



**STRATHCONA
COUNTY**

2020 COVID-19 Survey: Overall Results



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Communications

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I. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

During December 2020, Strathcona County conducted an online survey of residents' perceptions on a variety of topics associated with how they were coping as COVID-19's presence entered its ninth month.

Obtaining primary data directly from residents provides Strathcona County departments with information and enables County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. Although the survey was tailored to residents, those living outside the County could also take part in the study if they wished.

This report provides a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results.

A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation of the survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. Methodology

A. The questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was newly created specifically for this study. The creation of questions was submissions from various departments and finalized by members of the County's COVID committee. Many of the questions in this survey were tailored to be answered by residents from both urban and rural areas of Strathcona County. In addition to demographics, questions were asked in this survey in the following areas:

- A series of questions pertaining to where the public obtains information updates.
- Questions associated with wearing a face covering in indoor public spaces
- A series of questions pertaining to shopping locally in Strathcona County.

- Single questions pertaining to the use of the Strathcona County Library and County transit during the current pandemic.
- A series of questions about recreation activities and programs done during the current pandemic.
- A series of questions associated with services offered by Family and Community Servicers related to COVID-19.
- Questions about personal mental health when coping with living in the pandemic.

B. Sampling design and data collection procedure

The survey was made available online on two platforms. The first was through the Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP). The other was an open online survey where information was gathered with Survey Gizmo, which was geared toward both residents and non-residents who were not members of SCOOP. Citizens who worked in Strathcona County but did not reside here could also take part in the study. In addition, people who did not work in Strathcona County and did not live here could take part in the survey if they wanted.

The online survey ran between December 4 and December 20, 2020, during which 1,441 people took part in the survey. Although poll-based data is based on people who decide to participate and were not randomly selected, and have access to the online poll, the margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 2.6\%$, 19 times out of 20. The data was analyzed by Strathcona County's Communications using SPSS for Windows.

III. RESULTS

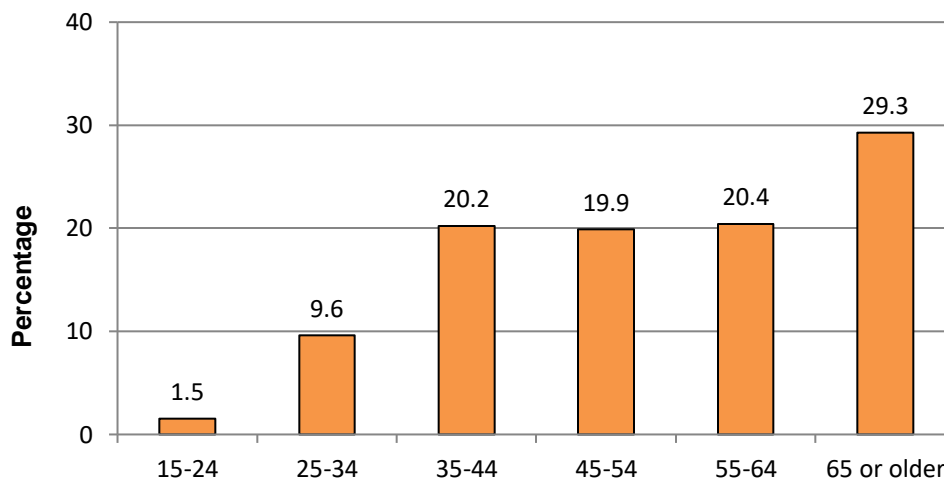
This section of the report presents a summary of the results associated with the perceptions and awareness of residents. Socio-demographic comparisons, where significant, are also highlighted.

A. Demographic overview

This section of the report presents an overview of the type of people who completed the online survey. The final urban/rural split was close to the actual proportions, with 69.7% (n=989) of the respondents being from Sherwood Park, 20.9% (n=296) living in rural Strathcona County and 9.4% (n=133) residing outside of the County.¹

As seen in Figure 1, most of the respondents who participated in the survey are over the age of 44, with 29.8% of the participants between the age of 25 and 44. Only a very small percentage of participants were under 25. Overall, 38.3% of males and 61.7% of females took part in the study.

FIGURE 1
Age of Respondents

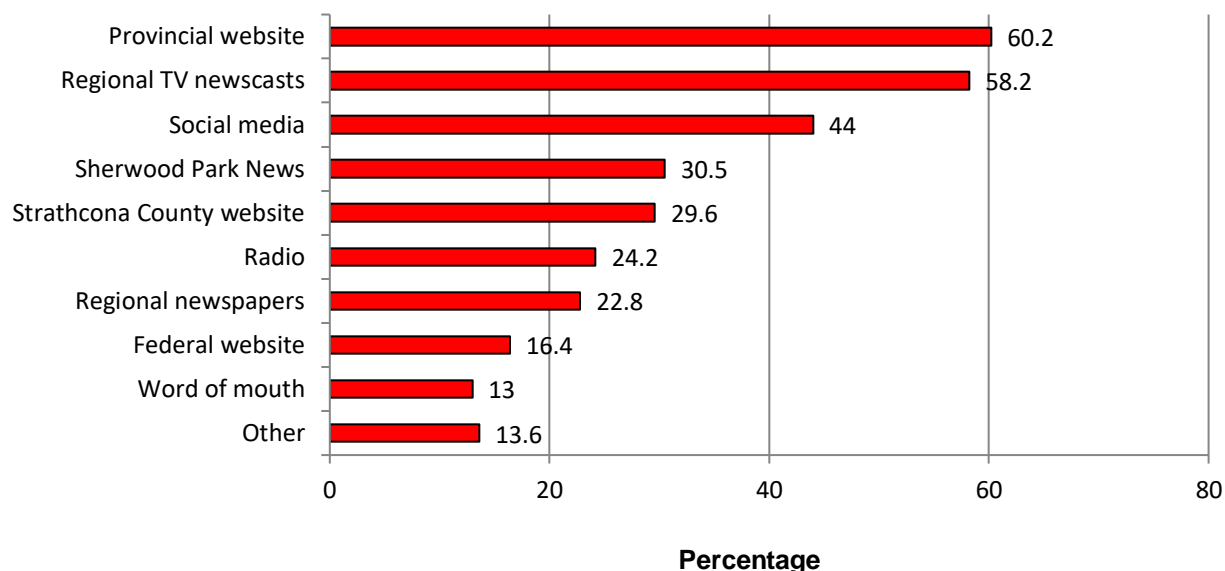


¹ An additional 23 people completed the survey, but there was insufficient information to verify where these people lived.

B. Aspects associated with communicating with the public

A series of questions were initially asked about how the public gets COVID-19 information. First, a general question about sources were asked. The overall results are shown in Figure 2. The provincial website and regional TV newscasts were the most popular sources, followed by social media, the local newspaper and the Strathcona County website. Respondents were given the opportunity to select more than one source of information when they answered this question.

FIGURE 2
Sources used when looking for information on COVID-19

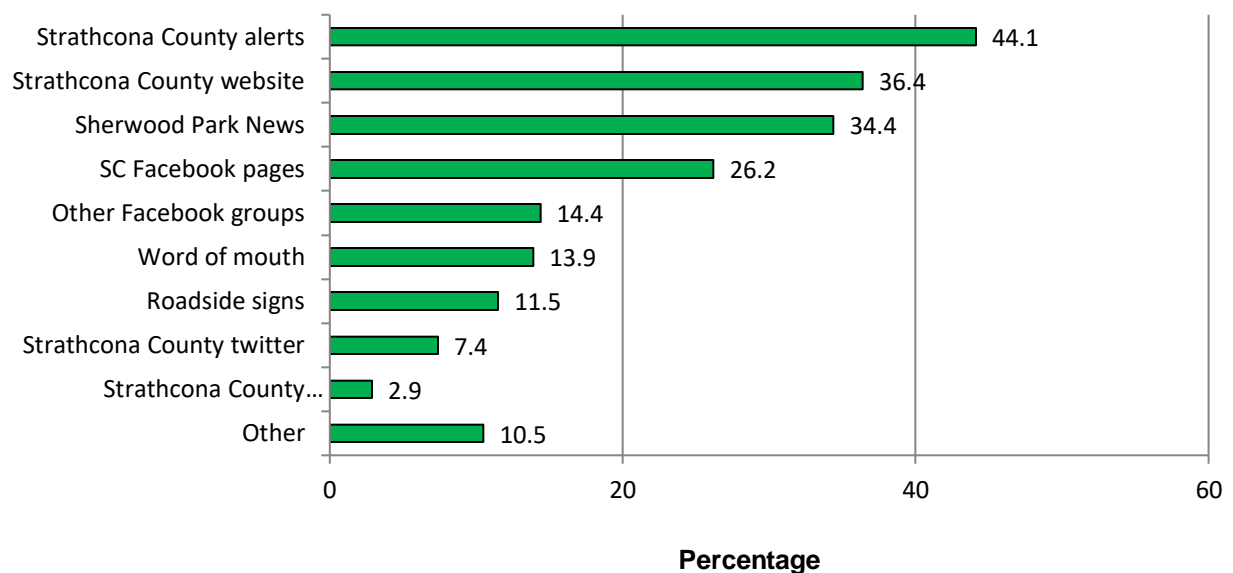


Other sources of information (13.6%) included the following (each mentioned multiple times): *AHS (Alberta Health Services)*, information coming from various *CBC* news links, information provided by Dr. Deena Hinshaw, a variety of online news sources, YouTube broadcasts, and postings from various medical based websites. There were also a small number of people who thought that COVID-19 was a hoax.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the sources for COVID that were asked specifically for Strathcona County. The overall results are shown

in Figure 3. *Strathcona County alerts*, the website and the local newspaper (*the Sherwood Park News*) were the most popular sources, followed by various *Facebook pages*, *word of mouth* and *roadside signs*. As with the previous question, respondents were given the opportunity to select more than one source of information when they answered this question.

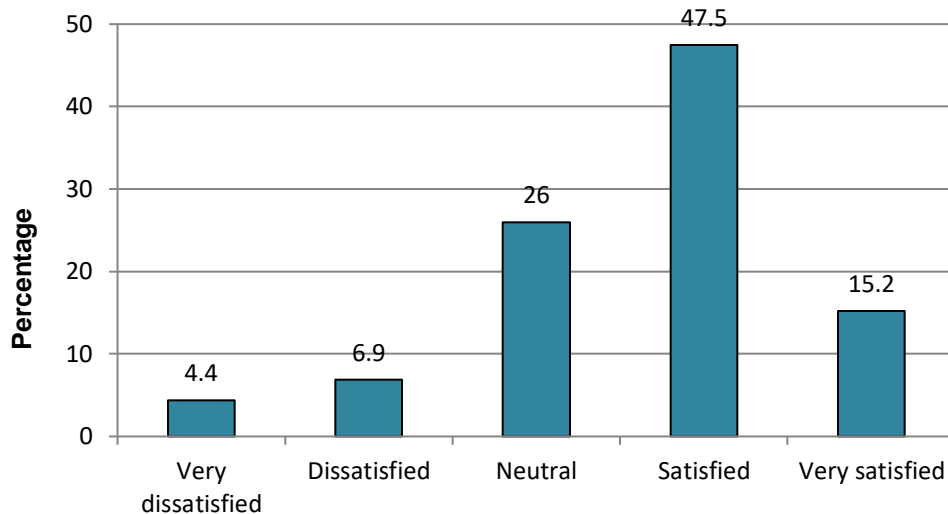
FIGURE 3
Sources used when looking for information on COVID-19 in Strathcona County



Other sources of information (10.5%) were the same as what was noted in the previous question.

Respondents were then asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the quality of communication messages coming from Strathcona County specifically related to COVID-19. As seen in Figure 4, almost 63% were satisfied or very satisfied with the COVID-19 information that they received from Strathcona County.

FIGURE 4
Satisfaction with the quality of communication messages from Strathcona County on COVID-19



Respondents were then asked to describe in their own words why they answered the way they did with respect to their level of satisfaction with the quality of communication messages coming from Strathcona County about COVID-19.

The following themes were identified, based on the 125 people who were dissatisfied with the quality of communication messages and provided comments to that effect:

- People felt that the numbers associated with COVID-19 for Strathcona County should be shared on social media. There were a few people who thought that it was difficult to get an accurate count that was specific to the region. Others thought that the numbers should be updated regularly. More breakdowns of what the numbers mean in terms of local demographics would also be helpful. Furthermore, Strathcona County Alerts should be used to convey this type of information on a regular basis.
- There is also a perception that the local government is not conveying information associated with COVID-19 and is relying on input from the provincial and federal governments. Related to this is a perception among some residents that the municipal

government is “passive” in its stance on COVID-19. Related to this, there is a perception that the information conveyed by the municipal government is repetitive of the messages conveyed by the provincial government.

In contrast, the following themes were identified, based on the 425 people who were satisfied with the quality of communication messages and provided comments to that effect:

- Many people were able to find information about COVID-19 easily through the messages conveyed by the County.
- Even though people were satisfied with the content of the messages, there was still a perception from a few people that the messages could be conveyed more frequently, though there were others who felt that the current frequency was fine.
- Most of these people felt that the messages about COVID-19 were timely and detailed, though there were some who would like the Mayor to update residents more often.
- Although satisfied with the quality of the messages, there were many who felt that there should be more reporting on the number of COVID-19 cases that are in Strathcona County, and these numbers should be updated regularly.

With respect to the 203 people who took a neutral stance on quality of communication messages and provided comments to that effect:

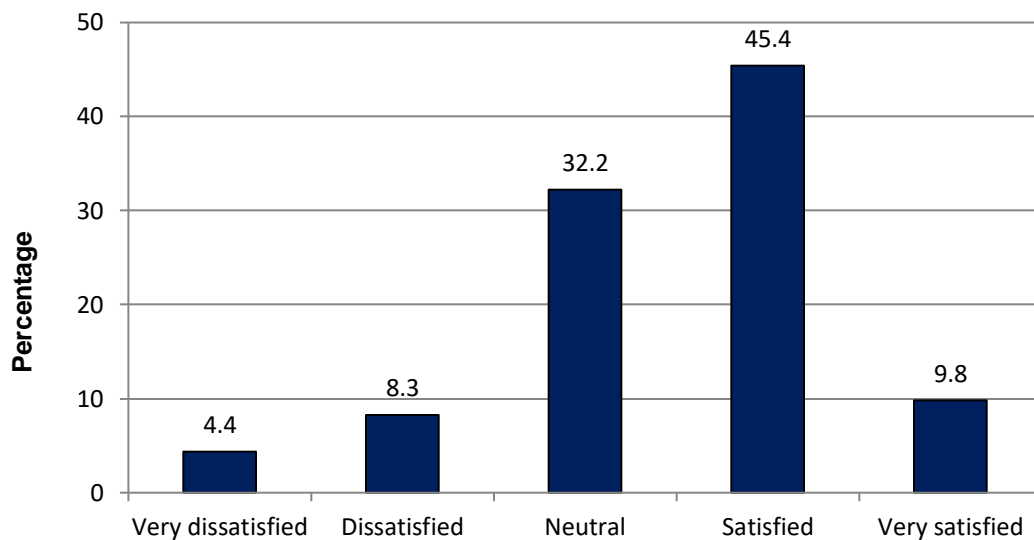
- The information conveyed was important to these people, though many felt there were times when the messages were confusing, especially if one compared the municipal perspective with the provincial and federal perspectives.
- There were many comments from people about the mask bylaw and why the County waited until the 25 people threshold to put it into place. There were some who felt it should have gone into effect at the time that Edmonton enacted their bylaw. Others have found the bylaw confusing since there are some who are seeing people without masks and perceive that the bylaw is not being enforced.

Following up from this, most respondents (89.7%) were not overwhelmed by the amount of information coming from Strathcona County about COVID-19. With respect to whether this information was valuable,

68.7% felt that it was, 14% felt that it was not valuable and the remaining 17.3% were not sure.

Finally, respondents were asked their level of satisfaction with the frequency of communication messages coming from the County on COVID-19. It can be seen from Figure 5 that a slight majority were satisfied or very satisfied with the frequency, though many people took a neutral position. Only a small percentage were dissatisfied with the frequency of communication.

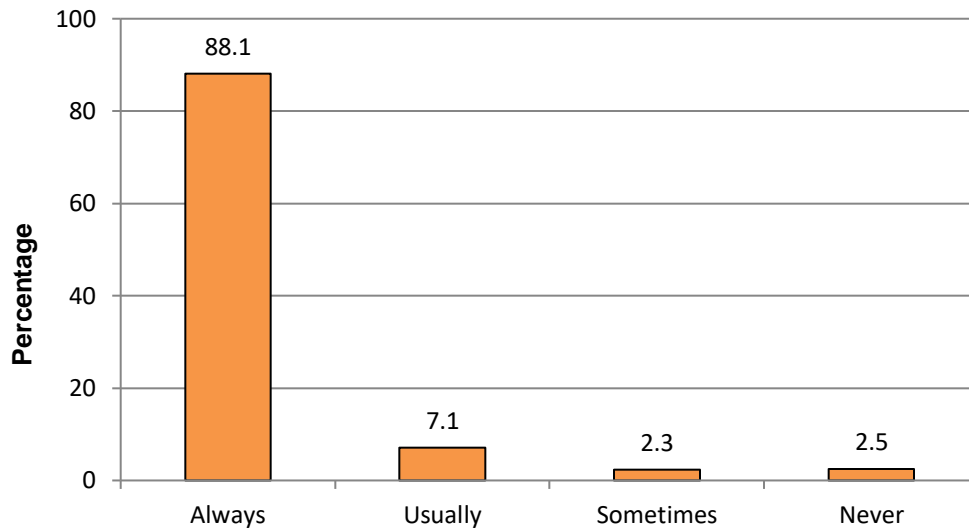
FIGURE 5
Satisfaction with communications' frequency from Strathcona County on COVID-19



C. Wearing face coverings in public indoor spaces

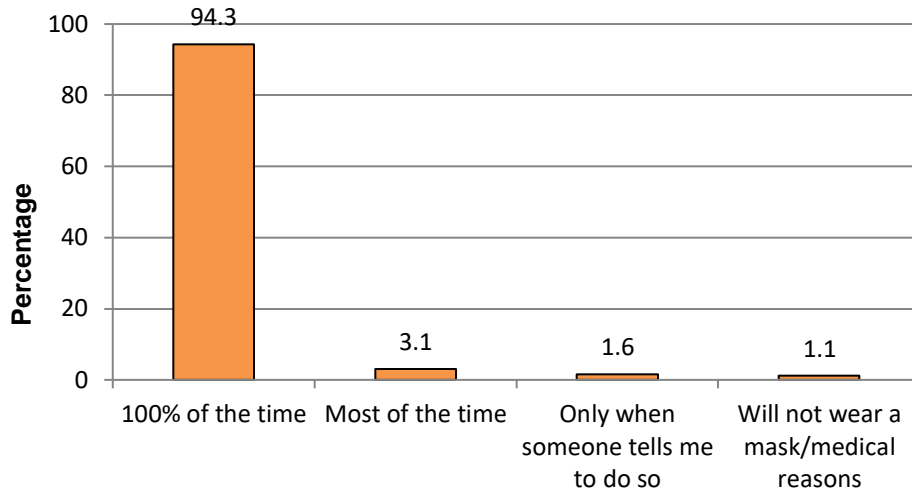
In this section, two questions were asked about the current use of face coverings when visiting indoor spaces. At the present time, Strathcona County has a mask bylaw in effect. When asked how often people remembered to bring their own non-medical mask or cloth face covering with them when they visited indoor public spaces, it can be seen in Figure 6 that most respondents were always wearing a face covering.

FIGURE 6
How often do you wear a face covering in an indoor space?



An additional question was asked pertaining to the frequency by which people would wear a mask in an indoor space. It can be seen from Figure 7 that the majority do this all the time. Only small percentages of people stray from this norm.

FIGURE 7
Frequency of wearing a face covering in an indoor space



D. Shopping habits during the COVID-19 Pandemic

A series of questions were asked about shopping habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, people were asked about their in-person shopping patterns. It can be seen from Figure 8 that in-person shopping in Strathcona County is less prevalent since the start of the pandemic.

FIGURE 8
In-person shopping patterns in Strathcona County since the start of the pandemic



Respondents were then asked if their online shopping patterns have changed since the start of the pandemic. It can be seen from Figure 9 that online shopping has increased since the start of the pandemic.

FIGURE 9
Online shopping patterns since the start of the pandemic



Respondents were then asked to indicate the reasons that motivates them to shop locally. The overall results include the following patterns:

- Convenience of getting the product at the store – 67.7%
- Availability – 51.8%
- Locally made product – 38.2%
- Price of the products – 27.9%
- Just buy what I want/need with no consideration – 15.7%
- I do not shop locally – 1.2%
- Other reasons – Answers consisted primarily of messages that respondents read or heard through local media such as TV newscasts or local newspapers, through various websites (e.g. provincial website, Facebook). Many people cited messages that they read from Mayor Rod Frank about shopping locally - 19.4%

Respondents were also asked to indicate factors that businesses should be aware of to encourage people to consider shopping online. The overall results include the following patterns:

- Having purchases delivered directly to my home – 54.8%
- Awareness of local online shopping opportunities – 52.3%
- Better price point – 46.2%
- Greater range of products available – 42.6%
- Doing all shopping transactions online (viewing products, paying electronically, etc.) – 41.3%
- Sites like Amazon are just easier – 28.7%
- Higher quality goods – 15.5%
- Other reasons – Most of the suggestions provided were messages conveying the importance of shopping locally, often as a way of supporting the community itself - 14.5%

E. Family and Community Services in the COVID-19 Pandemic

A series of questions were also asked about making use of Family and Community Services during the pandemic. Respondents were initially asked if they had become more aware of Strathcona County supports available for mental health or financial difficulties. Overall, 40.6% were more aware, though 48.3% were not and the remaining 11.1% were not sure.

Respondents were then asked which Family and Community Services supports might be needed to access within the next 6 months. The overall results include the following patterns:

- No services required – 41.8%
- Counselling or help coping with life's challenges – 19.2%
- Advice about community resources and how to access them – 14.0%
- Access to financial supports or subsidies – 8.9%
- Assistance related to being a parent – 5.7%
- Other services – Several suggestions were put forward, though many of the suggestions were targeted as those that focused on the needs that seniors in the community might require, including

accommodation assistance, health assistance and help with dementia. Other people reiterated the need for counselling help specifically associated with the challenges associated with COVID-19 - 27.3%

Respondents were also asked if they and or other members of their household needed additional supports to cope with the pandemic which are not available through Family and Community Services at this time. Overall, 67.8% did not need any additional services. Only a small percentage (7.8%) said that they did, while the remaining 24.4% were not sure.

Those who were looking for additional services were asked to indicate what these were. A variety of ideas were put forward, many of which might currently be available through FCS:

- A new moms group would be great.
- Addiction counselling meetings not being offered at this time.
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Giver support, and general mobility support.
- Social programs for younger children (*mentioned multiple times*).
- Coordinating facilities for seniors (*facilities/accommodations for seniors mentioned numerous times*).
- Assistance for disabled adults.
- At home learning, we don't have the technology available. Both us parents work from home and need our computers but now the kids need them too. It's just not doable and we cannot afford buying more computers. Schools have limited resources available.
- Better counselling, more long-term options for counselling and specific to men's counselling options.
- Children's mental health services. Parents have lost jobs; they can't see grandparents and are often afraid they will infect grandparents; they have lost their sports and school is very different. That's a lot to cope with for kids. Free children's mental health services specific to pandemic recovery is a good investment for the County's future.
- Could use counselling on anxiety (*mentioned multiple times*).
- Create events to unite the community over spreading fear around COVID-19.

- Financial help / funding for people who have no income (*mentioned multiple times*).
- Free courses or schooling.
- Grief counselling.
- Have options through work.
- Help for seniors to work out etc. All senior programs are closed
- Honestly, just reopening facilities and letting people make wise decisions for themselves would be so much better. Regular services and activities should be offered.
- I don't have benefits through work and my child is at higher risk of contracting COVID. If one of us were to end up in the hospital we would require health benefits and potentially other supports.
- I need handyman type repair services, but I can't/shouldn't have people in my home. This is stressful.
- Isolation for those that do not use the internet due to disability or age/ isolation of online schoolers.
- Local small business supports. Bricks and Mortar are getting support but local artists and homebased businesses haven't been supported at all.
- Not being able to be with family during Easter or Thanksgiving was bad enough, but 'losing' Christmas and its gatherings puts this over the top for trying to stay positive.
- There needs to be better support for those who cannot wear a mask. Simply being told to stay home or shop online is not helpful or effective.

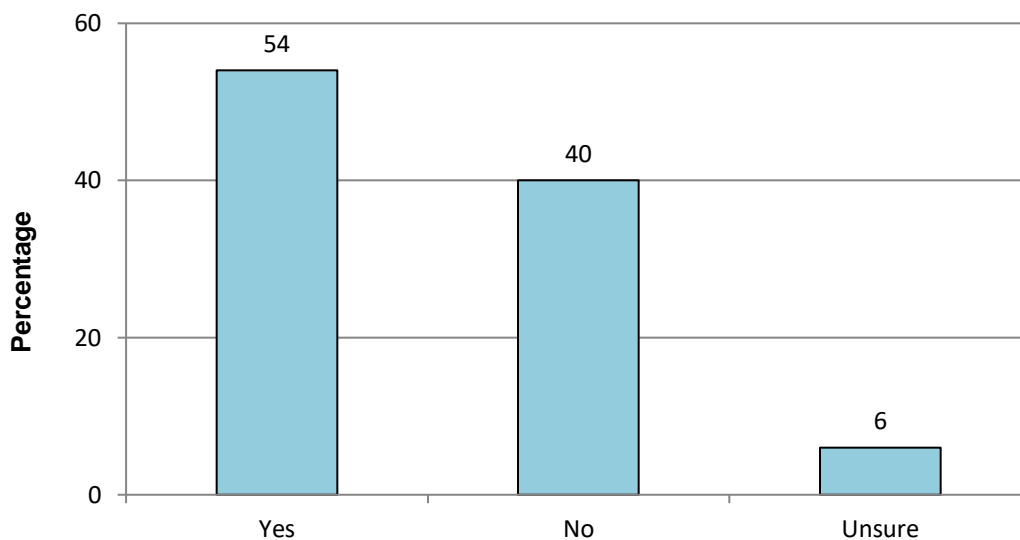
Respondents were then presented with a list of advertisements for Family and Community Services supports and asked which ones (if any) that they were aware of. The overall results include the following:

- Roadside signs – 47.1%
- Newspaper articles – 33.2%
- County website – 32.2%
- Facebook – 25.5%
- Digital screens in recreation facilities – 8.4%
- Twitter – 8.3%
- Instagram – 6.3%
- Haven't noticed any services being advertised – 27.6%

F. Recreation, Parks and Culture Services in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Several questions pertaining to recreation activities were asked in this survey. Respondents were initially asked if they had replaced their normal recreation activities with alternative ones due to the pandemic. The results are shown in Figure 10. Respondents were then asked to explain their answers.

FIGURE 10
Have your recreation activities changed since the start of the pandemic



Of the 54% who said “yes,” many indicated that they were now doing recreation activities at home, particularly exercise/fitness routines. There were also those who were trying to go for walks outside on a regular basis. There were also many people who were doing fitness classes virtually via Zoom. There were also numerous people who lamented that they were unable to go to the gym, as these fitness facilities were either closed or had very limited access. Many respondents also noted that swimming was no longer part of their routine.

Of the 40% who said “no,” many indicated that they had never made use of County facilities and always had done their fitness routines at home,

so nothing had changed. Other people indicated that they were walking outside for exercise before the pandemic, so for them, nothing had changed. There were also those who mentioned other activities such as hiking, bicycling or golfing that they were still doing, even in the pandemic, so for them, outside of perhaps being more cautious outdoors, nothing else had changed.

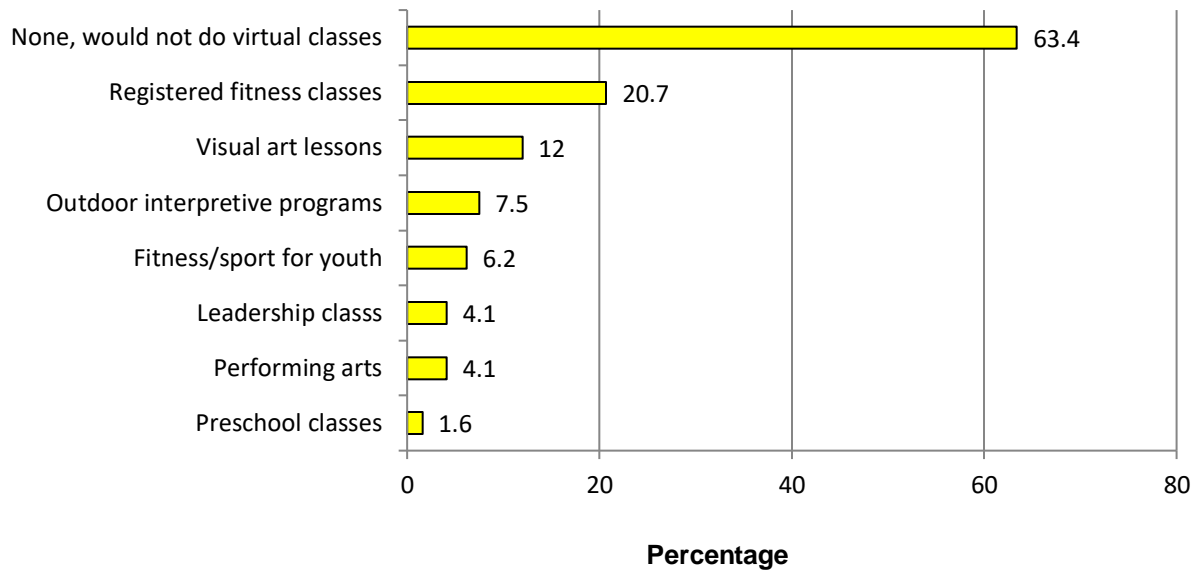
People were then asked how their well-being has been affected during the pandemic. Although some of the respondents indicated that they were feeling fine and carrying on as usual, there were many others who had negative perceptions. The main reasons that were constantly repeated included:

- Disruptions to their routines have resulted in less exercise and more weight gain.
- A reduction in social interactions with friends and family; some people have indicated that they are living alone, so this lack of interaction is especially problematic.
- Fewer outings such as shopping, swimming or going to the gym due to rules and/or closures.
- More stress and greater levels of anxiety; in general, many feel that their mental health has been affected.
- Many people have also noticed that they are less motivated to do things due to the pandemic.
- Besides themselves, many people also felt that the pandemic has been hard on their kids, due to school disruptions and a reduction (or elimination) of their recreation and social activities.
- A few people also mentioned the financial impacts caused by the pandemic.

Next, respondents were asked what virtual recreation classes they might be interested in registering and paying for if these were available. It can be seen from Figure 11 that most respondents were not interested in participating in any virtual classes. For the remaining people, registered fitness classes were the most popular.

FIGURE 11

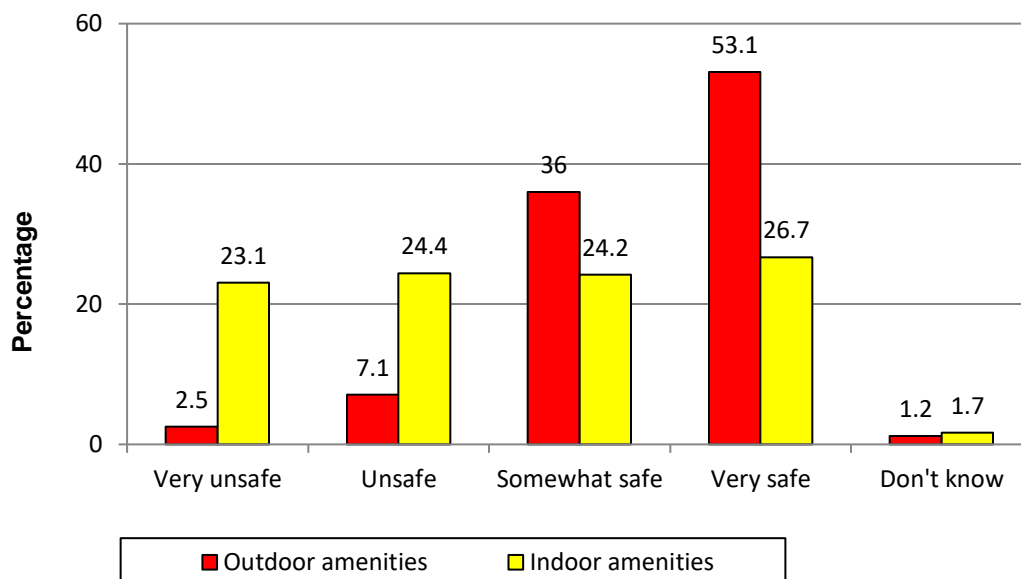
Interest in virtual recreation classes



G. Perceptions of safety when using recreation amenities

A series of questions were asked with respect to how safe people felt when using recreation amenities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 17.1% of them did not make use of outdoor recreation spaces, and 38.7% were not making use of indoor recreation or cultural amenities.² Figure 12 shows that most of the users felt safe using outdoor recreation amenities, while indoor users were somewhat divided as to whether the facilities were safe or unsafe to use.

FIGURE 12
Perceptions of safety when using indoor and outdoor recreation amenities during the COVID-19 pandemic

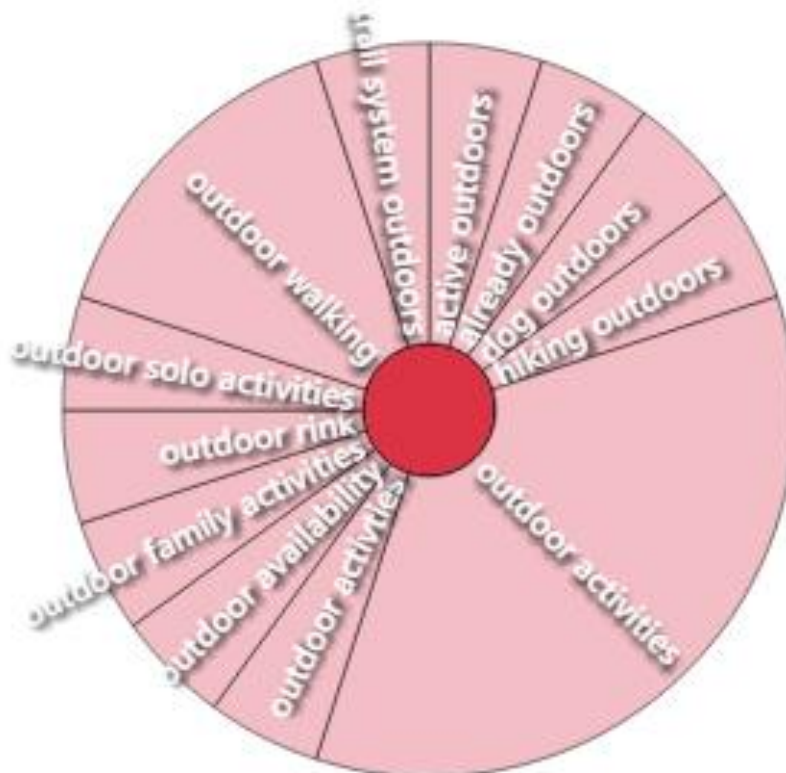


Those who felt *unsafe* with recreation amenities were asked to explain why they felt that way. With respect to not using outdoor amenities, many of the respondents would still do recreation activities outdoors but would avoid specific amenities such as parks and do activities near their home. There were others who would do outdoor activities such as hiking or walking,

² This meant that 82.9% were using outdoor amenities and 61.3% were using indoor amenities (when these were open for use).

where they were constantly on the move. A variety of outdoor options derived from the open-ended responses are shown in Figure 13.

FIGURE 13
Outdoor recreation activities



There were also some people who indicated that they preferred to do recreation and exercise activities at home (such as using a home-gym setup) instead of going to outdoor amenities.

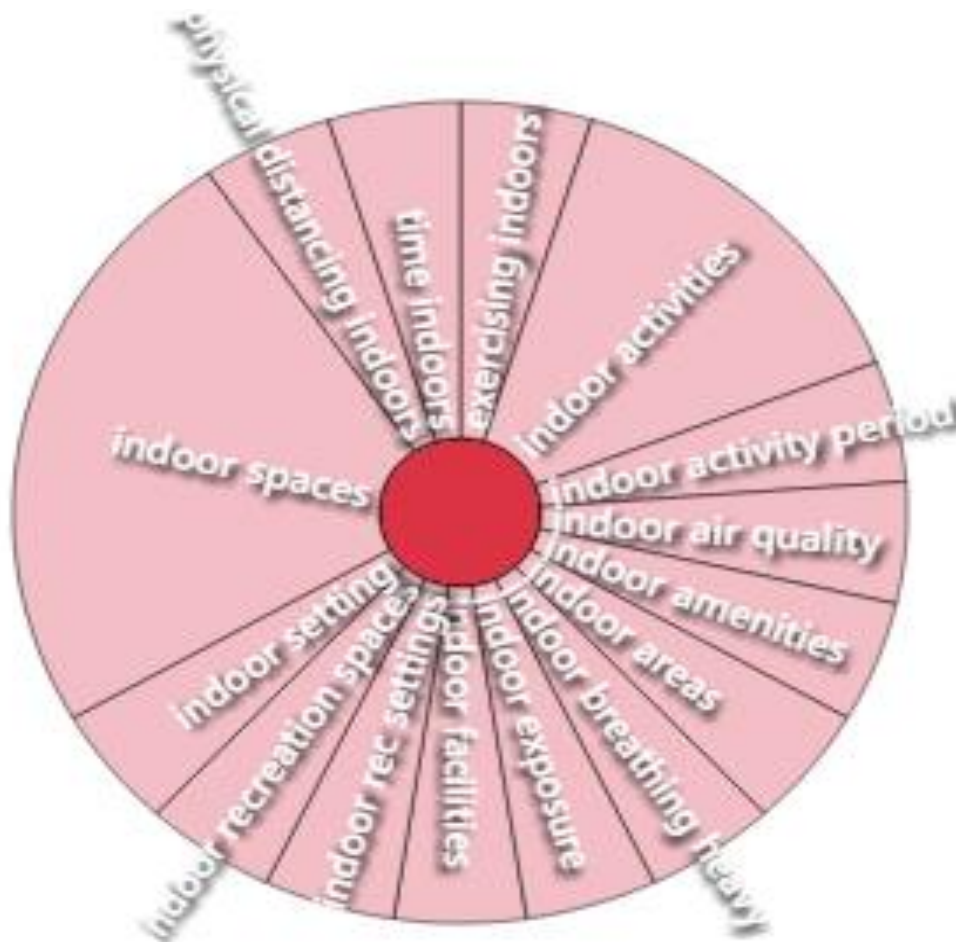
Of those who felt unsafe within indoor recreation facilities, the main reasons provided were:

- The sheer volume of people using the facilities at any one time, coupled with those who did not do social distancing.
- With respect to the use of masks, people commented on seeing those who were not wearing masks or were not wearing masks properly.
- There were also people who felt that there was a lack of enforcement for people wearing masks within the facilities.

There was also confusion toward wearing masks when engaged in exercise or other activities.

- Many people also were concerned with the level of cleanliness within the various recreation facilities.
- People also expressed concerns with respect to the ventilation systems currently in use within these facilities.
- A variety of other concerns with the indoor spaces were also mentioned, as shown in Figure 14.

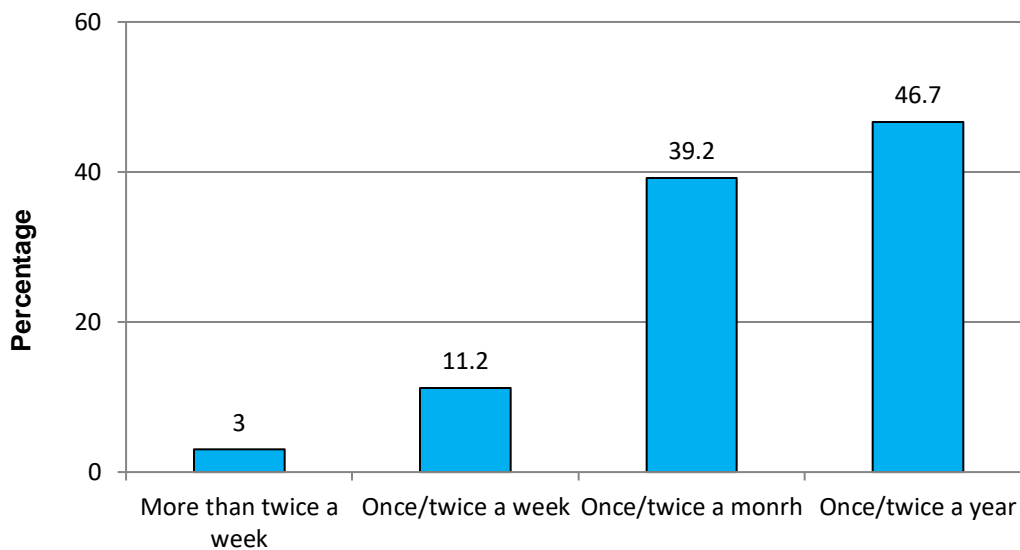
FIGURE 14
Issues associated with indoor recreation facilities



H. Use of other Strathcona County services

Respondents were asked about physical visits to the County library during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, it was found that 63.6% were not visiting the library at all. Of the ones who did, it can be seen in Figure 15 that frequent visits were down considerably from visits made prior to the pandemic. It should also be noted that physical access to the public library has been limited or has not been available to the public for several months since the pandemic began.

FIGURE 15
Visits to the public library during the COVID-19 pandemic



Respondents were also asked about perceptions toward using transit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, it was found that 87.3% did not use public transportation. Of the ones who did (excluding those who were not using transit), the following perceptions were noted:

- 27% had no concerns and continue to use transit services with appropriate precautions.
- 21.3% had some concerns (even with precautions) and as such would only use transit services for essential trips.
- 51.7% had significant concerns and regardless of precautions and standards, would not use transit at this time.

I. Personal well-being during the pandemic

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked about their current well-being as they continue to cope with the pandemic. With respect to their mental health, it can be seen in Figure 16 that most people feel that their mental health is adequate. However, it can be seen in Figure 17 that a higher percentage of females feel their mental health is fair or poor compared to males, who were more inclined to perceive their mental health as being very good or excellent.

FIGURE 16
Overall perceptions of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

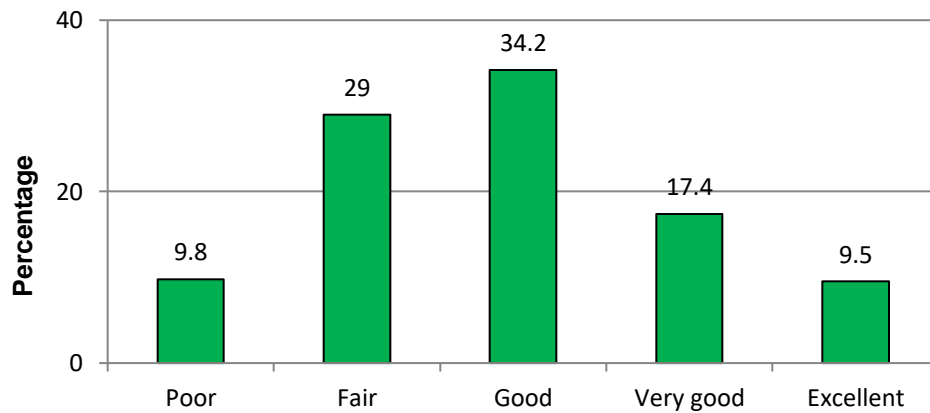
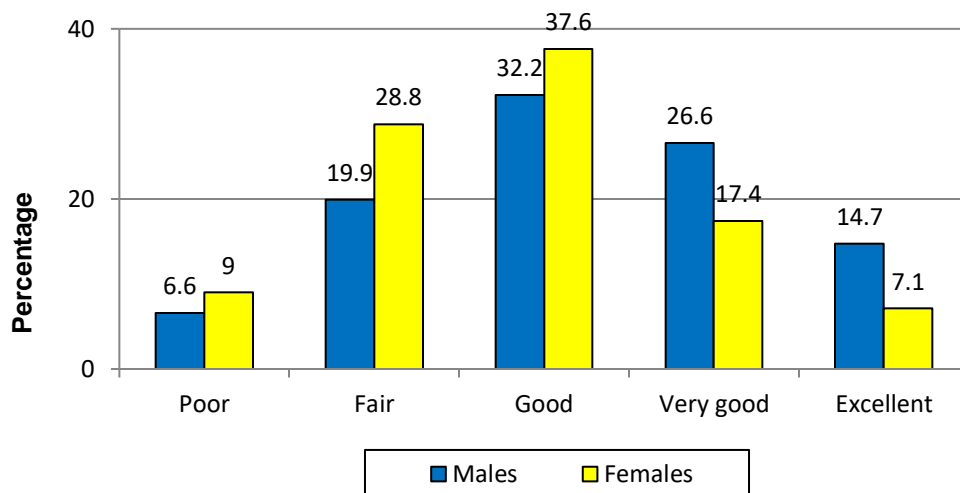
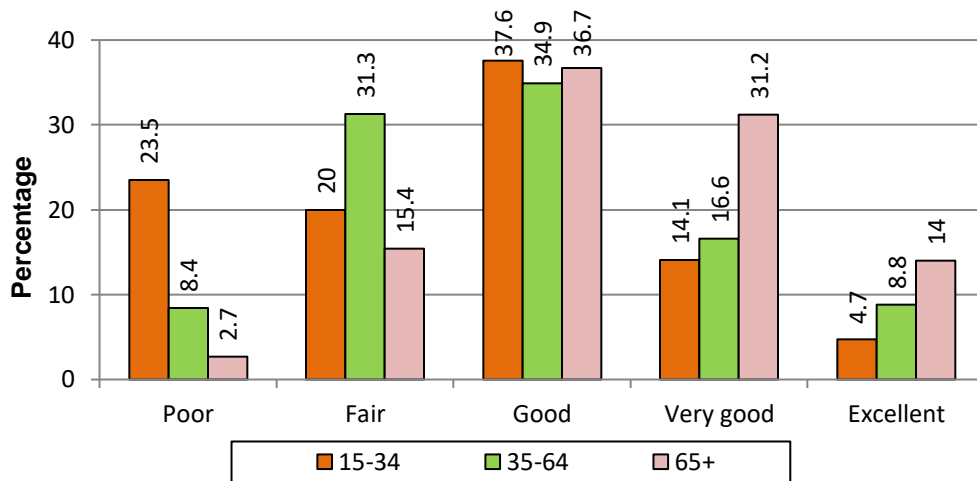


FIGURE 17
Overall perceptions of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gender comparisons)



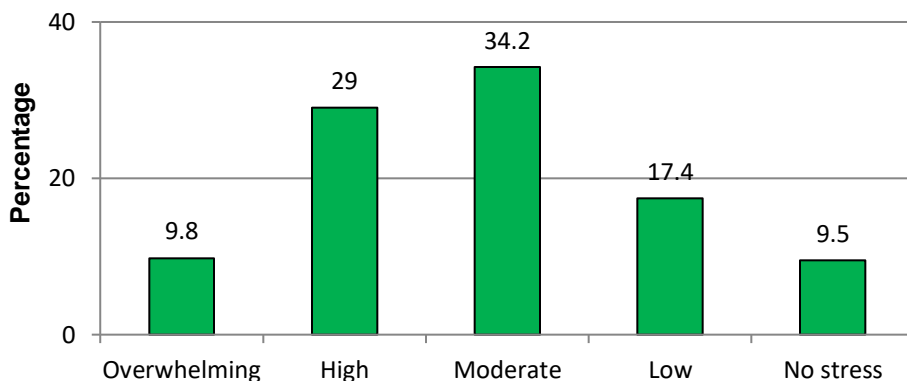
With respect to age, it can be seen in Figure 18 that perceptions of mental health increase in positivity among older respondents compared to younger ones. Although roughly one third of respondents perceive their mental health to be “good” regardless of their age, those aged 65 or older have higher positive perceptions of their mental health compared to those under the age of 65.

FIGURE 18
Overall perceptions of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Age Groups)



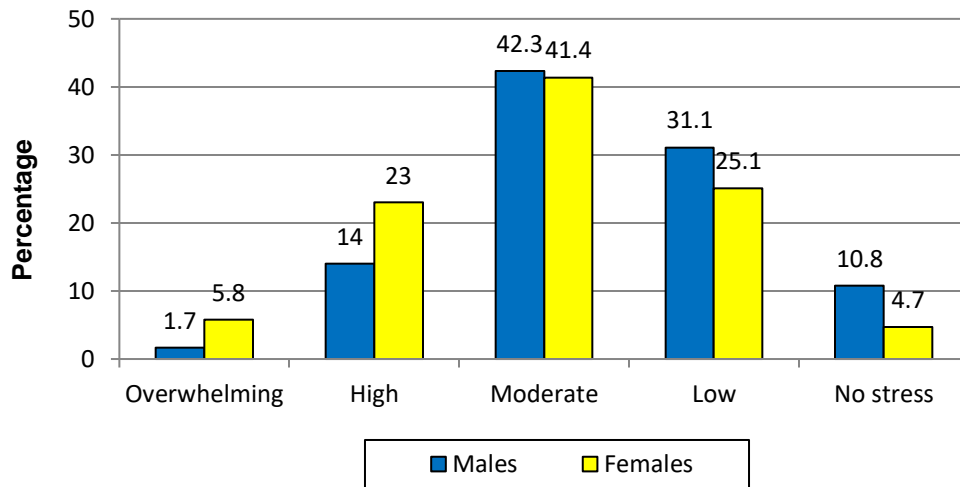
Respondents were then asked about their stress levels during COVID-19. It can be seen in Figure 19 that very few people are experiencing high or overwhelming levels of stress.

FIGURE 19
Overall perceptions of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic



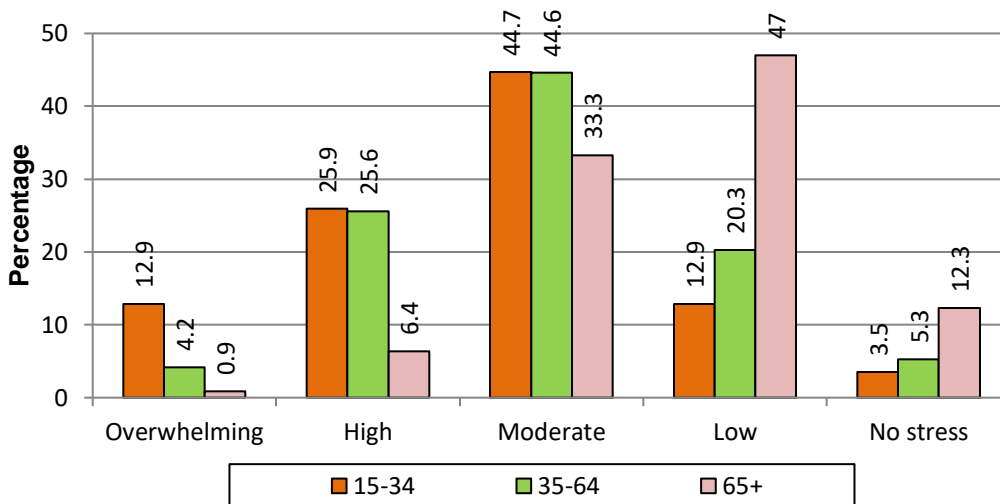
It can be seen in Figure 20 that a slightly higher percentage of females are experiencing overwhelming or high stress compared to males.

FIGURE 20
Overall perceptions of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gender comparisons)



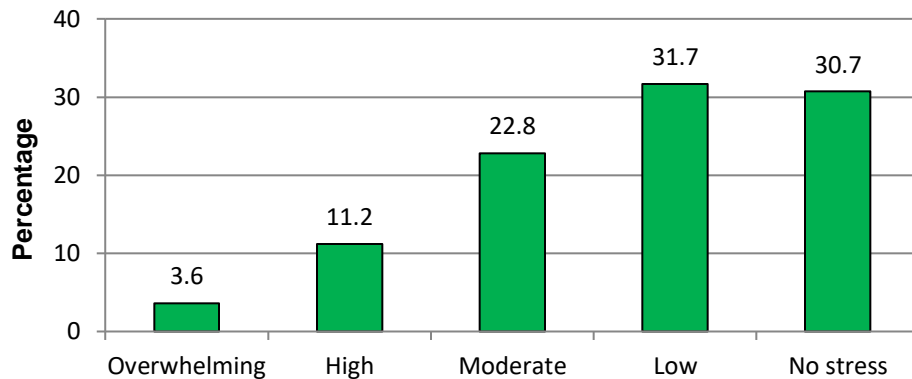
With respect to age groups, it can be seen in Figure 21 that those aged 65 or older have considerably lower levels of stress compared to those under the age of 65.

FIGURE 21
Overall perceptions of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Age Groups)



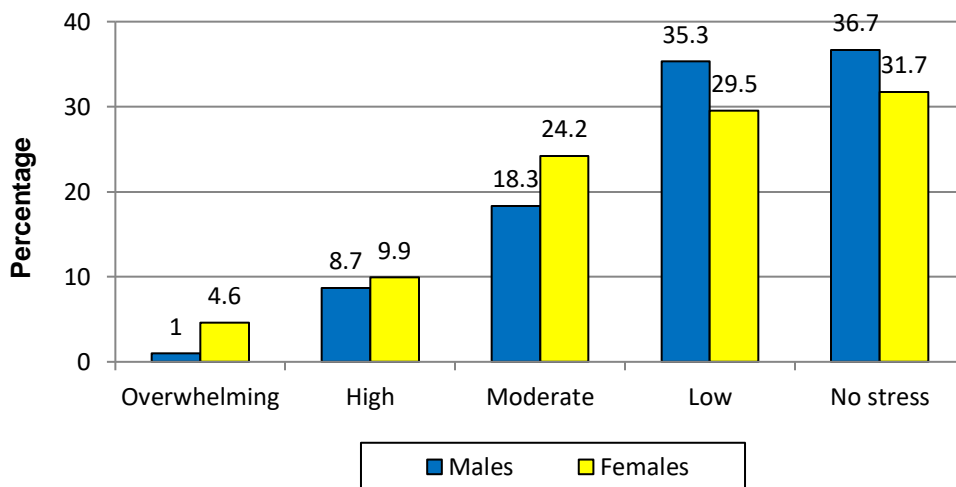
The last question asked in the survey was stress levels during COVID-19 as it pertained to personal finances. It can be seen in Figure 22 that most people were not experiencing stress in this regard, or if they were, the level of stress was low.

FIGURE 22
Overall perceptions of stress associated with personal finances during the COVID-19 pandemic



It can be seen in Figure 23 that males and females are experiencing similar levels of stress when it comes to finances. A small percentage of females are overwhelmed to a greater extent compared to males.

FIGURE 23
Overall perceptions of stress associated with personal finances during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gender comparisons)



With respect to age groups, it can be seen in Figure 24 that those aged 65 or older have considerably lower levels of stress when it comes to finances during the pandemic compared to those under the age of 65. Even here, however, only small percentages of people in all age groups are experiencing overwhelming or high levels of stress due to finances.

FIGURE 24
Overall perceptions of stress associated with personal finances during the COVID-19 pandemic (Age Groups)

