

Cost of Living Survey 2022/23

A report by Age UK Redbridge, Barking & Havering



January 2023

“The current economic situation is affecting my physical and mental health.

I am not able to afford the food I need for a good balanced diet, and I cannot afford a holiday or go to social events as before.”

Local Resident

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1. Introduction

Age UK Redbridge, Barking & Dagenham and Havering is a local charity, which has been working with older people for over 50 years. We have dedicated, trained staff who are making a positive difference to the lives of older people through a variety of services. This includes the Voices of Experience Project, giving older people in Redbridge the opportunity to give their feedback.

2. Background

Age UK is increasingly concerned about how the rising cost of living is affecting older people on low and modest incomes. Household energy prices are going up by an average of 54% and are expected to rise further. Inflation hit 6.2% in February 2022 and is set to go even higher. However, the State Pension and benefits are only due to rise by 3.1%.

Most people on low and modest incomes will not be able to make ends meet without more Government support. We designed this survey as we wanted to know how the cost of living crisis is affecting older people living in Redbridge.

3. Methodology

Participants who could access the internet were emailed a link to an online survey. Additionally, we sent paper copies in the post. Some participants even gave their feedback over the phone. We also visited supported living establishments and community groups to collect their feedback.

4. Strengths & Limitations

The flexibility of our approach in gathering feedback from people, and the variety of methods used are among the project's strengths. A limitation is that the majority of respondents are of a white background and there were a smaller number of contributions from other ethnic groups. We shall aim to address this with future campaigns.

5. Executive Summary of Findings

During October - December 2022, 154 local people in Redbridge completed our survey on the current cost of living pressures.

This section summarises key findings - see section 6 for findings in full.

Survey Response - In Summary

Financial Situation

- A clear majority of respondents (91%) express worry or concern about rising costs.
- A significant number (85%) have taken action to cut back on their bills and expenses.
- Of those making cutbacks, around three quarters (73%) have reduced their household energy use, 43% have curtailed their social activity or holiday plans and 35% have cut down on meals, or switched to cheaper brands.
- After paying for basics, 43% of respondents have 'money left over for luxuries' while a larger number (48%) say they do not.
- 41% have had to use savings.

Impact on Daily Life

- A significant minority of respondents (39%) say that the current economic situation has affected their physical or mental health.
- Managing everyday life has become a worry for many, with increasing levels of anxiety and nervousness commonly described.
- Key concerns include the ability to pay bills, level of savings, and possibility of falling into debt

Findings By Age

- Those of later working age (50 to 64) and over 90 are noticeably most concerned about increased costs.
- Recent retirees (aged 65 - 74) are most likely to have cut back on their spending.
- Respondents aged 50 - 64 are twice as likely to have 'money left over for luxuries' compared with those aged 75 - 89, or under 50.
- Those aged under 50 are twice as likely to have used savings, compared with others, with recent retirees (aged 65 - 74) also more likely to have done so.

Government Support

- Just a tenth of respondents (9%) feel that Government support for those on low or modest incomes has been adequate.
- A broad majority (88%) feel that state pensions and benefits should rise.
- Three quarters of respondents (77%) feel that information on entitlements is lacking.
- On news that the triple lock may be suspended, some respondents are sympathetic of the wider economic climate, while a much larger majority comment on feeling disappointed, let down, and also frustrated with the delays in making a decision.
- A broad majority (85%) feel that more support should be offered to improve household energy efficiency, such as loft insulation.

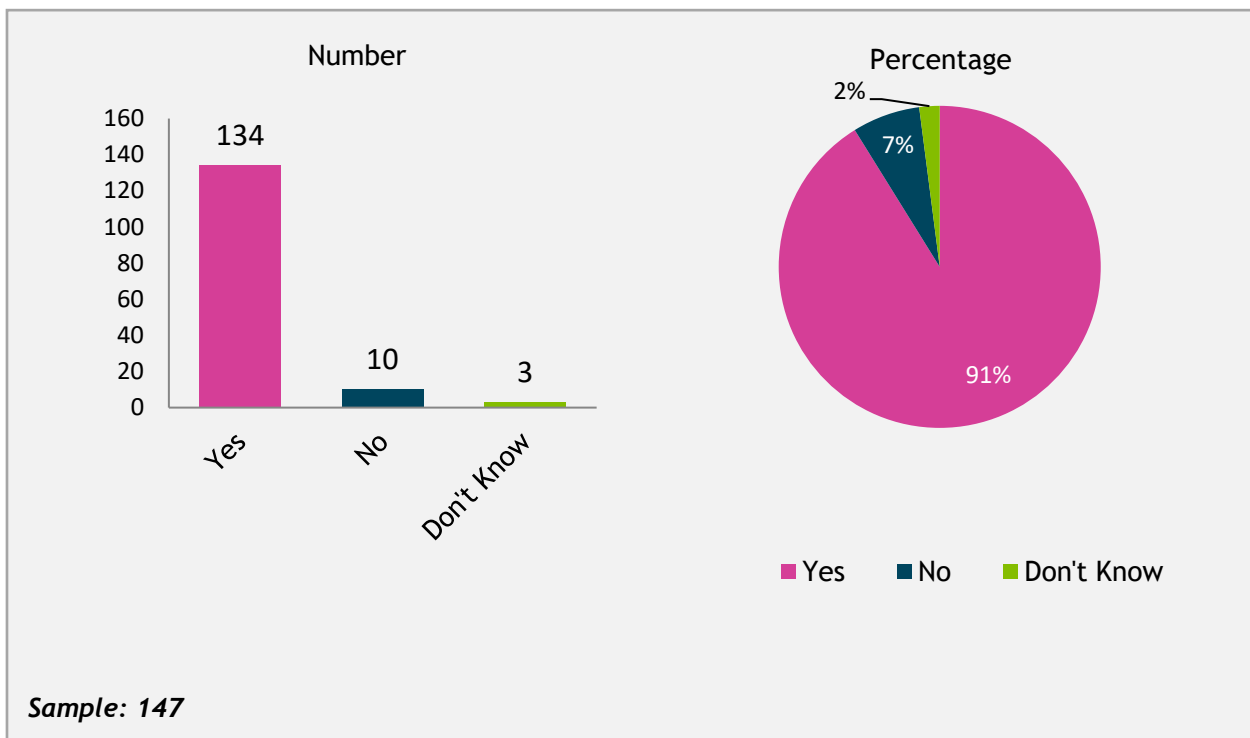
6. Our Survey - Analysis of Feedback

During October - December 2022, 154 local people in Redbridge completed our survey on the current cost of living pressures.

We gauged general levels of concern, whether income is sufficient to meet needs - and any actions taken if not, and if Government support and information is felt to have been adequate.

Feedback is analysed as a whole, and additionally by age groupings for selected questions.

6.1 Are you worried or concerned about the huge increase in household energy prices and the increase in the cost of living?



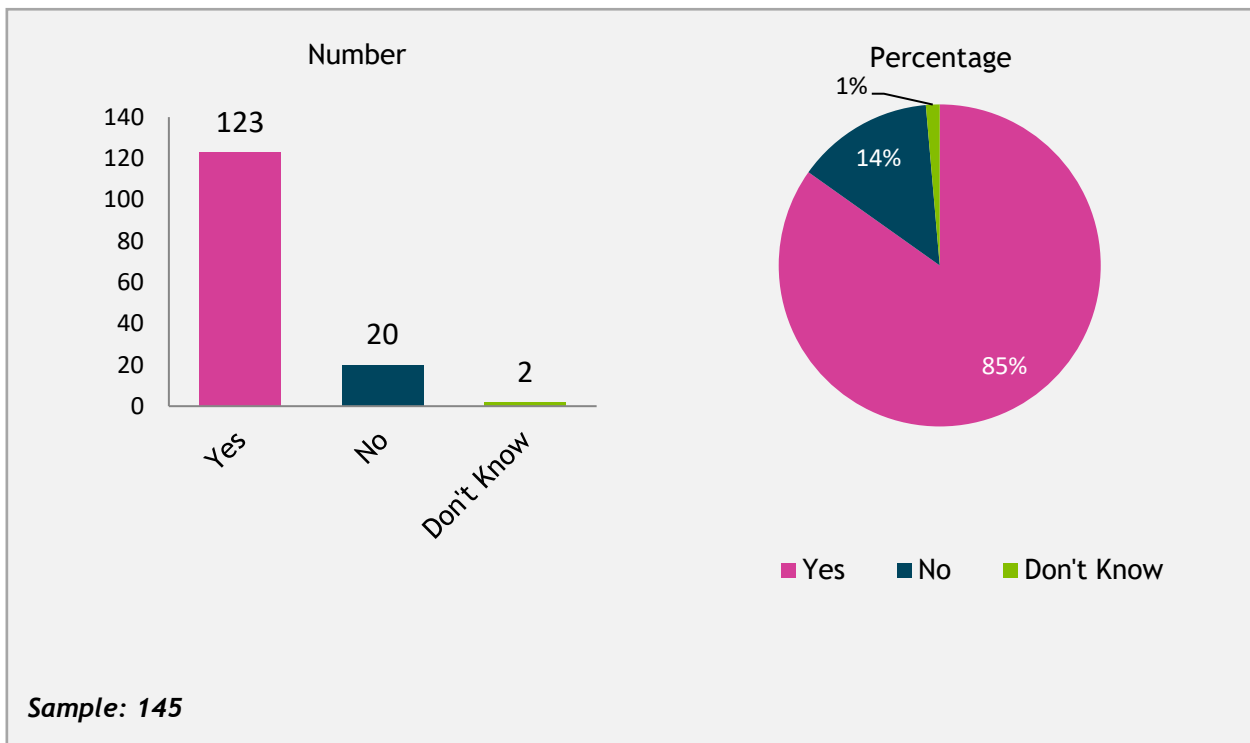
A clear majority of respondents (91%) express worry or concern about rising costs and prices.

6.1.1 By Age: Worried or concerned about increased costs.

	% Yes
Aged 90 or Over	100%
Aged 50 - 64	100%
All Respondents (Baseline)	91%
Aged 75 - 89	91%
Aged 65 - 74	89%
Under 50	83%

When looking at responses by age, we find that those of later working age (50 to 64) and over 90 are noticeably most concerned about increased costs. Those under 50 are least concerned.

6.2 Have you taken any action to cut back on your bills and expenses?



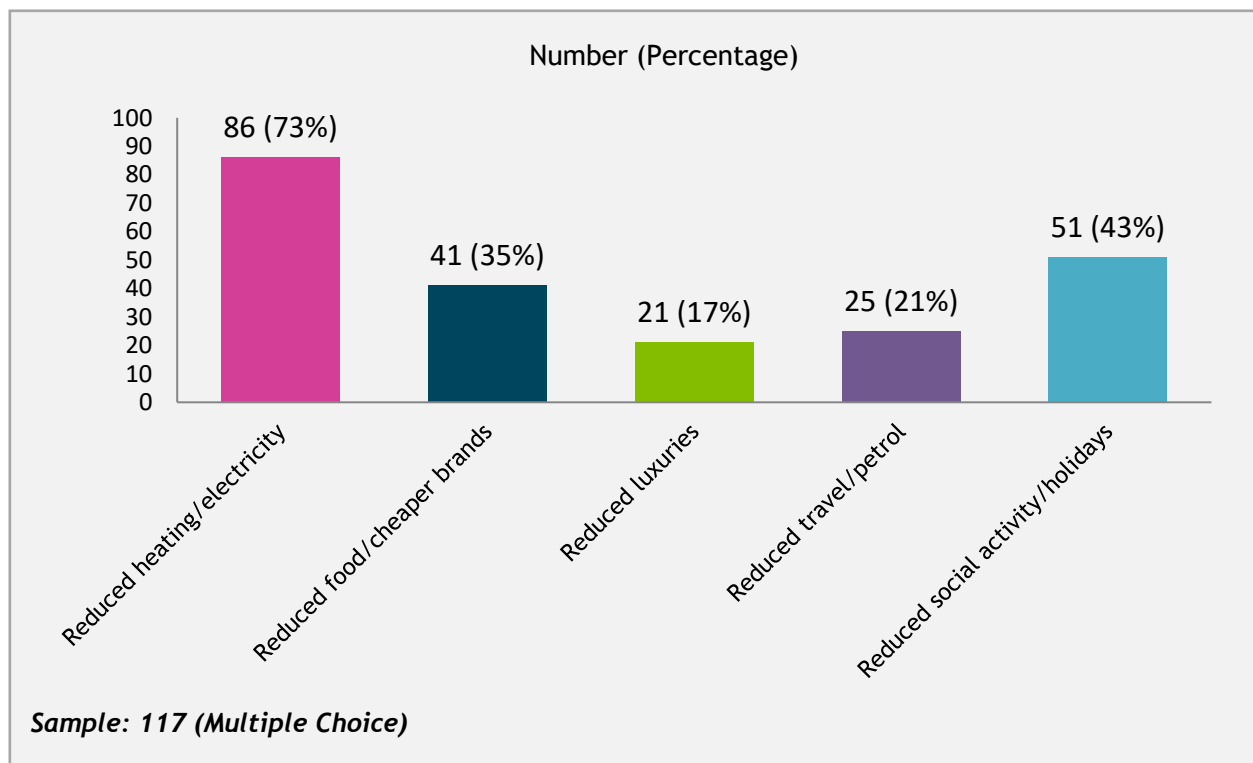
A broad majority of respondents (85%) have taken action to cut back on their bills and expenses.

6.2.1 By Age: Have taken action to cut back on spending

	% Yes
Aged 65 - 74	91%
Aged 90 or Over	86%
All Respondents (Baseline)	85%
Aged 50 - 64	85%
Aged 75 - 89	84%
Under 50	69%

Recent retirees (aged 65 - 74) are most likely to have cut back on spending, while respondents aged under 50 are the least likely to have done so - by a significant margin.

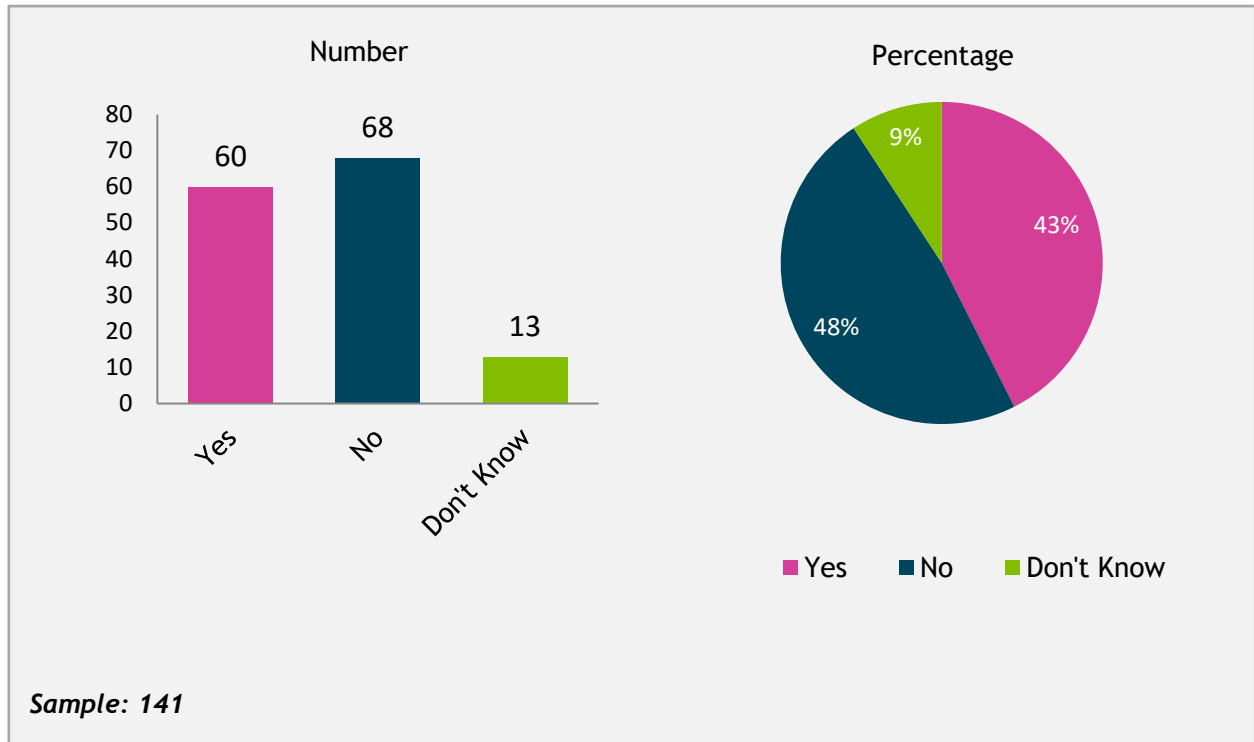
6.2.a If yes, how have you cut back on your spending?



Of those making cutbacks, around three quarters (73%) have reduced their household energy use, 43% have curtailed their social activity or holiday plans and 35% have cut down on meals, or switched to cheaper brands.

Around a fifth of respondents are driving less to save on petrol, or buying fewer luxuries.

6.3 After paying the basics, do you have any money left over for luxuries?



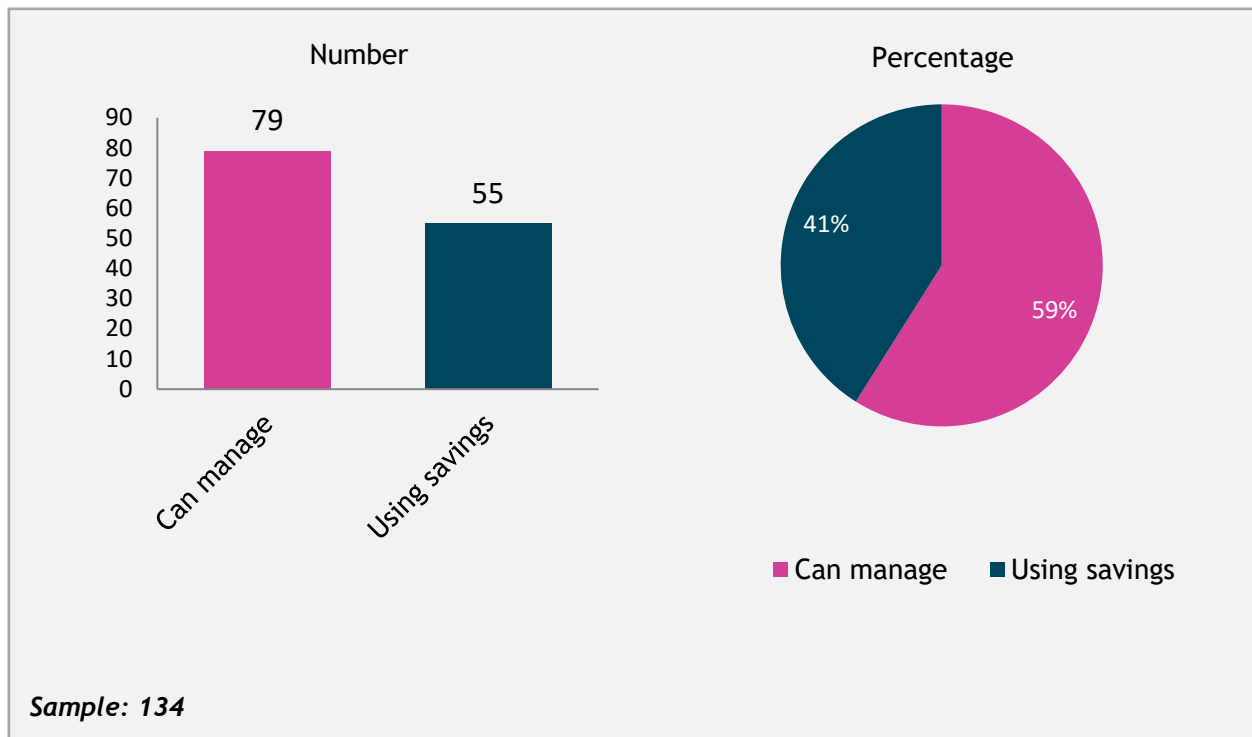
After paying for basics, 43% of respondents have ‘money left over for luxuries’ while a larger number (48%) say they do not.

6.3.1 By Age: Have money left over for luxuries

	% Yes
Aged 50 - 64	62%
Aged 90 or Over	57%
Aged 65 - 74	50%
All Respondents (Baseline)	43%
Aged 75 - 89	34%
Under 50	33%

Respondents of later working age (50 - 64) are twice as likely to have ‘money left over for luxuries’ compared with those aged 75 - 89, or under 50.

6.4 Can you manage on your current income or are you having to use savings or other means to cover all costs?



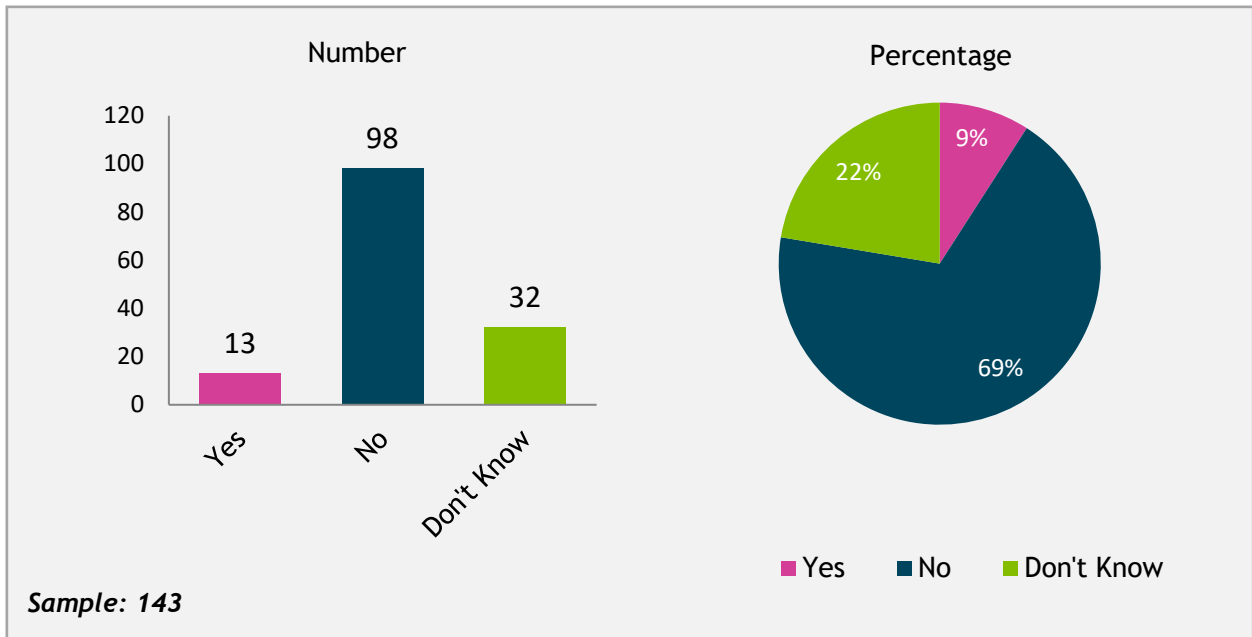
A majority of respondents (59%) feel that their current income is meeting costs, while a significant minority (41%) have had to use savings.

6.4.1 By Age: Having to use savings

	% Yes
Under 50	75%
Aged 65 - 74	43%
All Respondents (Baseline)	41%
Aged 75 - 89	38%
Aged 90 or Over	33%
Age 50 - 64	31%

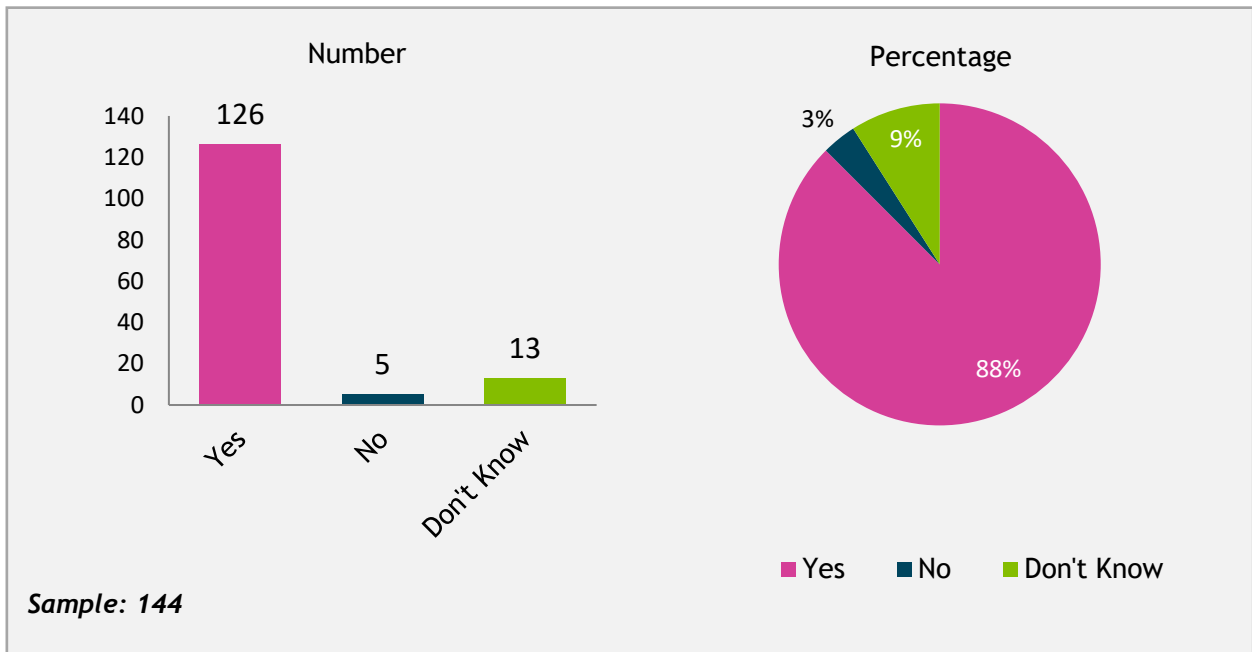
Those aged under 50 are twice as likely to have used savings, compared with others, with recent retirees (aged 65 - 74) also more likely to have done so.

6.5 Do you think the Government has offered enough support to people on low and modest incomes?



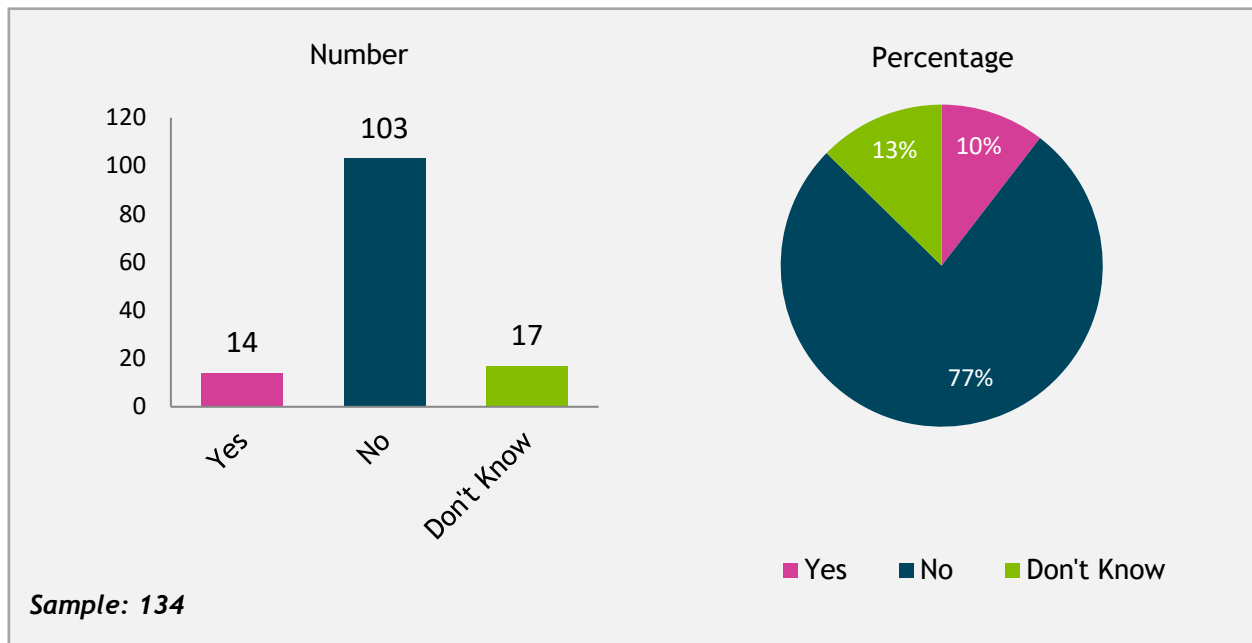
Just a tenth of respondents (9%) feel that Government support for those on low or modest incomes has been adequate.

6.6 Do you think the Government should raise the level of the State Pension and the level of benefits?



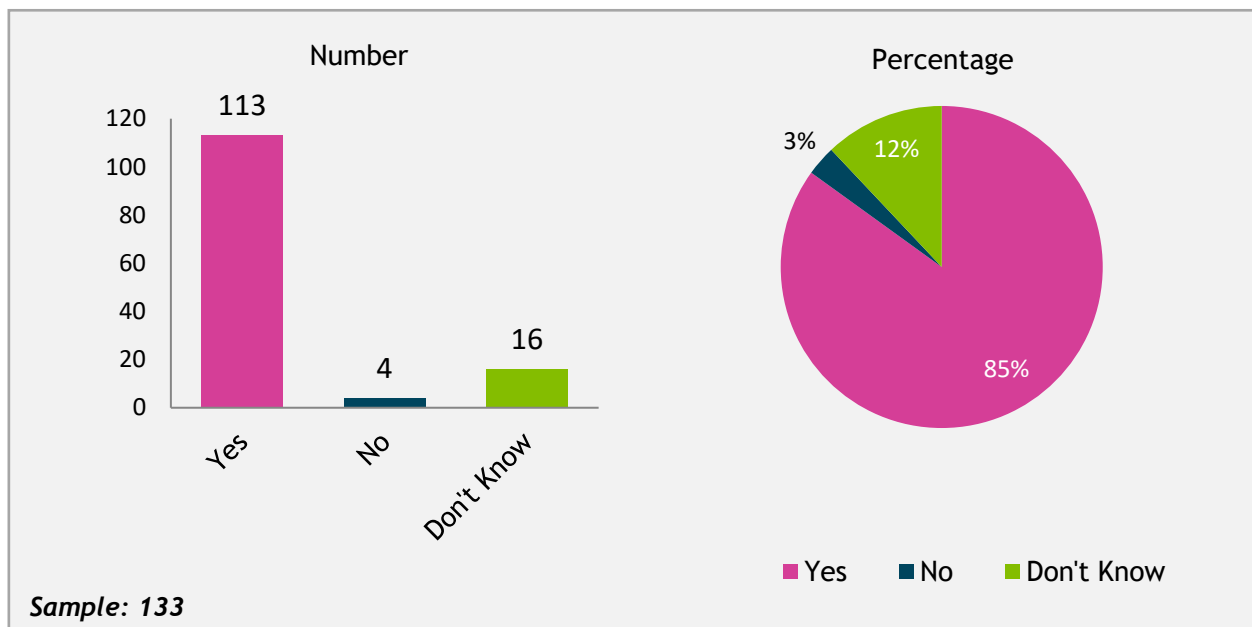
A broad majority (88%) feel that state pensions and benefits should rise.

6.7 Do you think the Government does enough to make people aware of benefits and grants they are entitled to (such as pension credit)?



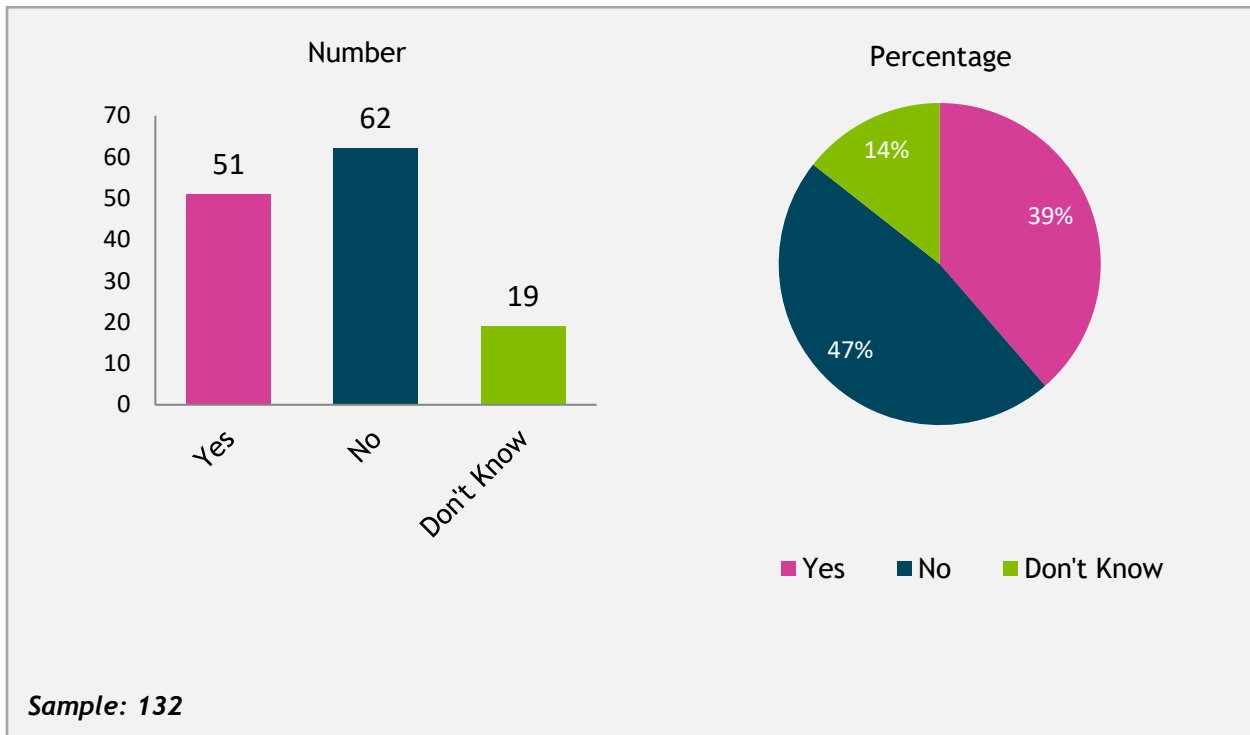
Just a tenth of respondents (10%) feel that the Government does enough to promote entitlement to benefits, such as Pension Credit.

6.8 Do you think the Government should offer more support to improve household energy efficiency (such as grants for insulating lofts etc)?



A broad majority (85%) feel that more support should be offered to improve household energy efficiency, such as loft insulation.

6.9 Is the current economic situation affecting your health in any way, mental or physical?



A significant minority (39%) say that the current economic situation has affected their physical or mental health.

Managing everyday life has become a worry for many, with increasing levels of anxiety and nervousness commonly described. Stress, depression and sleeping difficulties are also reported.

Selected Feedback

“Worrying too much about managing everyday life.”

“Very tense, nervous, anxious and can't relax. Cannot sleep well.”

“Anxiety is increasing.”

“Stress, high blood pressure, depression.”

Key concerns include the ability to pay bills, level of savings, and possibility of falling into debt.

Selected Feedback

“Mentally constantly worrying if I can pay bills.”

“I worry that my savings will not be enough in years to come.”

"I will be stressed as to how can I save or be able to manage myself to have healthy food and not worry going into debt."

Worries reach beyond personal circumstances - with concerns for extended family and wider society expressed.

Selected Feedback

"Worried whether extended family members will be able to cope."

"it is very hard to stay positive when so many people are being affected."

Cutting back on heating, and in cases regular bathing and healthier food is having a negative impact on both physical and mental health.

We hear that some conditions require a warm environment, so not everybody is able to reduce heating costs.

Selected Feedback

"Mainly being colder than usual."

"I'm not very happy with sitting waiting until I'm freezing before using my utilities."

"I am less mobile because of feeling cold."

"This current economic situation, is effecting my physical and mental health. This is because I am not able to afford the food I need for a good balanced diet, and I cannot afford a holiday and go to social events as before."

"Getting ill more often as can't keep warm or clean. Really worried about money."

"I have health issues which require me to be in a warm environment especially in winter months."

Those with caring responsibilities are particularly worried about increasing costs. It is also commented that after contacting services for help, levels of information and response have been poor. One person notes that policy makers are 'indifferent' to the needs of poorer residents.

Selected Feedback

"I worry how I will cope financially if anything I need for daily living increases yet again. My younger daughter gets Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and she spends a lot of time here with me using my washing machine and eating here too."

*“Worried - trying to get our questions answered, nobody getting back to you.”
Not feeling well. Feeling anxious.”*

“It’s frightening that our leaders are so indifferent to the poor. The rich can look after themselves, the poor can’t.”

6.10 How do you feel about the Government suspending the triple lock this year?

On news that the triple lock may be suspended, some respondents are sympathetic of the wider economic climate, while a much larger majority comment on feeling disappointed, let down, and also frustrated with the delays in making a decision.

There is widespread anxiety that inflation will outstrip income and with prices high - now is ‘not the time to cut back’. One person suggests that means-testing could safeguard those most in need.

The long term implications of cutbacks are also underscored.

Selected Feedback

“Had to be done!”

“They may not have any choice.”

“I feel disgusted and betrayed.”

“Horried. Inflation escalating but state pensions staying the same.”

“Anxious about the little future which is left for us. Can we survive on an ever decreasing pension?”

“Very disappointing as this is just the right time to increase support - not trim it.”

“Frustrated, confused. Wish they would make a decision & stay with it.”

“I think the most important thing is to increase universal credit and widen the eligibility for free school meals.”

“Disappointing but understandable in some ways but there should be something more for the lower income people. Should it be means tested? Those on lower incomes could then benefit from triple lock and a hybrid model for others.”

“Aware of long term implications of failing to uprate benefits and pensions.”

6.11 Any other comments?

Finally we asked people for any other comments.

We detect themes on food and household energy, information including the ‘digital divide’, support and social equity and fairness.

Selected Feedback

Food and Household Energy

“Milk has gone up exponentially. Should be subsidised for the poorest.”

“I make sure to economise when I boil the kettle in the morning. I save some in a flask.”

“Cut down on cigarettes and drink if a person is struggling. However, the cost of food is ridiculous.”

“Government should finance foodbanks.”

“Regarding smart meters - my supplier has told me that I cannot have one installed. Waiting for ombudsman to take the case.”

“I have been fortunate so far in that my gas and electricity prices are in contract prices until early next year, then I will probably have a shock!”

Information

“Getting information out to the elderly who are on their own and unable to mix socially.”

“So many people need help and need to be made aware of what is available.”

“People online can find information on benefits and grants, but otherwise it might be difficult to obtain such details. I have already taken an offer of free loft insulation from an energy company.”

“The elderly need more help with the internet taking over. They should have people made known to them who could help them.”

“Please use terms the elderly can understand, none of the modern jargon - triple lock!!?”

Support

“To have someone (like a social worker) to contact us about our needs.”

“Since Covid nothing seems to get resolved, you are left waiting for answers to questions. You ask and leave your name and telephone number and nobody gets back.”

Social Equity

“How long will this current “crisis” be impacting on the elderly on low income/minimal support?”

“A country is always looked upon how it treats its older people, this country treats older people disgracefully.”

“Hope the government will stop penalising the elderly who needed help and have worked hard all their lives.”

“If you don't live in a house that is higher than band D, you don't get any benefits from Redbridge regarding council tax etc. They don't include higher bands as they think you've got enough.”

“Who knows what tomorrow brings?”

“I could do with more money!”

7. Glossary of Terms

PIP

Personal Independence Payments

8. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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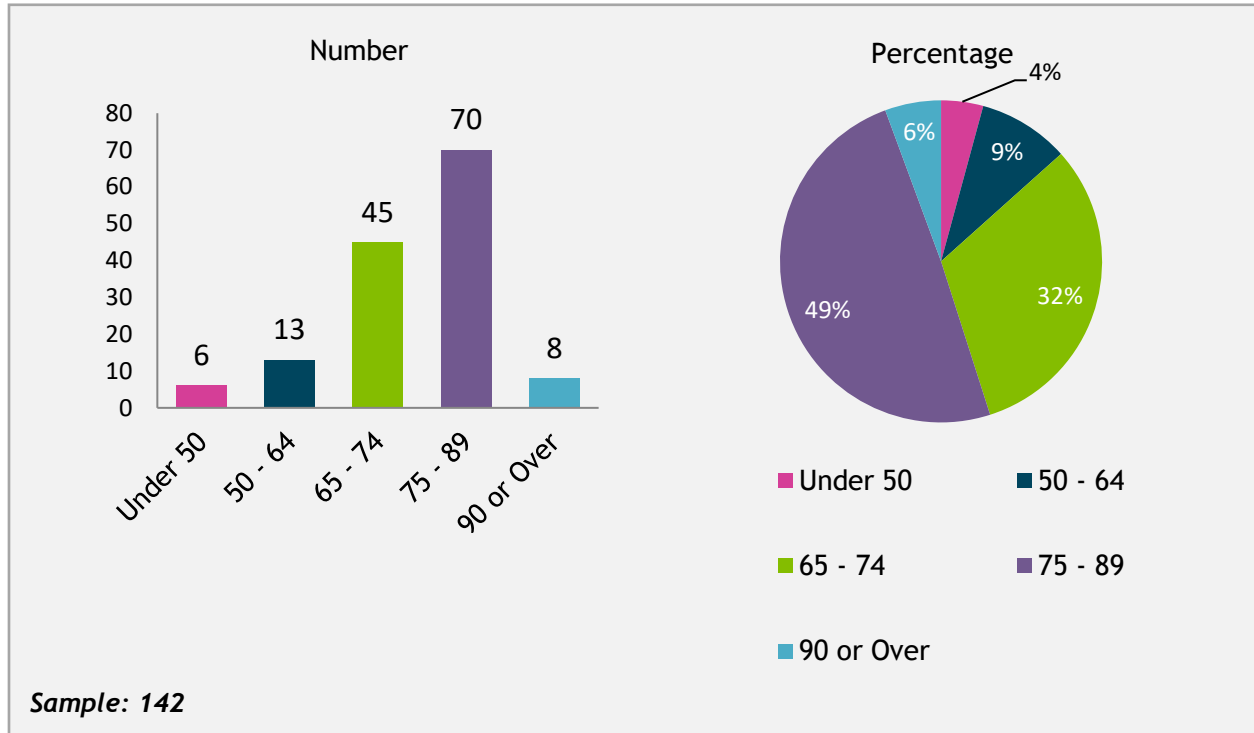
Email: admin@ageukrbh.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1088435

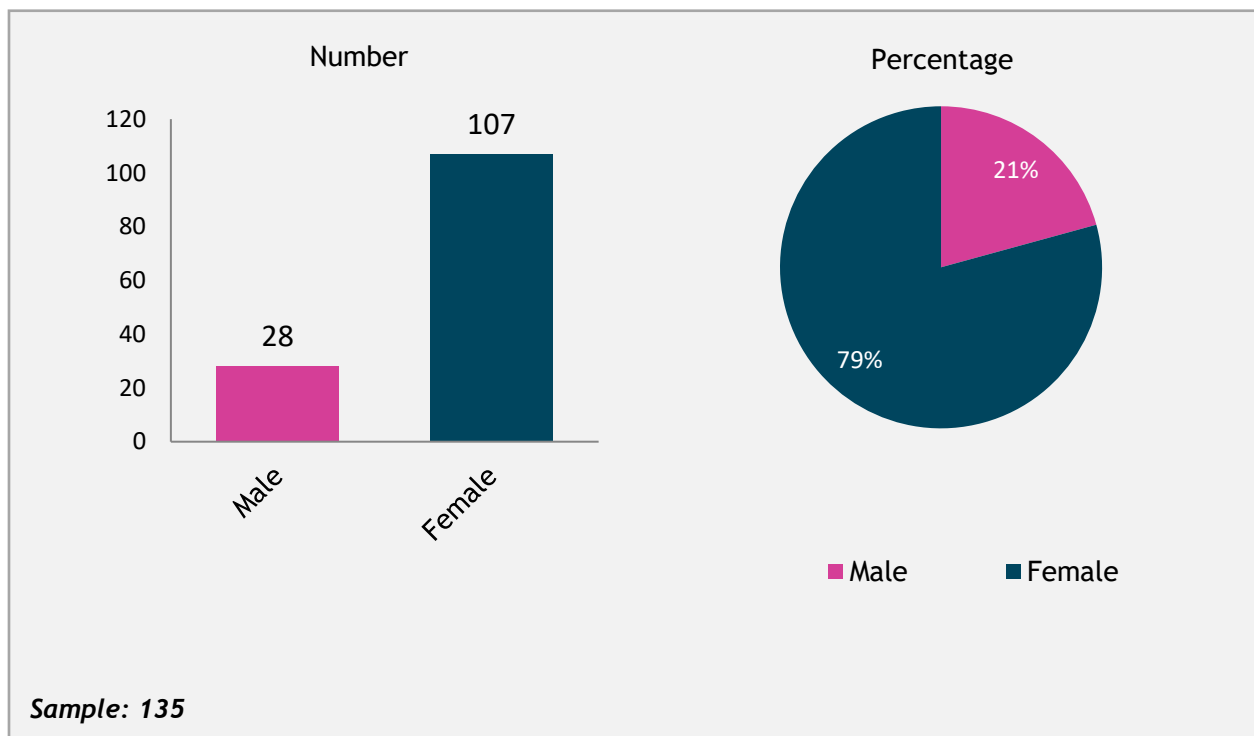
Appendix - Demographics

The demographics of participants are stated as follows:

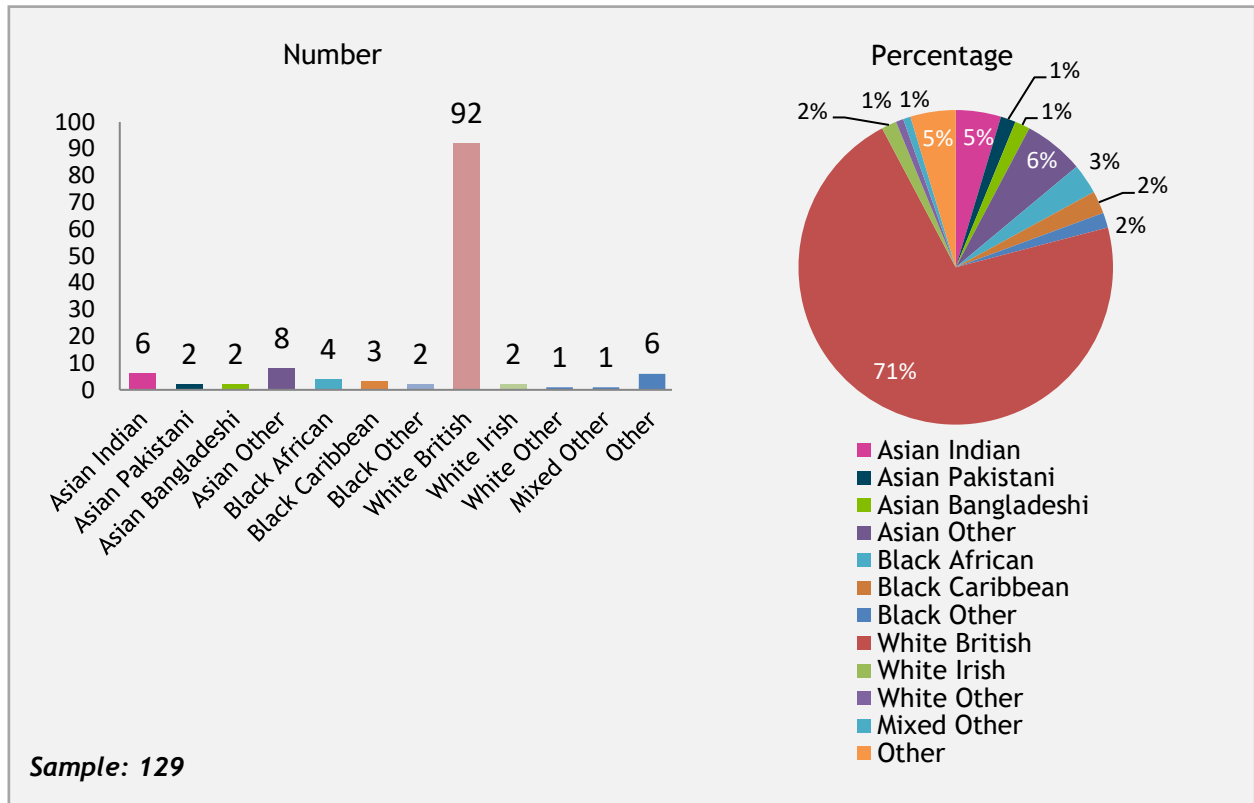
Age



Gender



Ethnicity



“I make sure to economise when I boil the kettle in the morning.

I save some in a flask.”

Local Resident