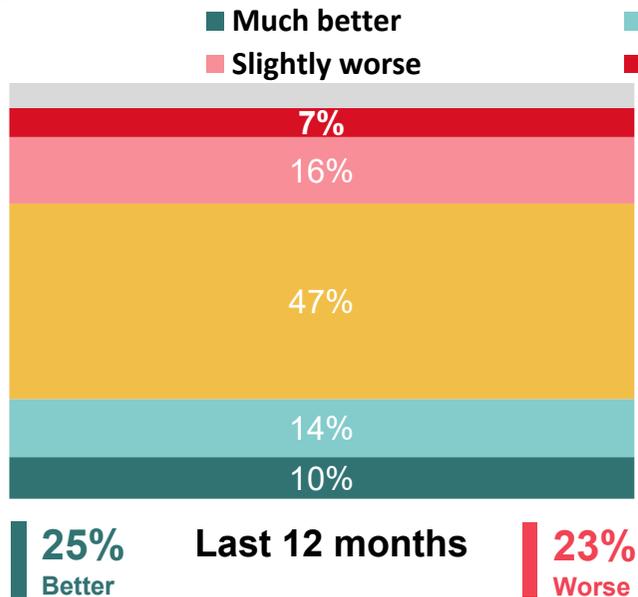
2. Perceptions of NHS care

More think NHS care standards have remained consistent over last 12 months than got better or worse...and are optimistic they will improve in the future

In general, the public think that – prior to the coronavirus crisis – **the standard of NHS services had stayed about the same (47%)** over the last 12 months. Broadly equal proportions think the NHS had got better and worse (25% and 23% respectively). Looking to the future, **there is an expectation among approaching half (45%) that standards will get better**, although still sizeable minorities think they will stay about the same (27%) or get worse (25%).

Q. Prior to the coronavirus crisis, do you think the general standard of care provided by the NHS over the last 12 months has been getting...?

Q. And thinking about the future, do you think the general standard of care provided by the NHS over the next 12 months will get...?

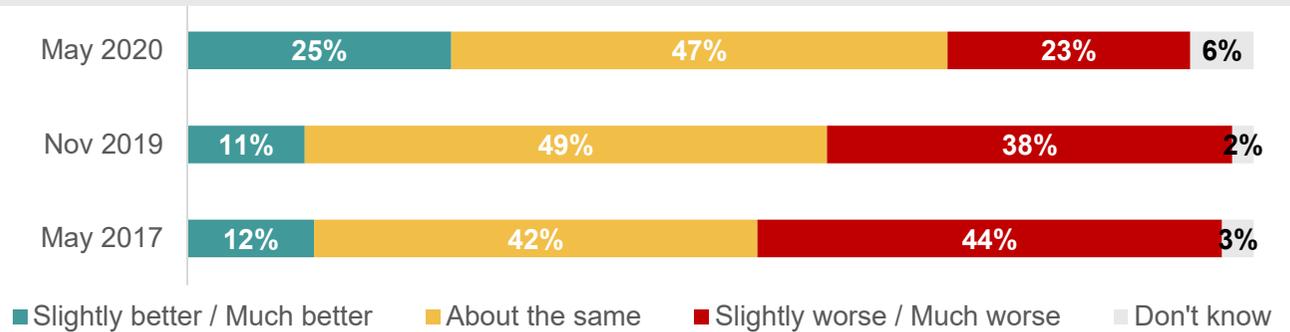


The youngest (18-24) and oldest (65+) people are more likely to agree that standards of care have got better in the last year (37% of 18-24 and 29% of 65+ year olds, compared with 25% overall), which given these groups access different services suggests improvements in care standards are not confined to one area. Young people (18-24) are also most optimistic that care will improve in the future (55%, compared with 45% overall).

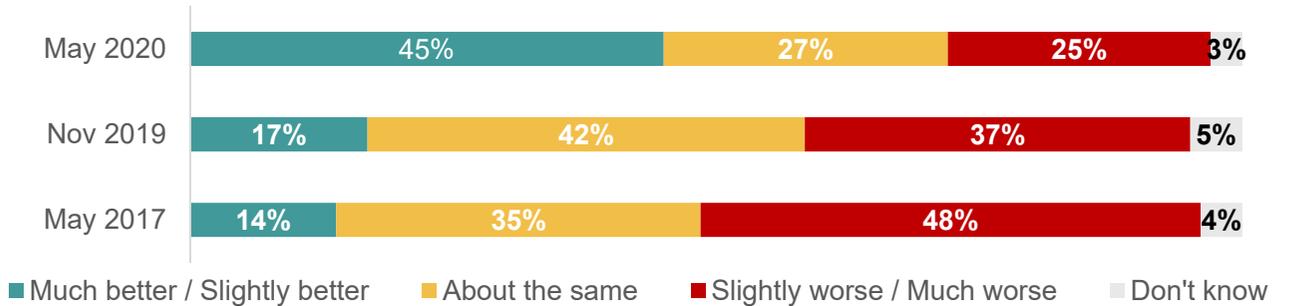
The public continue to be more optimistic about NHS standards than in previous years, particularly looking forwards to the future

Nearly half (45%) think that the general standard of NHS care will get better over the next 12 months, compared with only 17% in 2019 and 14% in 2017. These views may be relative to the current situation with coronavirus. Thinking **prior to the coronavirus**, nearly half think standards of care in the NHS had been staying about the same (47%), although again the public are more optimistic than they were. One quarter think it had been getting better (25%), up from 11% in November 2019 (NB - Please note that the question wording changed slightly and the methodology moved online so these trends should be treated with caution).

* Prior to the coronavirus crisis, do you think the general standard of care provided by the NHS over the last 12 months has been getting...



* And thinking about the future, do you think the general standard of care provided by the NHS over the next 12 months will get...



* I'd now like you to think about your own experience and everything you have seen, heard or read recently. Do you think the general standard of care provided by the NHS: (a) Over the last 12 months has been getting... (b) Over the next 12 months will get...

Public use of NHS services during lockdown



The public were asked whether they had used a NHS service since the lockdown had begun and, if so, which service they had used. For each service they had used, they were then asked how comfortable or not they felt using that service.

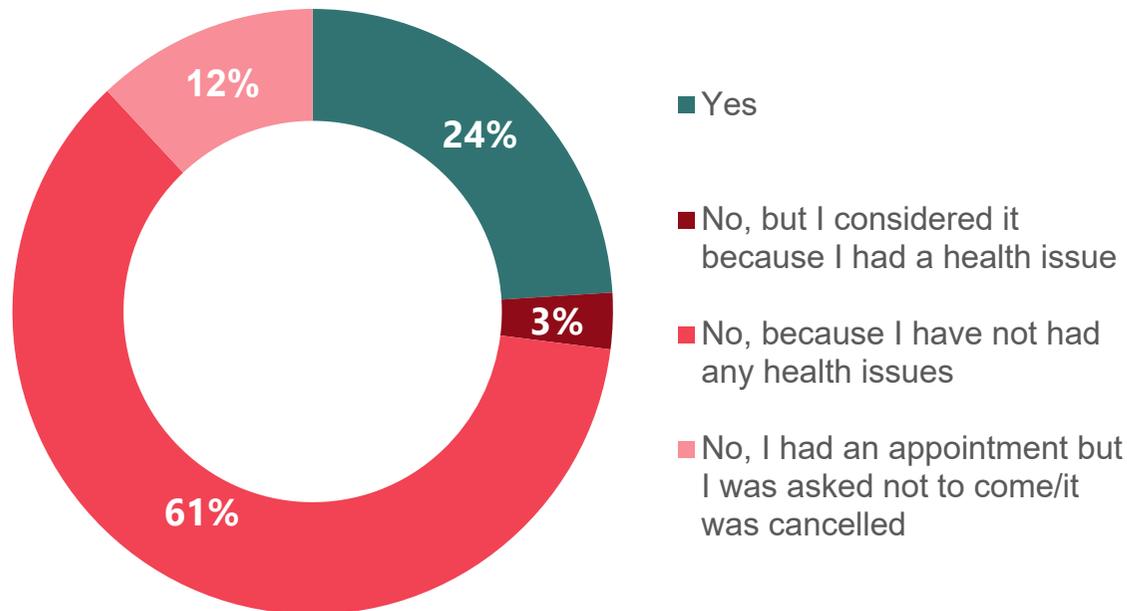
A quarter of the British population (24%) have used a NHS service since the government introduced a lockdown in response to the coronavirus epidemic. A further three per cent of the public considered using a service but did not end up doing so.

Just over one in ten (12%) have had a pre-arranged healthcare service cancelled.

Overall, people felt more comfortable than uncomfortable when accessing services, although this varied depending on the perceived risk of the service. For example, more were comfortable visiting their GP (84% comfortable, 15% uncomfortable) than visiting 'the frontline' A&E at their local hospital (70% comfortable, 28% uncomfortable) where the perceived 'risk' was greater.

One-quarter have used a health service since lockdown started – only 3% had a health issue and considered doing so, but decided not to

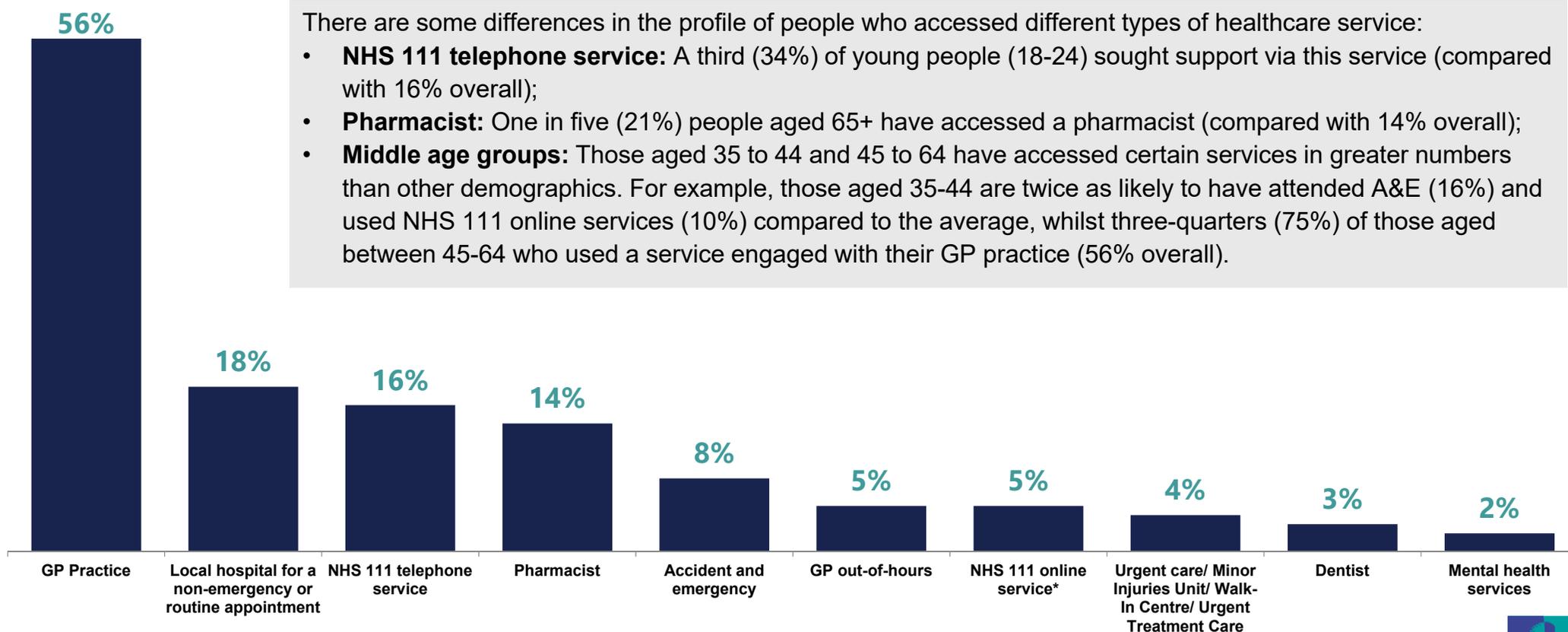
Q. Since the government introduced restrictions relating to coronavirus on people over the last few weeks, have you used a health service?



- **Gender difference:** Women are more likely to have accessed a healthcare service than men (29% compared with 19%);
- **Geographical variance:** Significantly more people living in Wales have accessed a service (36%). Whilst those who considered but did not access a service because of a health issue is low, those living in the South East of England were significantly more likely to have had such an issue and considered it (five per cent compared to three per cent overall);
- **Impact on older and/or those with a long-term condition:** Just under one in five (17%) older people aged 65+ had an appointment cancelled during lockdown (compared with 12% overall). A similar proportion (20%) of people with a long-term health problem or disability also had an appointment cancelled, suggesting that the treatment of existing conditions has been impacted by the coronavirus crisis.

Of those who accessed a health service since lockdown began, over half used their GP practice and one in five accessed local hospitals

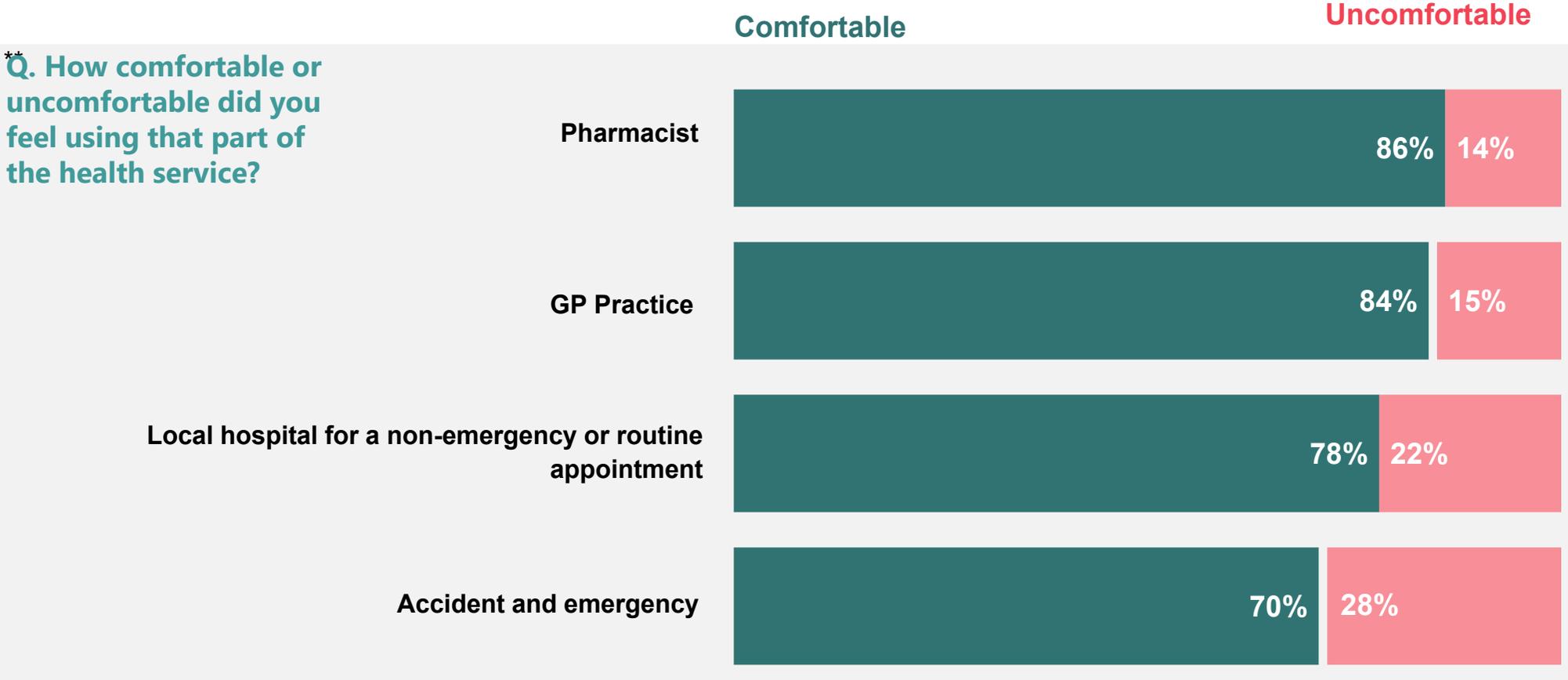
Q. [Those using a healthcare service since lockdown began...] Which health service did you use?



There are some differences in the profile of people who accessed different types of healthcare service:

- **NHS 111 telephone service:** A third (34%) of young people (18-24) sought support via this service (compared with 16% overall);
- **Pharmacist:** One in five (21%) people aged 65+ have accessed a pharmacist (compared with 14% overall);
- **Middle age groups:** Those aged 35 to 44 and 45 to 64 have accessed certain services in greater numbers than other demographics. For example, those aged 35-44 are twice as likely to have attended A&E (16%) and used NHS 111 online services (10%) compared to the average, whilst three-quarters (75%) of those aged between 45-64 who used a service engaged with their GP practice (56% overall).

Where people accessed services, the majority felt comfortable doing so, although they were less comfortable when visiting A&E



CAUTION: Please treat results with caution as they are based on small numbers of people (except for GP Practice)

CAUTION: Some services removed due to low numbers of people answering

Views of those who had a medical issue but did not access healthcare services



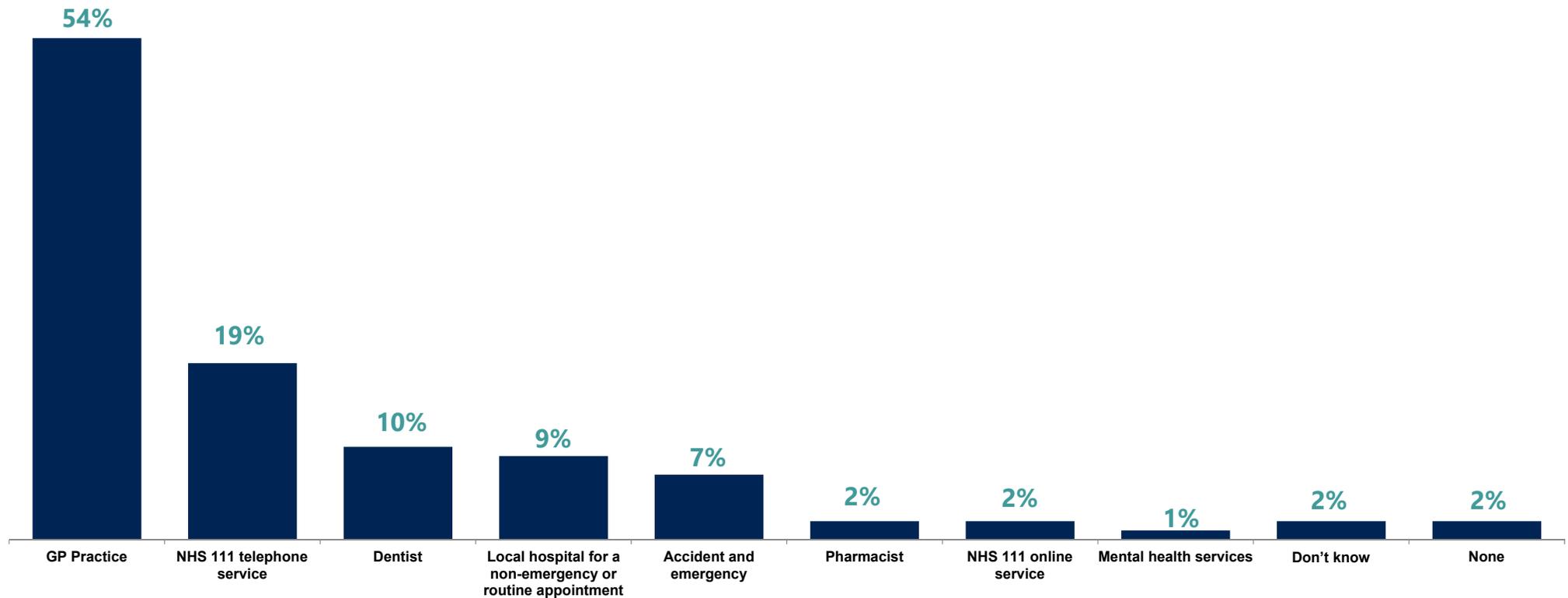
Those who had a medical condition but decided not to use a NHS service were asked which service they had considered using and why they ultimately did not use it.

A total of 3% of the population had a health issue which meant they considered using a NHS service but did not.

For over half (54%) this would have involved accessing their GP practice. One in five did not access NHS 111 via telephone (19%) and one in ten a dentist (10%). A further one in ten (nine per cent) did not visit their local hospital for a routine or non-emergency appointment, whilst seven per cent deferred a trip to A&E*.

Majority considered using a GP practice, whilst a fifth thought about dialing the NHS 111 telephone service

Q. Which health service did you consider using?



Public use of NHS services in future



All respondents were asked how comfortable they would feel using their local GP or hospital in the next 3-4 weeks. Those who indicated they would feel uncomfortable were asked why they would feel this way.

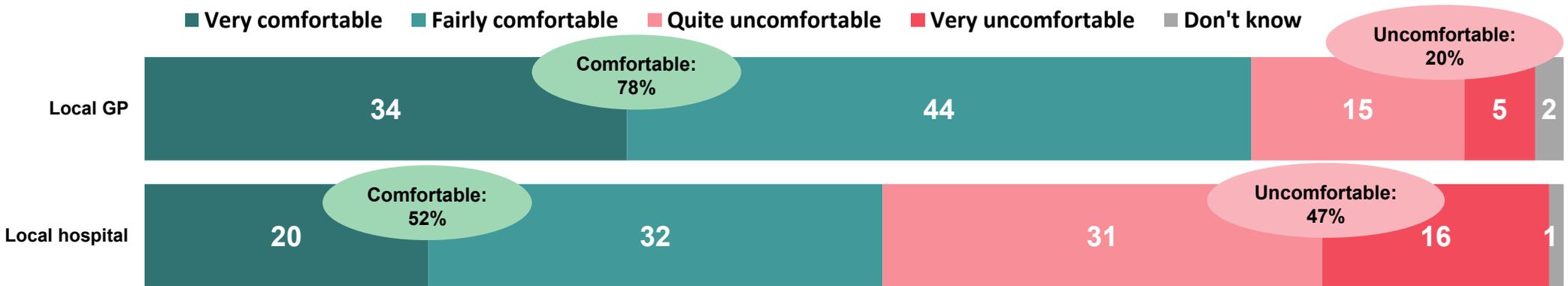
A majority of the public (52%) would feel comfortable using their local hospital over the next few weeks if the need arose, although a sizeable minority would be uncomfortable (47%). People would feel much more comfortable visiting their GP (78%) – only one in five (20%) indicate they would feel uncomfortable.

The overwhelming concern when considering a visit to both healthcare settings is fear of being exposed to coronavirus (76% for hospital, 63% for a GP practice). Around one in ten would feel uncomfortable because of the additional pressure placed on the health service (12% for hospitals and eight per cent for a GP practice). In addition, one in ten were not sure they would get an appointment at their GP practice (nine per cent).

Four-fifths would feel comfortable visiting their local GP..those who might need to visit a hospital have greater apprehension

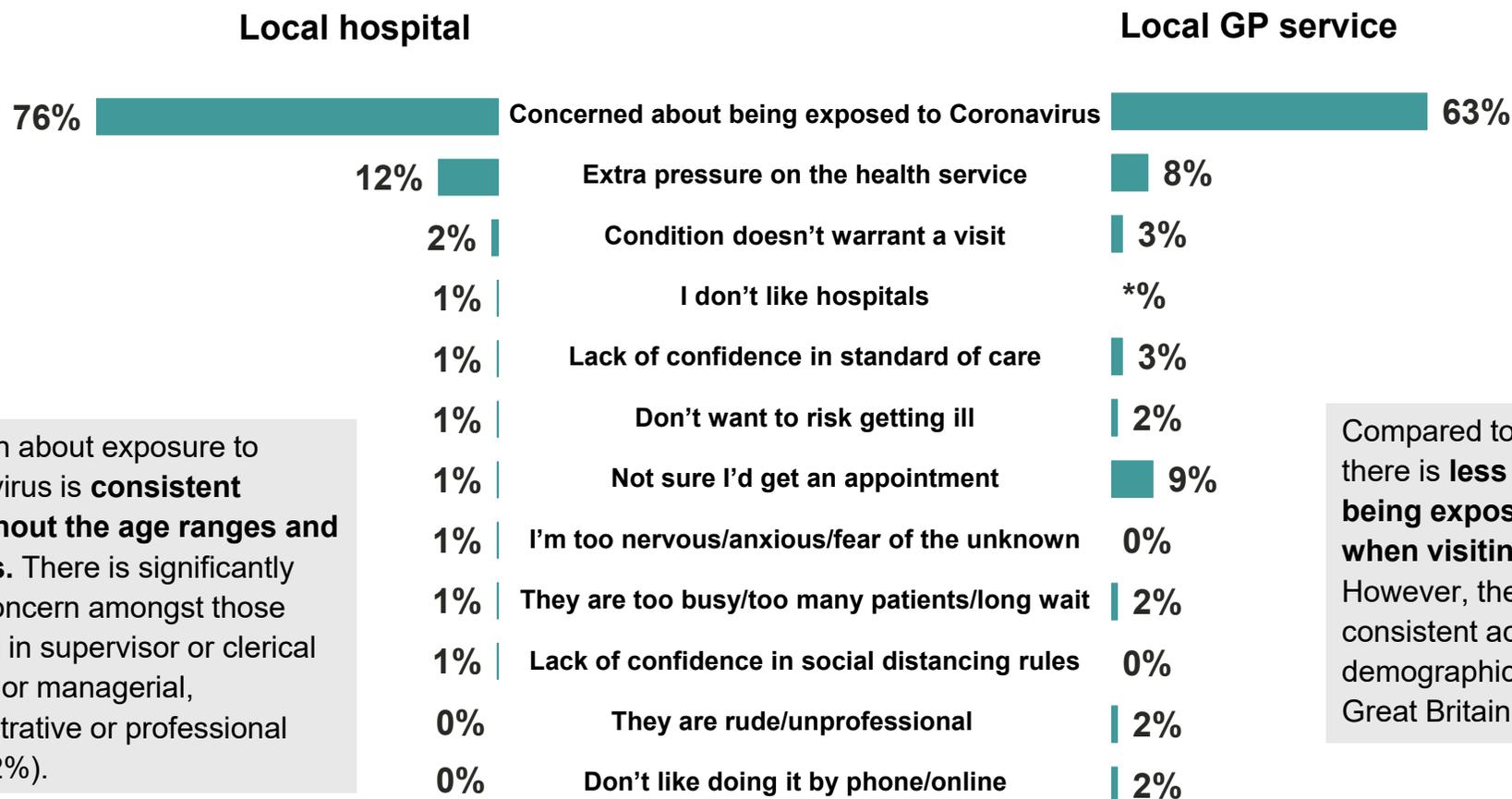
- **Older people (65+):** Encouragingly, older people (65+) are significantly more likely than average to say they would be comfortable visiting their local hospital (58% compared to 52% overall).
- **Gender:** There is also a clear gender divide in opinion – men are more likely to say they would feel comfortable visiting a hospital (56%) whilst women are more likely to say they would feel uncomfortable (51%).
- **Geographical variance:** There are also localised differences, with three in five (61%) of those living in London (the epicentre of the coronavirus epidemic) feeling uncomfortable about having to go to hospital. Contrast this with the south-west, where a similar proportion (62%) would feel comfortable doing so. Londoners remain significantly more wary of visiting a GP – three in ten (28%) would feel uncomfortable doing so. This is in contrast to Scotland, where nearly nine in ten (87%) would feel comfortable going to their GP.

Q. If you developed a health issue that you felt needed treatment over the next 3-4 weeks, how comfortable or not would you feel using your local GP/local hospital if necessary?



Concern about coronavirus is the overwhelming reason why people would feel uncomfortable accessing local health services

Q. You said you would feel very/quite uncomfortable. Why is that?



Concern about exposure to coronavirus is **consistent throughout the age ranges and regions**. There is significantly more concern amongst those working in supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional jobs (82%).

Compared to visiting hospital, there is **less concern about being exposed to coronavirus when visiting a local GP**. However, the concern is consistent across all demographics and regions in Great Britain.

Thank you