



# Youth mental health in crisis? Public and generational attitudes in the UK and Australia

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February 2024

# About this survey

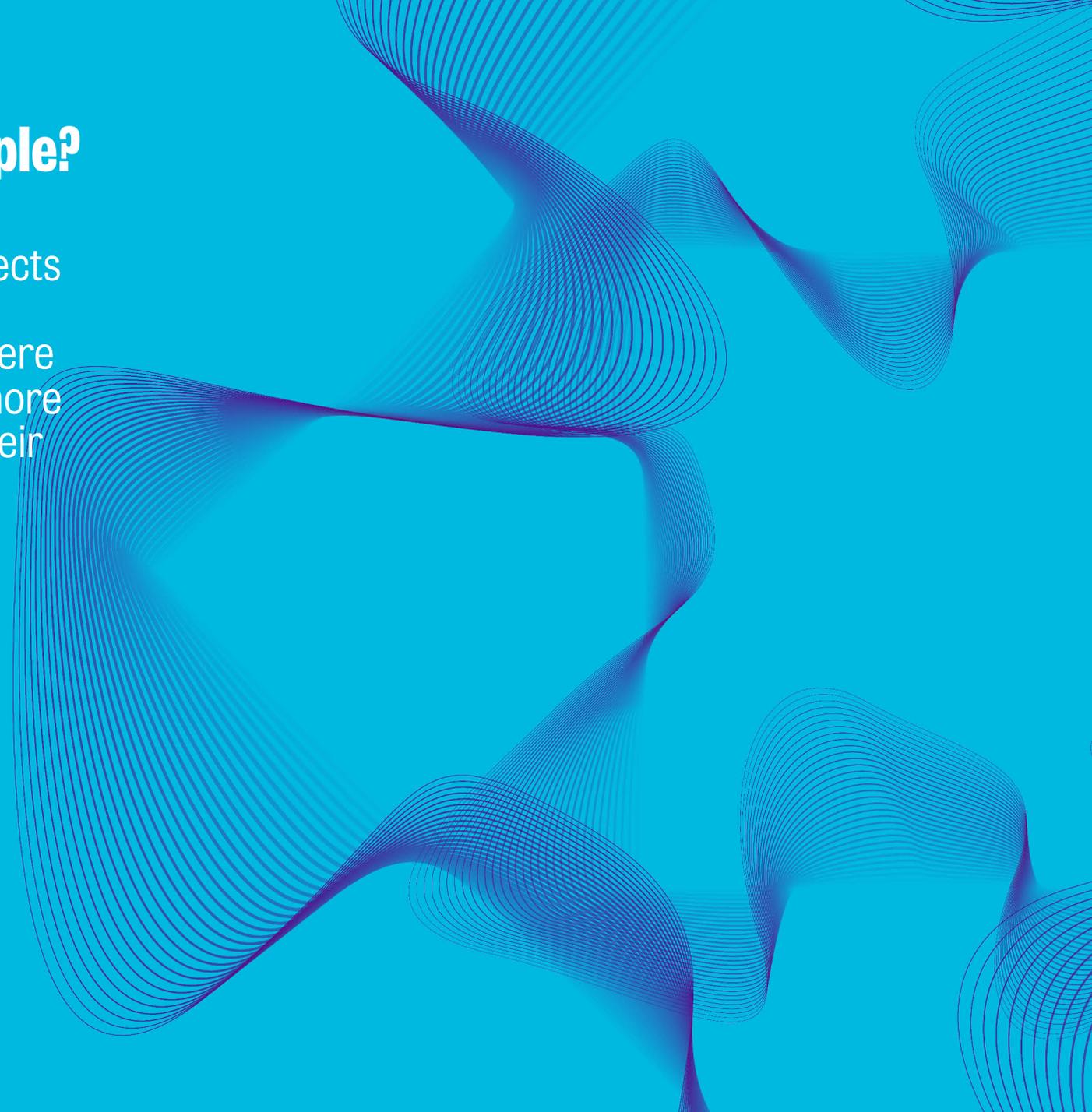
All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,516 adults in the UK aged 18+ and 2,007 adults in Australia aged 16+. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1 and 7 December 2023 in the UK, and between 1 and 12 December 2023 in Australia. Both surveys were carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK and Australian adults (aged 18+ and 16+ respectively).

## Years of birth for generations used in report

<b>Gen Z</b> (1997–2009)	<b>Millennials</b> (1981–1996)	<b>Gen X</b> (1965–1980)	<b>Baby Boomers</b> (1946–1964)
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# Are today's youth worse off than previous generations of young people?

Large proportions of the public feel various aspects of life – including mental health – are worse for young people today compared with when they were young, and young people themselves are even more likely to feel they have it tougher compared to their parents' generation

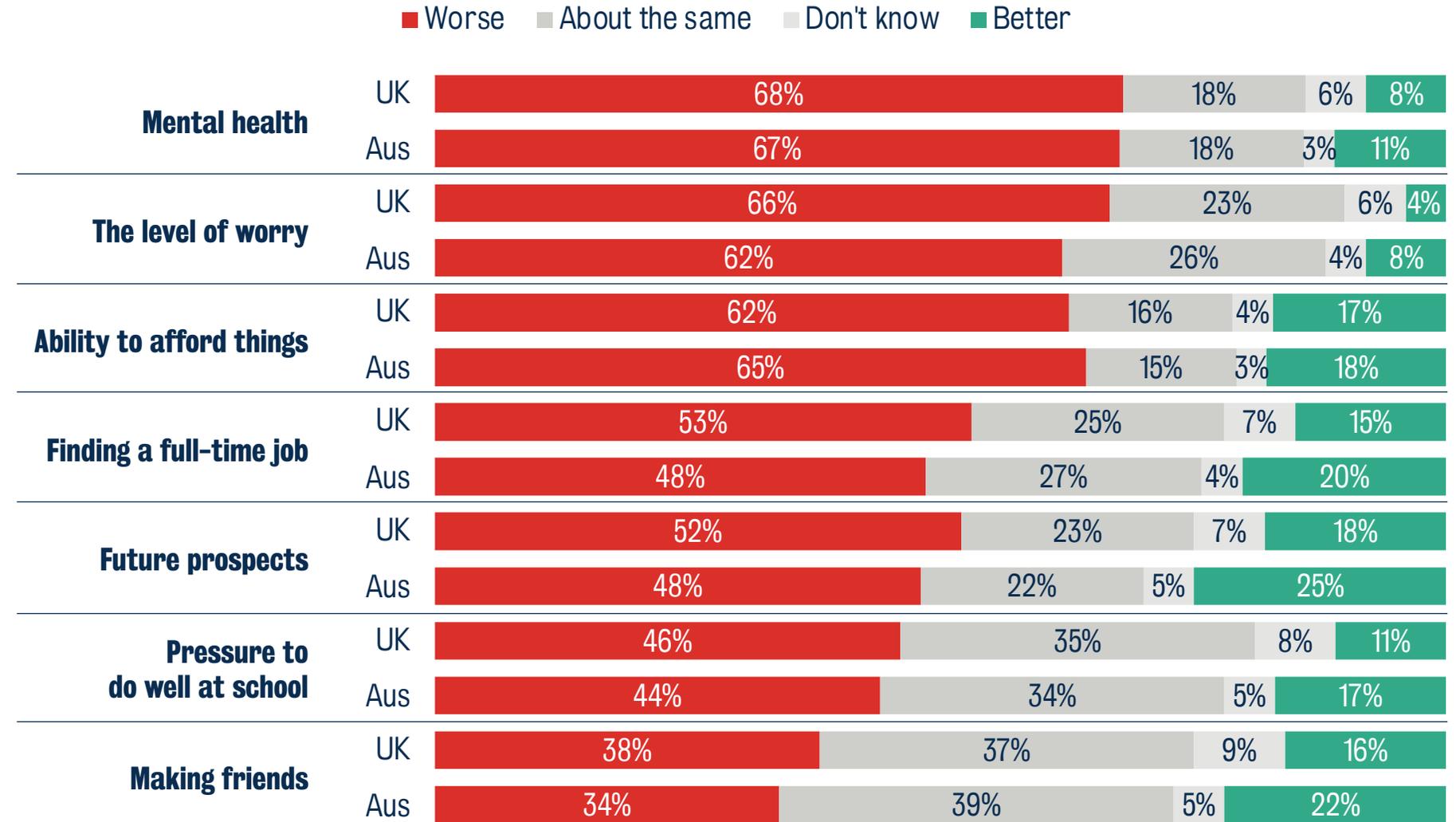


# Those aged 30 and above tend to believe today's youth are worse off in key ways. But views vary by generation...

In both the UK and Australia, those aged 30 and above are most likely to say that, compared with when they were aged 18 to 29, mental health, levels of worry and the ability to afford things have worsened for young people today, with around six in 10 or more feeling this way.

Around half also say young people's ability to find a full-time job and their future prospects are now worse.

Compared with **when you were aged 18–29 years**, do you think each of the following has got better or worse for young people today, or is it about the same? (Asked to those aged 30 and over)

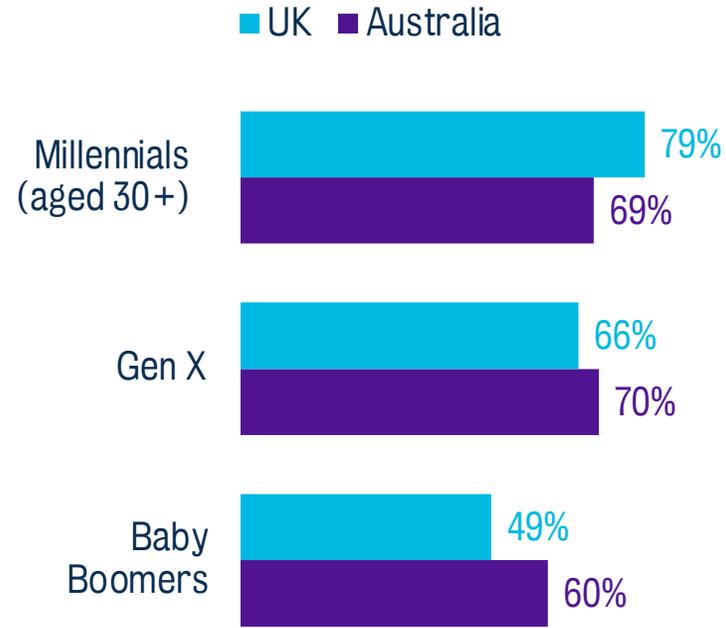


# ...In the UK, Baby Boomers are by far the least likely to say young people's ability to afford things has worsened, yet at the same time in both the UK and Australia it is this older group who are most likely to feel it is tougher for the young to find a full-time job

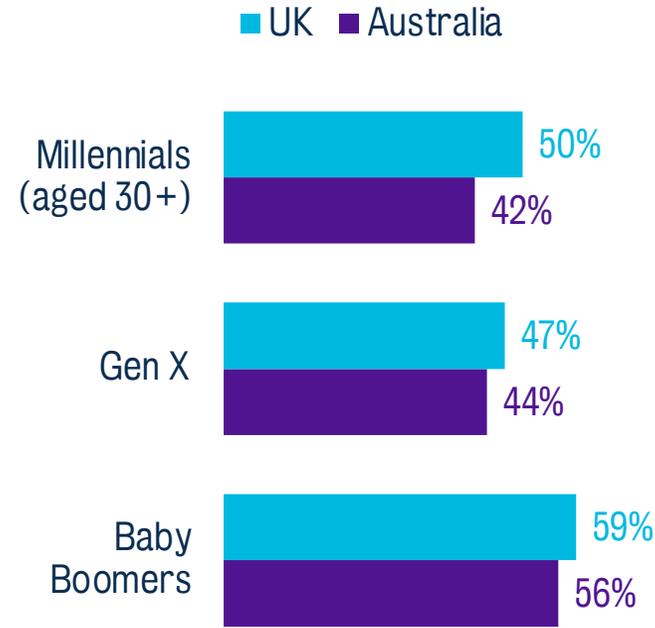
Compared with **when you were aged 18-29 years**, do you think each of the following has got better or worse for young people today, or is it about the same?

% who say \_\_\_\_\_ has got **worse**...

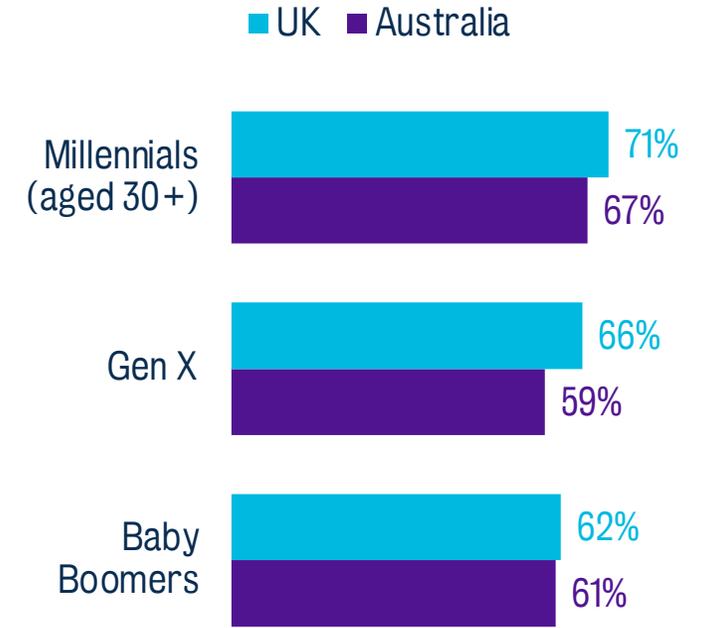
## Ability to afford things



## Finding a full-time job



## The level of worry

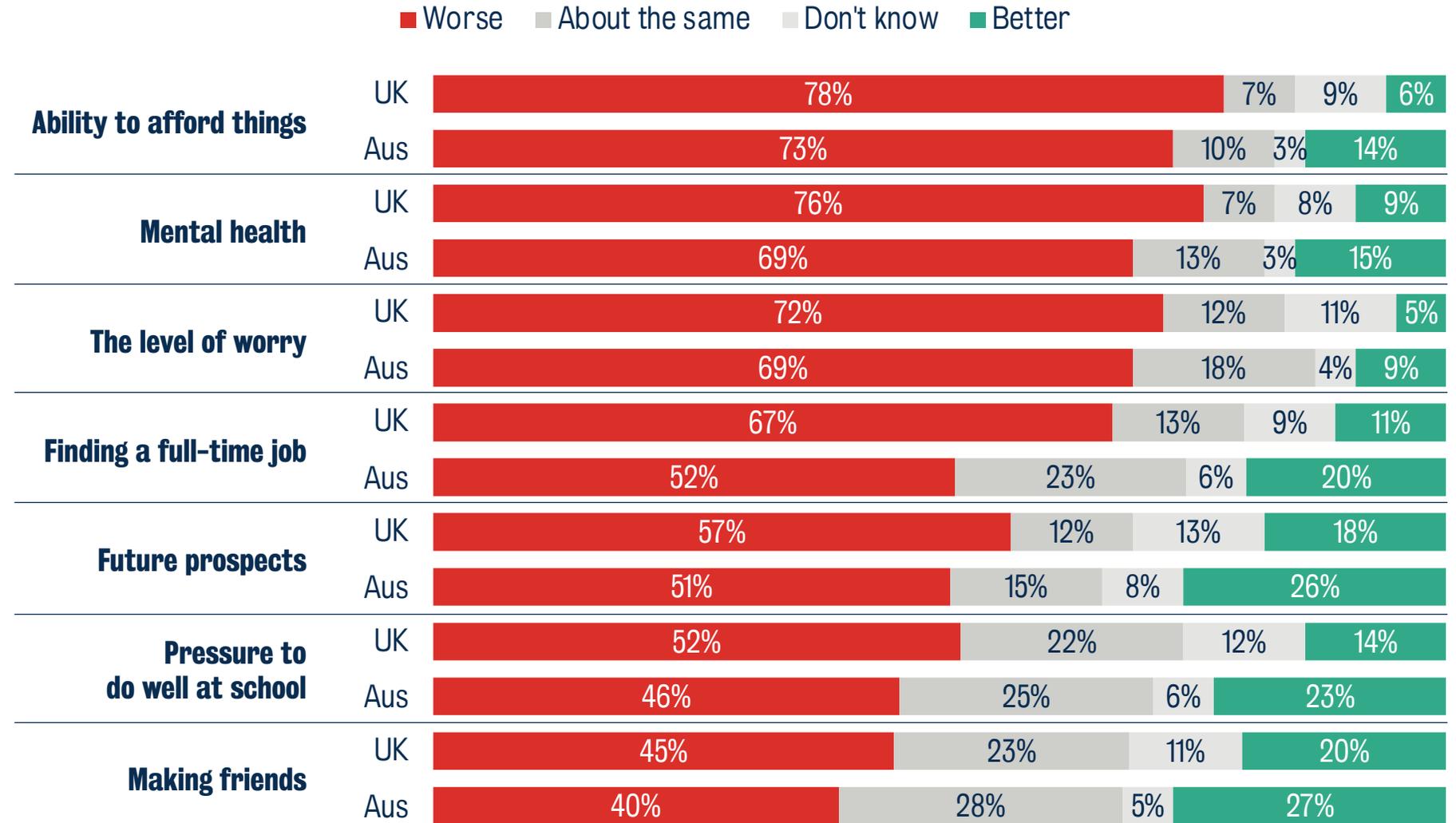


# Young people tend to be more likely to say things have got worse for them

Those aged 29 and under tend to be more likely to see things as worse for young people today compared with when their parents were their age, particularly in the UK.

And while there is little difference in views among UK and Australian youth, one key difference is on how easy it is to find a full-time job, where those in the UK are much more likely to think this has got worse.

Compared with **when your parents were your age**, do you think each of the following has got better or worse for young people today, or is it about the same? (Asked to those aged 29 and under)

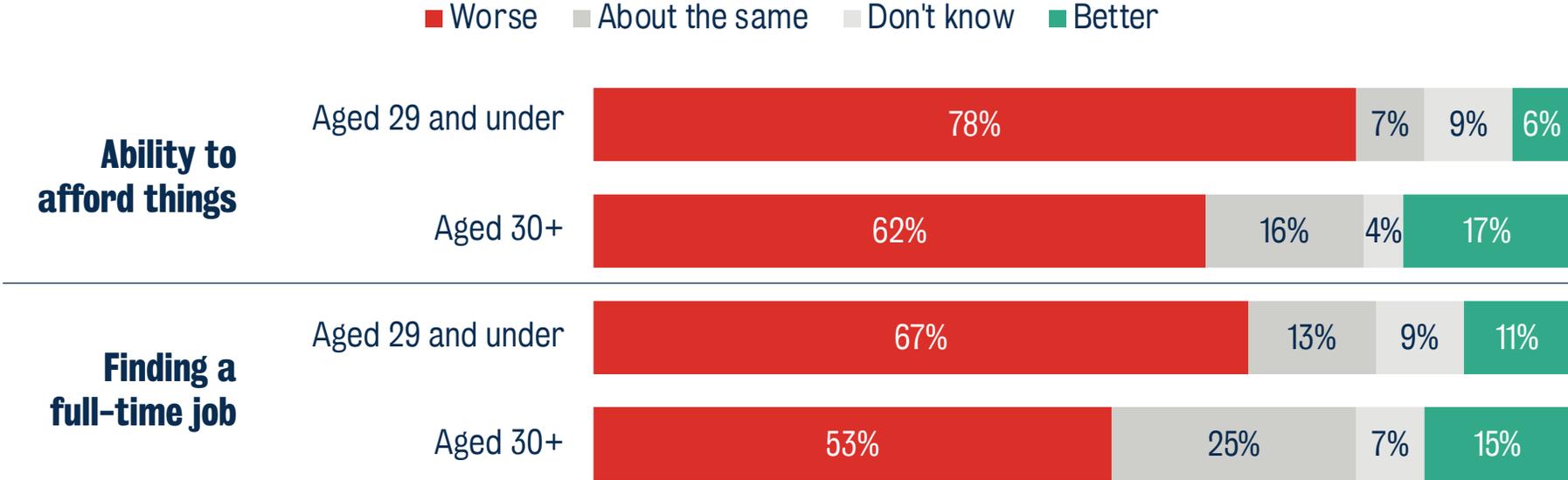


# In the UK, there is a considerable gap in perceptions between younger and older people on the ability to afford things and to find a full-time job

Around six in 10 people in the UK aged 30 and over think young people’s ability to afford things has worsened, but this rises to roughly eight in 10 among young people themselves.

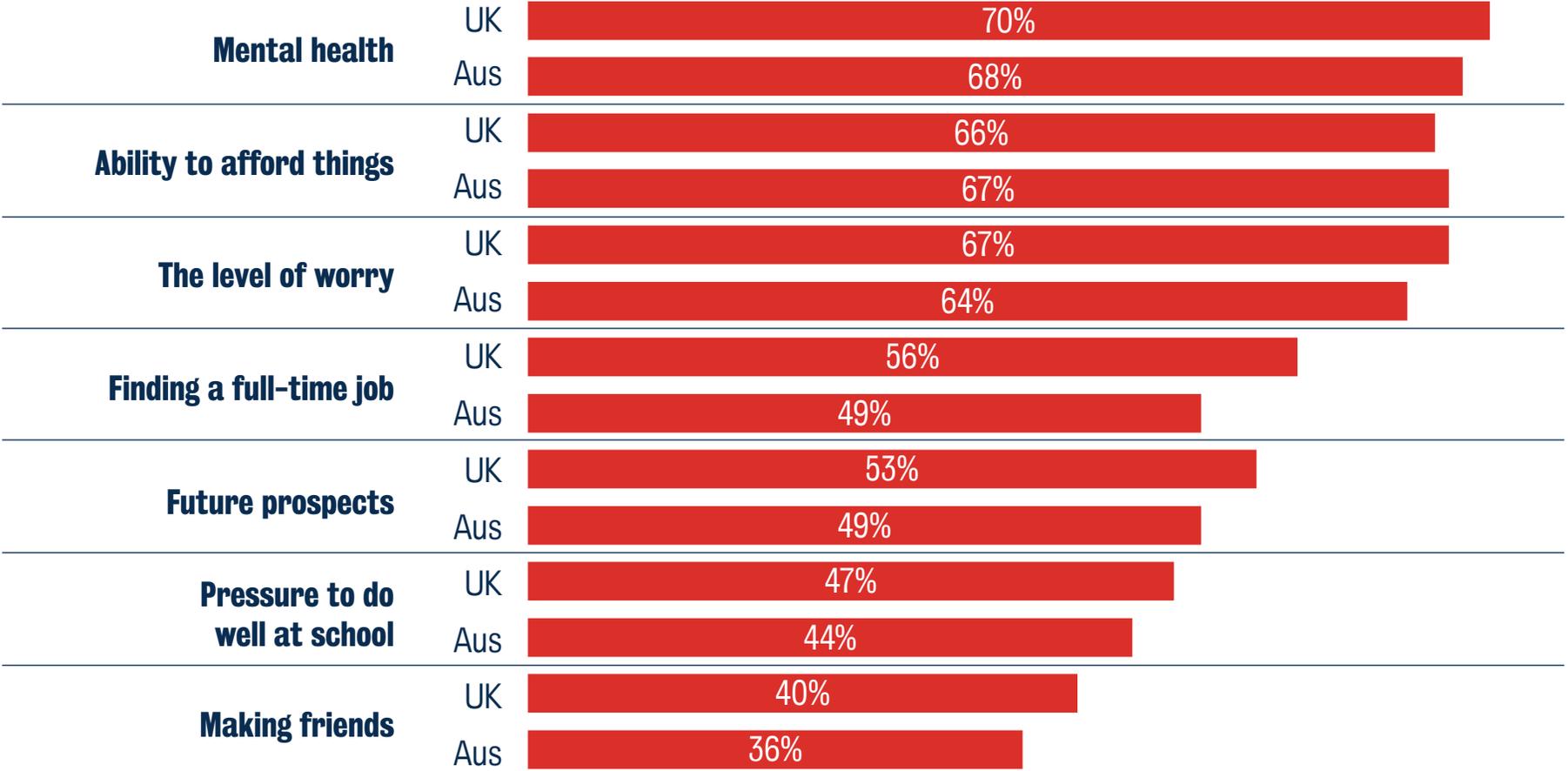
Similarly, while half of older people think finding a full-time job is harder for today’s youth, two-thirds of younger people hold this view.

Compared with **when you were aged 18-29 years/when your parents were your age**, do you think each of the following has got better or worse for young people today, or is it about the same? (UK responses)



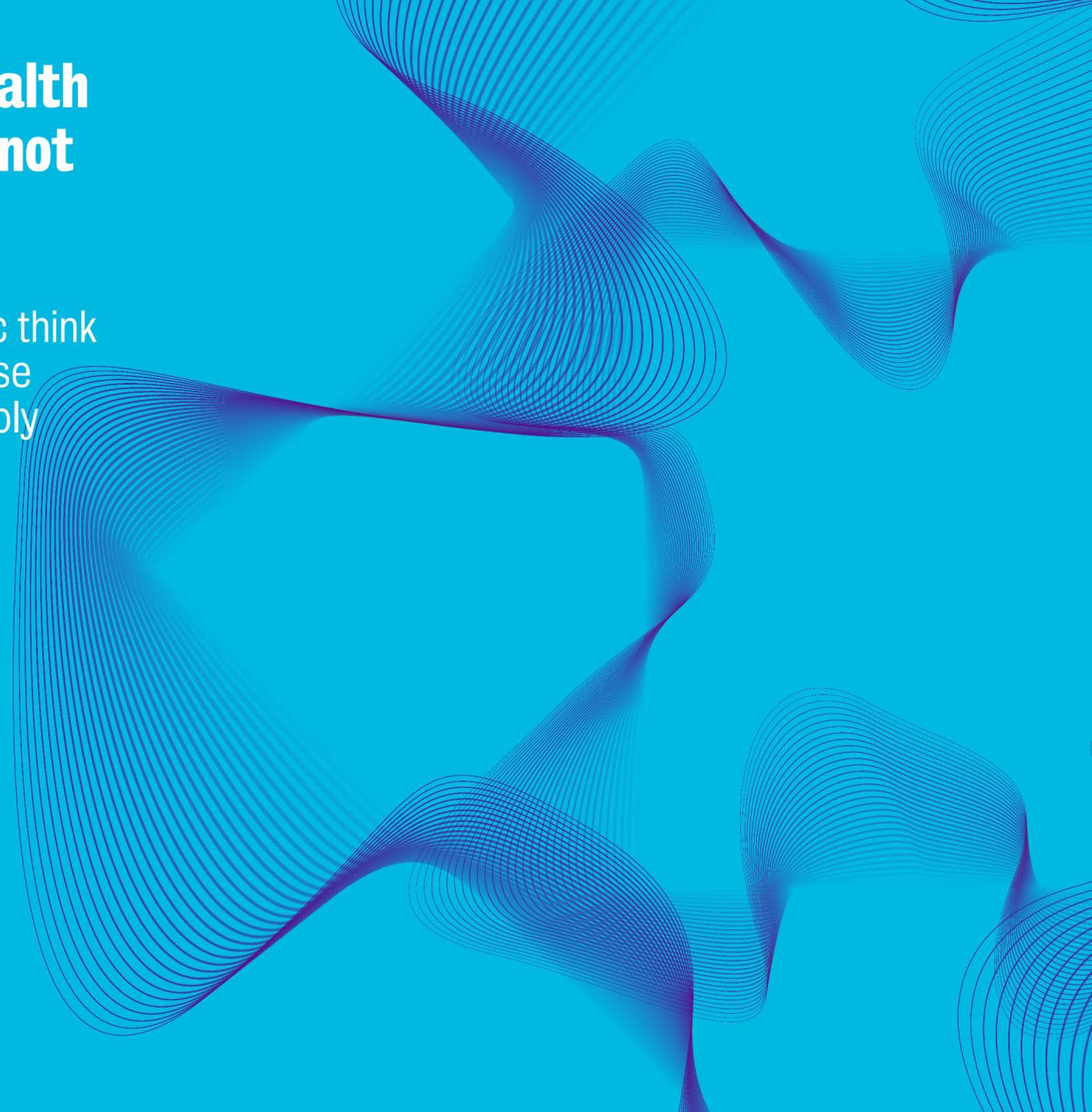
# Combining responses among both younger and older people shows large proportions of the UK and Australian public as a whole think today's youth have it tougher in a number of ways

Compared with **when you were aged 18-29 years/when your parents were your age**, do you think each of the following has got better or worse for young people today, or is it about the same? (% who say worse)



# Most people think youth mental health problems have risen – but they're not convinced it's a “real” increase

Nearly two-thirds of the UK and Australian public think youth mental health problems are either no worse than they were in the past or are increasing simply because today's young people are less resilient



# Research suggests that reports of youth mental health problems in the UK and Australia have increased in recent years, and a majority of the public in both countries believe this is the case

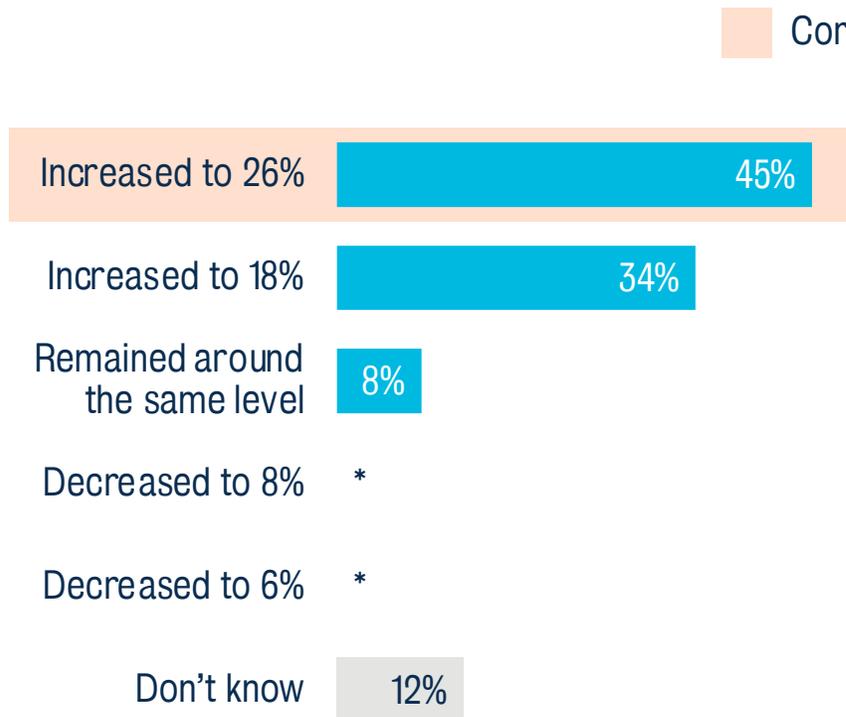
In the UK, the public are most likely to believe the share of people aged 17 to 19 with a probable mental disorder increased from 10% to 26% between 2017 and 2022 – which is in line with official analysis of survey data.

In Australia, research indicates that the proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds with mental disorders has risen by 50% in recent years. Around a third of the Australian public think this is the case, but slightly more believe such disorders have risen less – by only 25%.

## UK

In 2017, 10% of people aged 17-19 in the UK had a probable mental disorder. Which of the following do you think is true:

By 2022, this had...

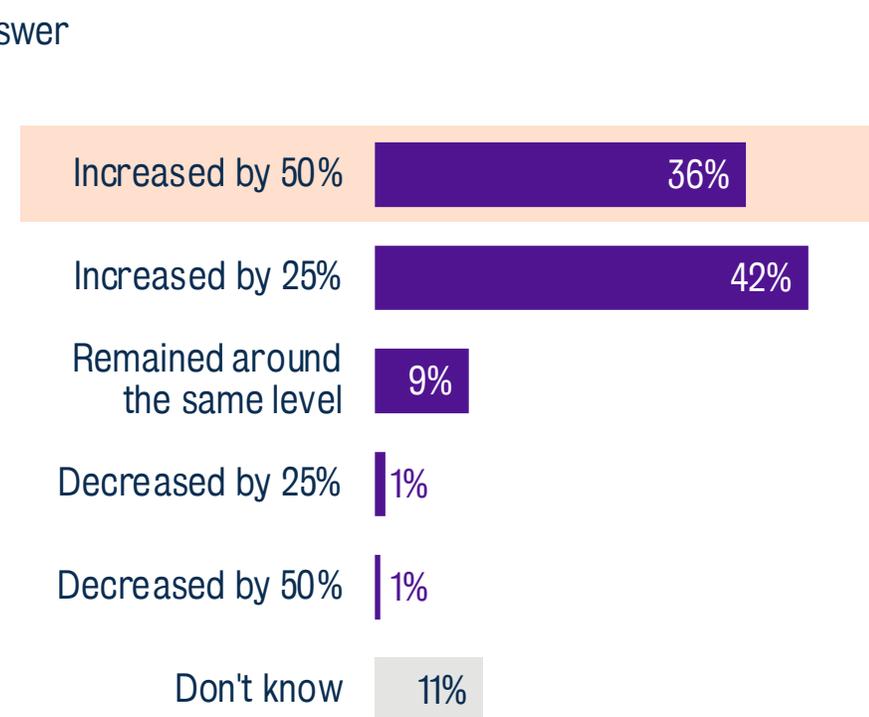


Source for UK figure  
Source for Australia figure

## Australia

Which of the following do you think is correct:

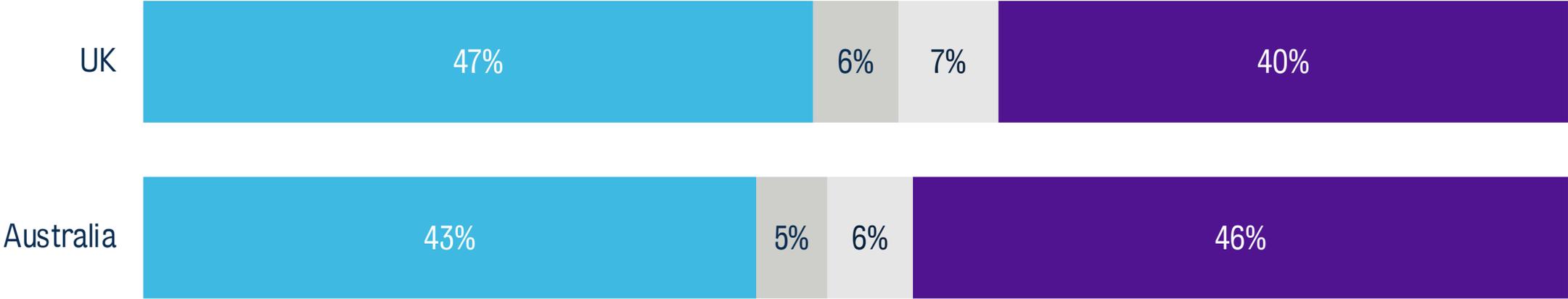
Between 2007 and 2021, the number of 16- to 24-year-old Australians with mental disorders...



# But almost half think the increase is because mental health issues are more likely to be identified now

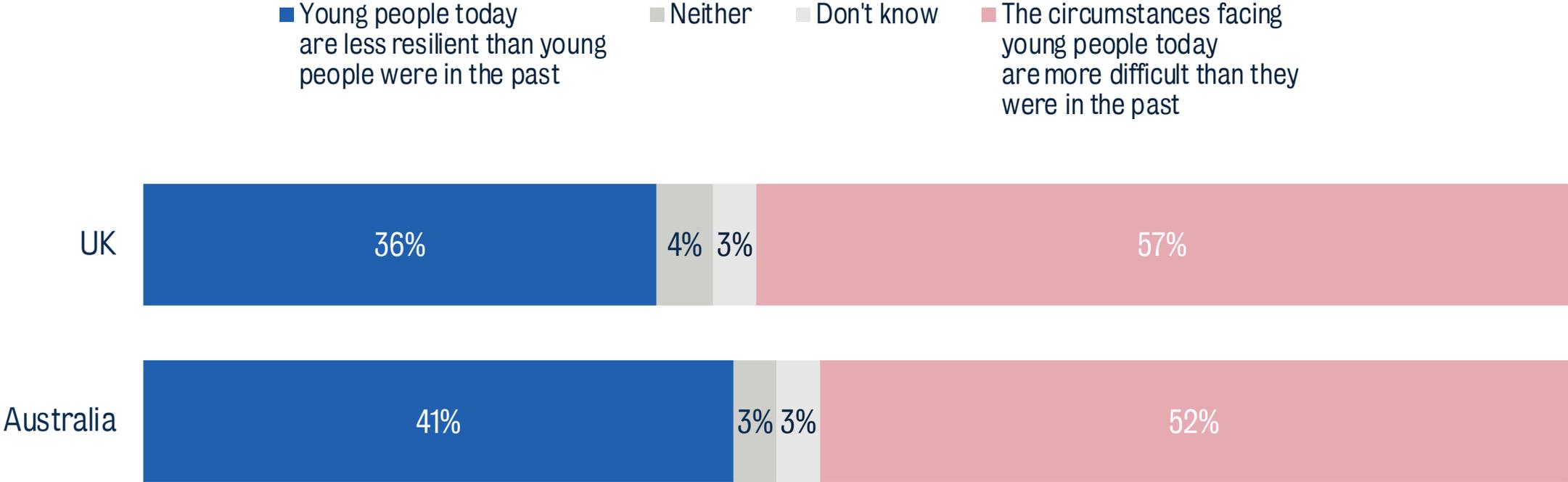
When thinking about the changes in mental health problems among young people, which of the following, if either, is closest to your view...?

- Mental health problems were just as common among young people in the past, they just weren't identified as mental health problems back then
- Neither
- Don't know
- There has been a real increase in the proportion of young people with mental health problems today – this is a new trend



# Among those who think there has been a real increase in youth mental health problems, around a third or more think it's because young people are less resilient now – though most put this down to tougher circumstances

Which of the following, if either, is closest to your view on why there has been an increase in mental health problems among young people?  
(Asked to those who say there has been a real increase)



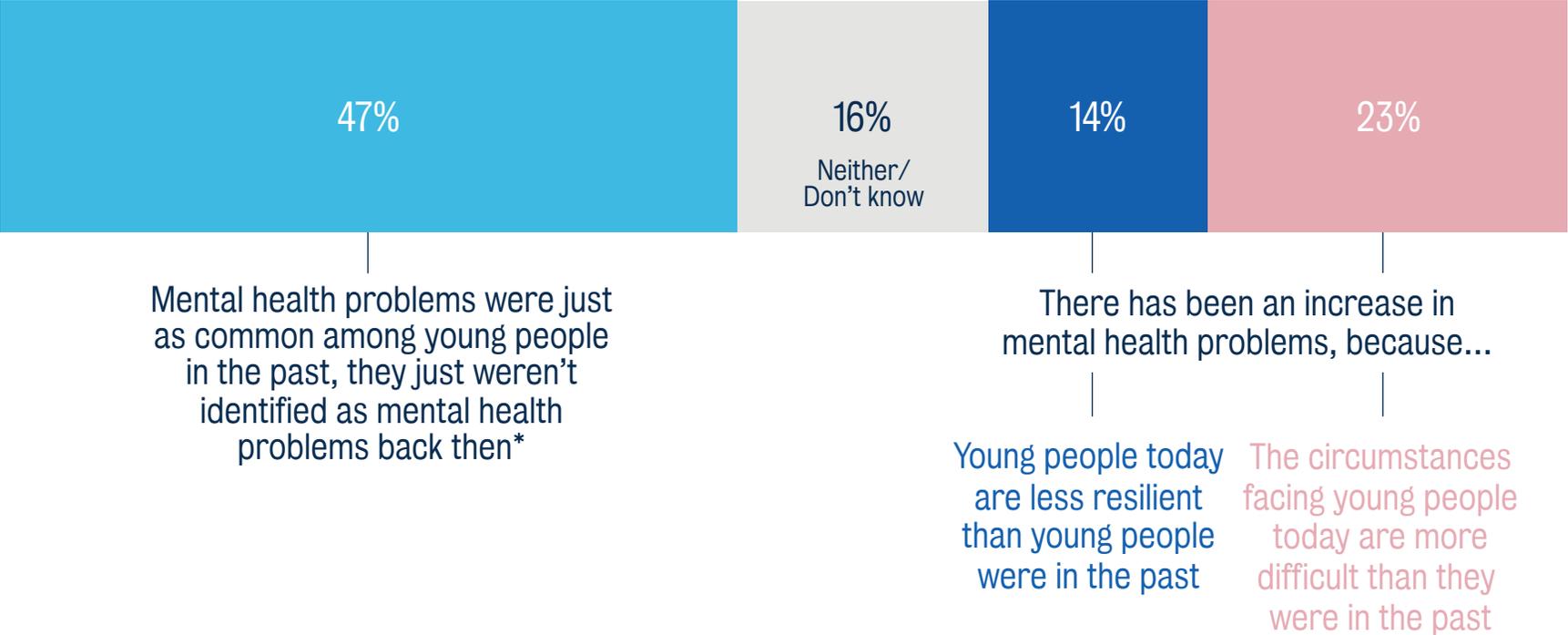
# Overall, three in five people in the UK think youth mental health problems are either no worse than they were in the past or are increasing simply because today's youth are less resilient

By looking across two questions on whether increased youth mental health problems are a new development, and if so, why, we can get an idea of what the whole population thinks of this trend and its cause.

47% of people in the UK believe mental health problems were just as common among young people in the past, they just weren't identified as mental health problems back then, and a further 14% think the increase is real but that young people today are less resilient.

This means that 61% overall are sceptical that worsening social conditions have affected youth mental health, compared with 23% who believe the circumstances facing young people today are genuinely more difficult.

Which of the following, if either, is closest to your view on why there has been an increase in mental health problems among young people? (Asked to those who say there has been a real increase in the UK)



\*In response to separate question: "When thinking about the changes in mental health problems among young people, which of the following, if either, is closest to your view...?"

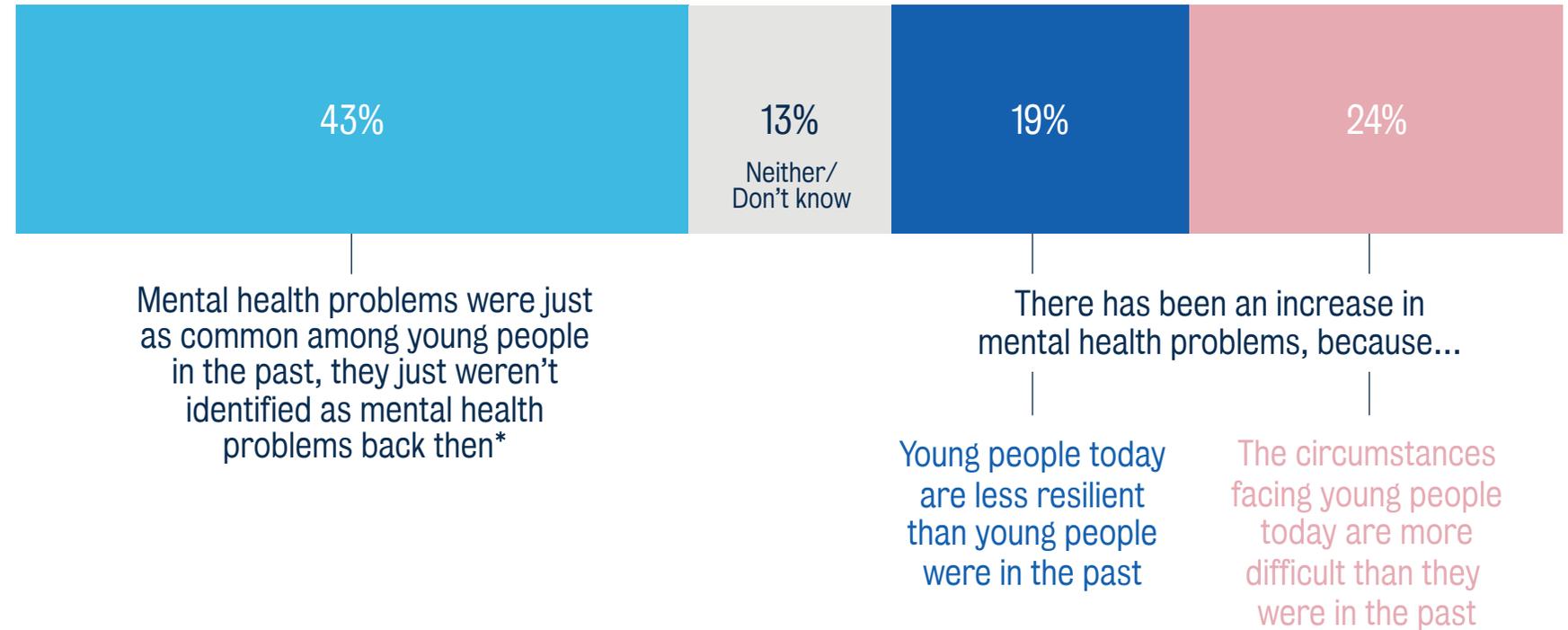
Base: 2,453 UK adults aged 18+ who selected a reason why youth mental health problems have increased (1-7 Dec 2023).  
 Figures rebased as a proportion of population as a whole

# And it's a similar story in Australia, where close to two in three also think either that the increase is due to mental health issues just being better identified now or to lower resilience among today's youth

43% of people in Australia believe mental health problems were just as common among young people in the past, while another 19% think the increase is real but has happened because young people today are less resilient.

Hence 62% overall take issue with the view that tougher circumstances facing young people may have negatively impacted their mental health.

Which of the following, if either, is closest to your view on why there has been an increase in mental health problems among young people? (Asked to those who say there has been a real increase in Australia)

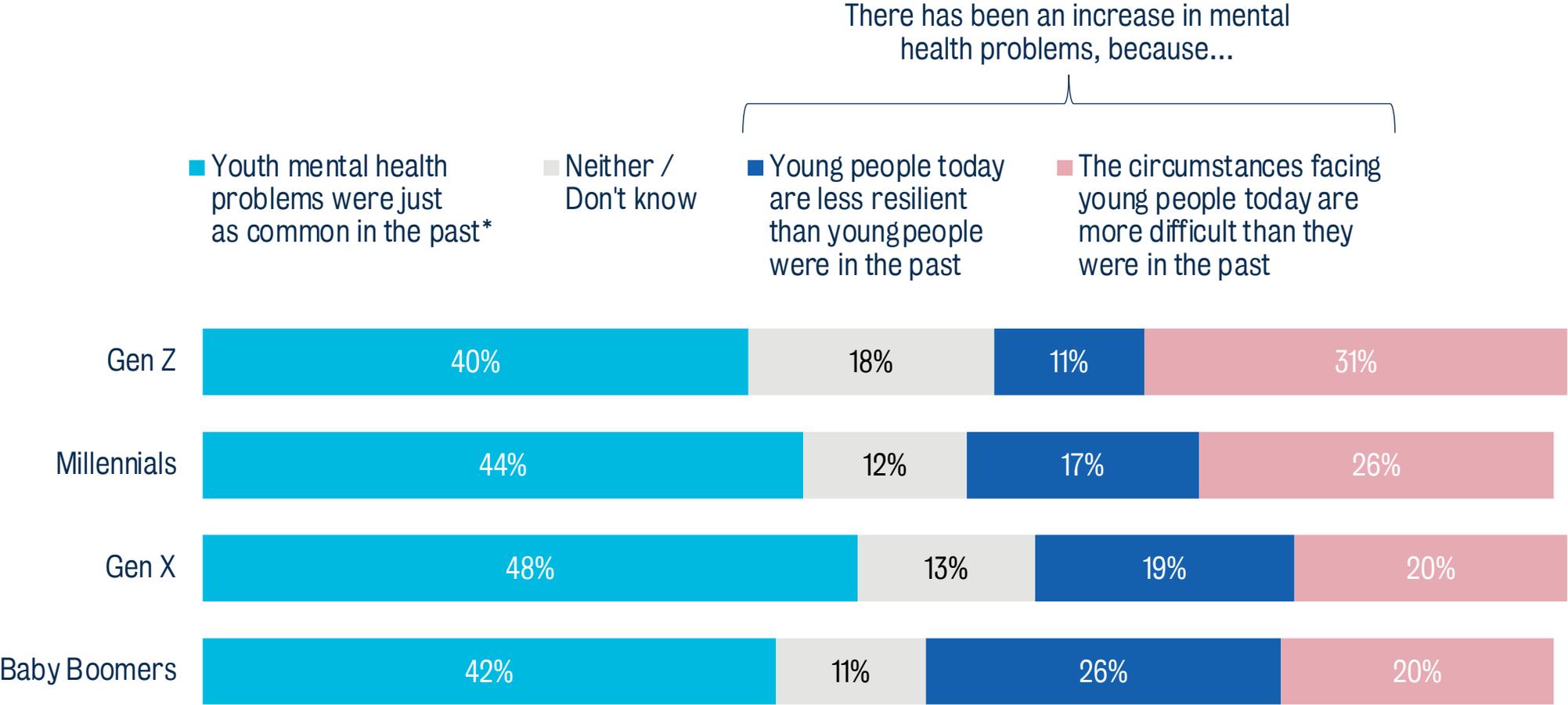


\*In response to separate question: "When thinking about the changes in mental health problems among young people, which of the following, if either, is closest to your view...?"

Base: 2,007 Australian adults aged 16+ (1-12 Dec 2023)

# In Australia, Gen Z are most likely to say tougher circumstances for young people are behind a rise in mental health problems, while older generations are more sceptical of this explanation

Which of the following, if either, is closest to your view on why there has been an increase in mental health problems among young people?  
(Asked to those who say there has been a real increase in Australia)



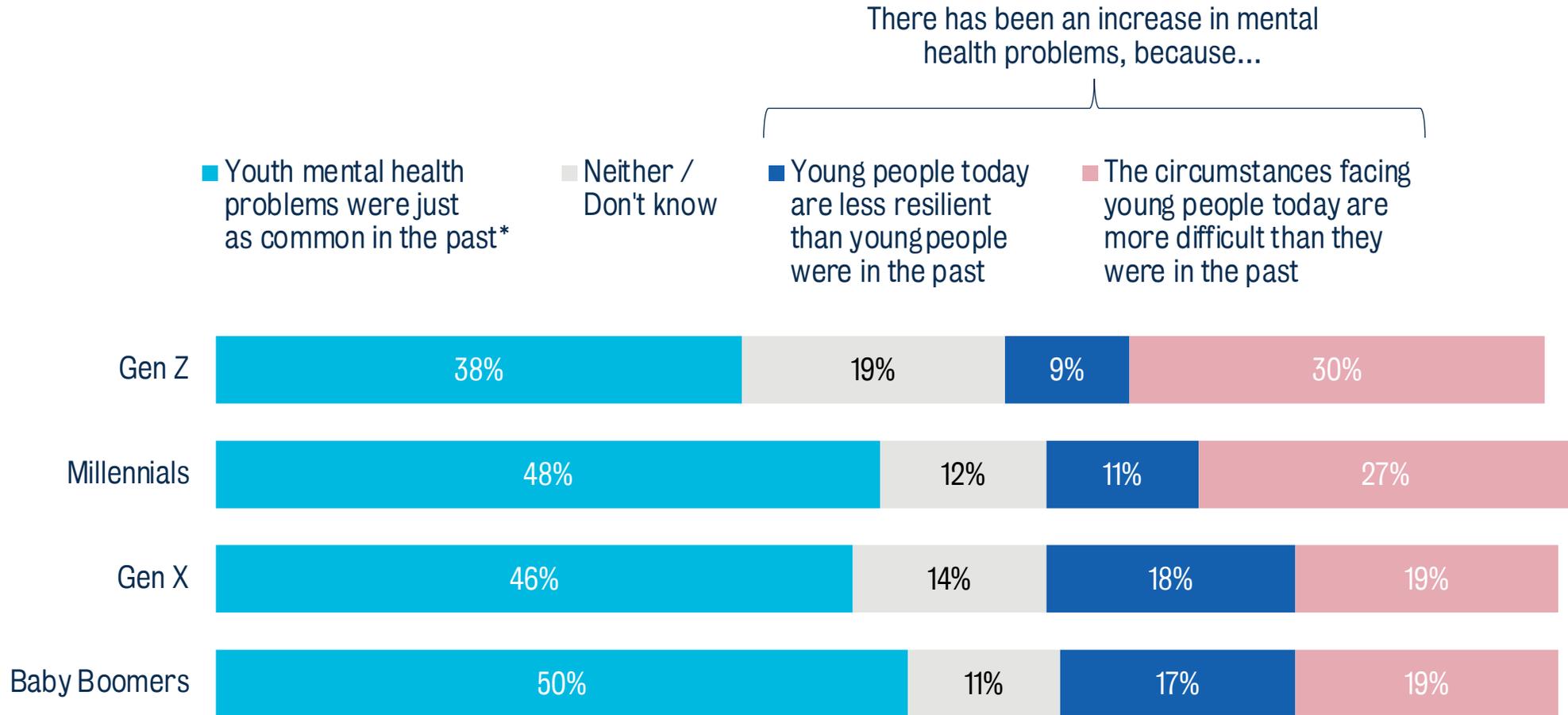
\*In response to separate question: "When thinking about the changes in mental health problems among young people, which of the following, if either, is closest to your view...?"

Base: 2,007 Australian adults aged 16+ (1-12 Dec 2023)

Base: 929 Australian adults aged 16+ who said there has been a real increase in the proportion of young people with mental health problems (1-12 Dec 2023)

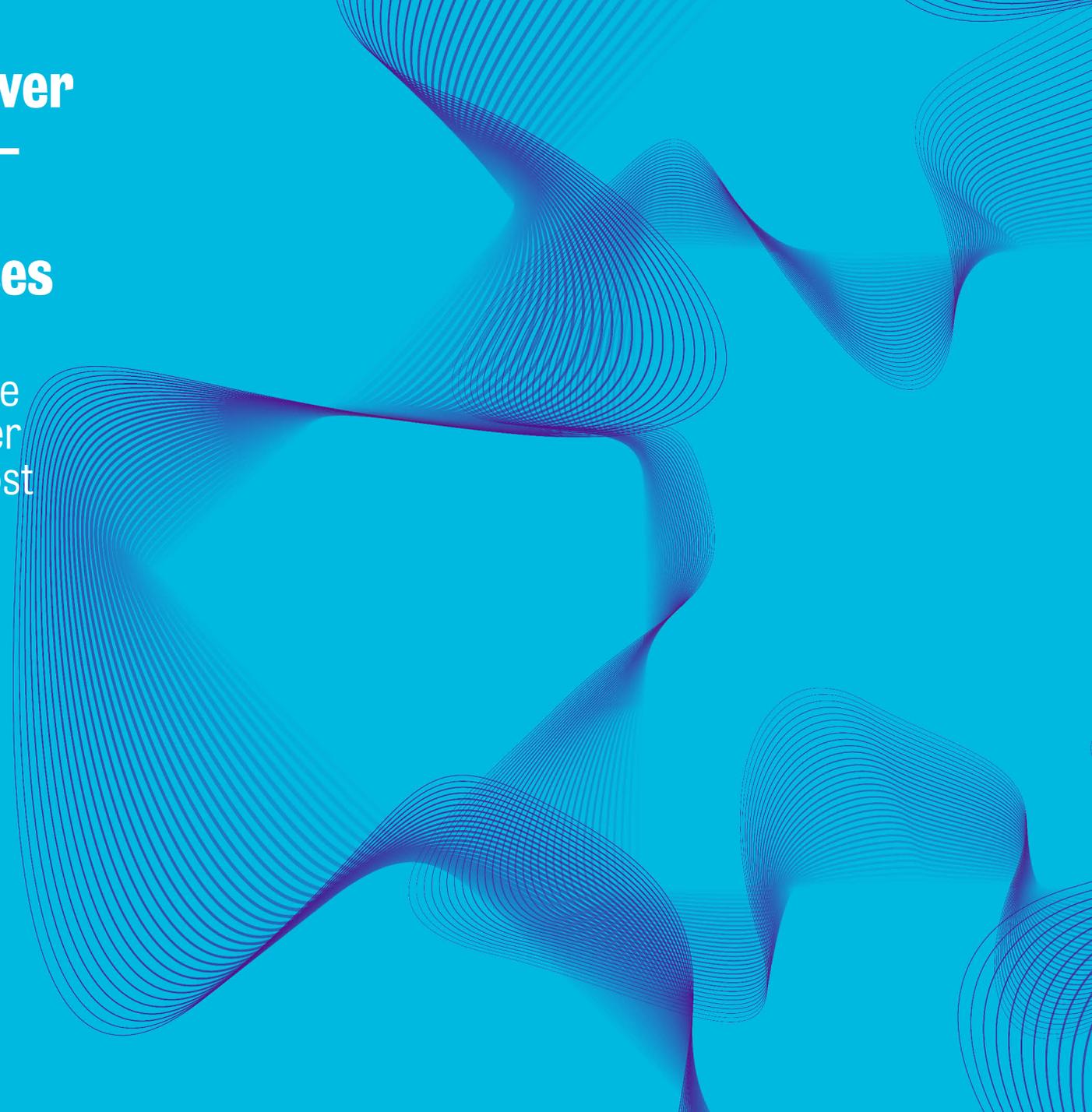
# UK Baby Boomers are more likely than their Australian counterparts to say youth mental health problems were just as common in the past, but younger generations in the two countries have very similar perspectives

Which of the following, if either, is closest to your view on why there has been an increase in mental health problems among young people?  
(Asked to those who say there has been a real increase in the UK)



# **Social media is seen as the key driver of worsening youth mental health – but different generations have different perspectives on the causes**

Gen Z are least likely to blame social media, while Baby Boomers are least likely to think the greater cost of living could be a factor and by far the most likely to blame greater use of drugs and alcohol

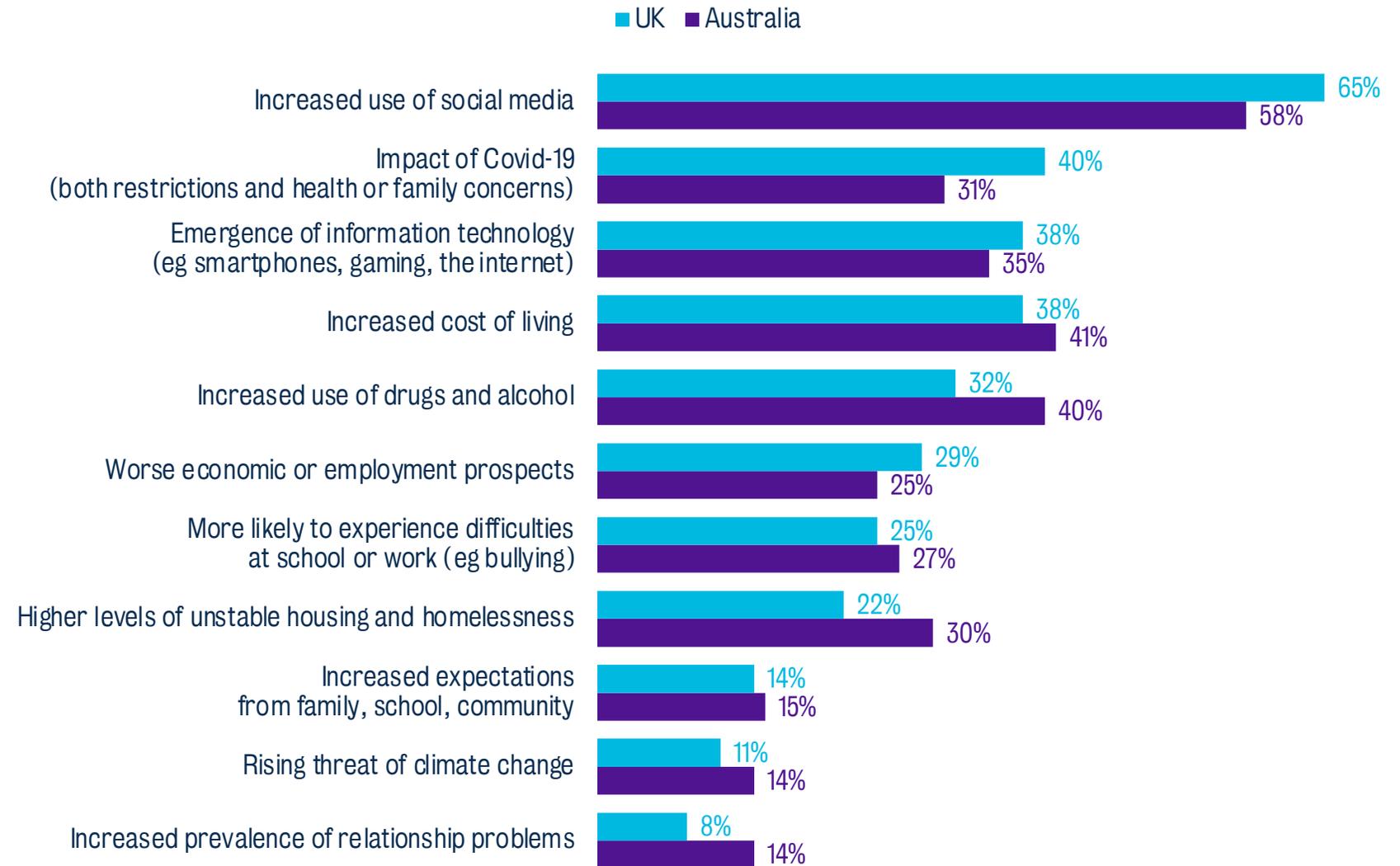


# Social media is seen as the main reason for the apparent increase in youth mental health problems

Increased use of social media is the only potential cause of rising youth mental health problems selected by a majority of both the UK and Australian public, with around six in 10 or more believing this is a key driver.

Other factors – such as the impact of Covid, the emergence of new tech and the increased cost of living – are seen as the next most important, while worse economic or employment prospects rank even lower.

Studies have shown that mental health problems have increased significantly among young people. Which three or four of the following reasons, if any, do you think are the most important in explaining this increase?

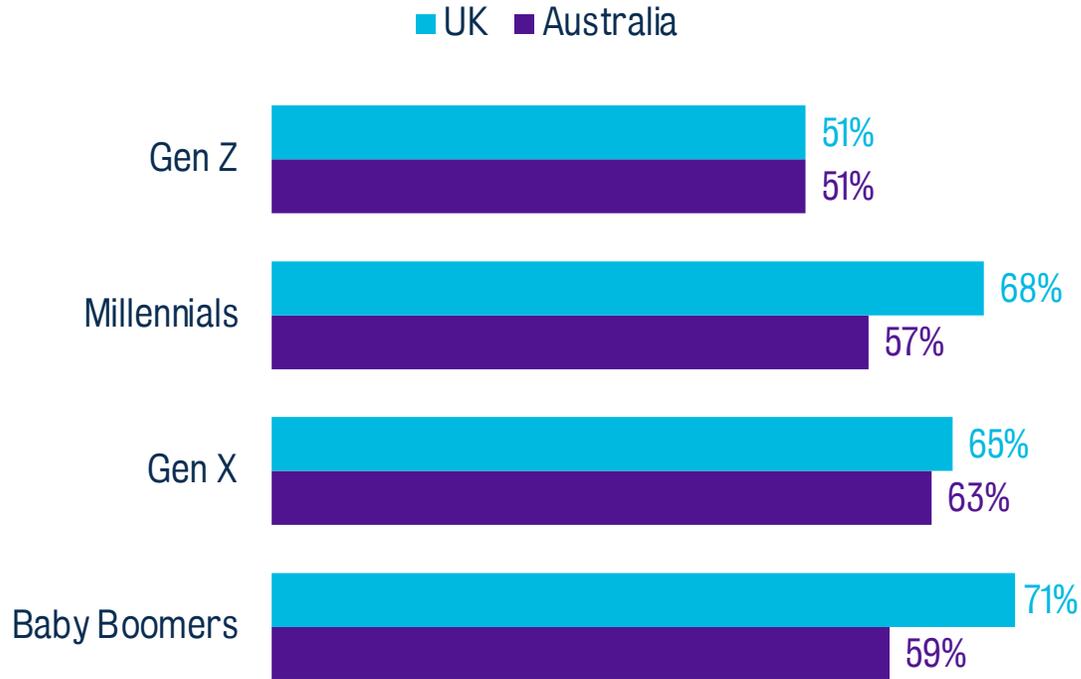


# Gen Z are least likely to say increased use of social media or the emergence of information technology has played a role in rising mental health problems among young people...

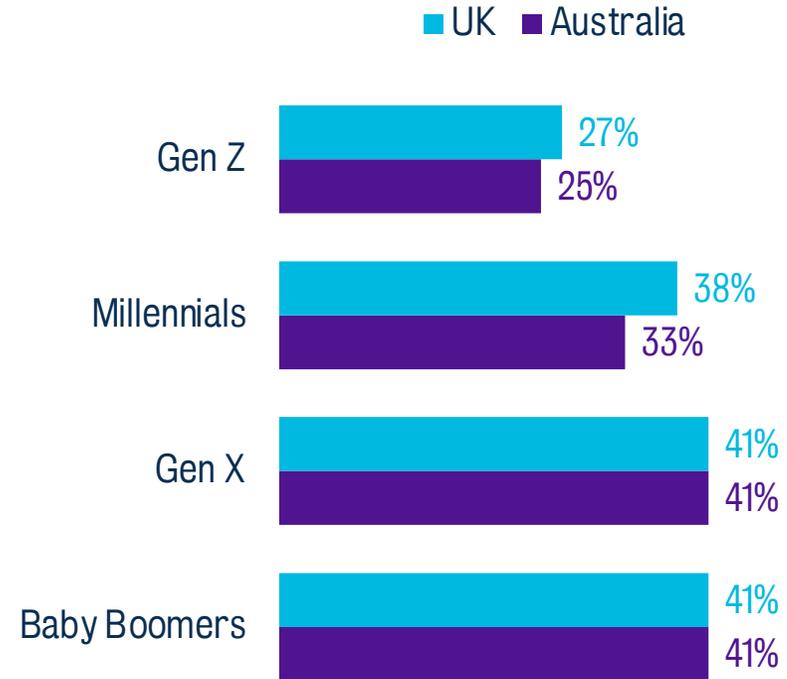
Which three or four of the following reasons, if any, do you think are the most important in explaining this increase [in mental health issues among young people]?

% who say...

## Increased use of social media



## The emergence of information technology (eg smartphones, gaming, the internet)

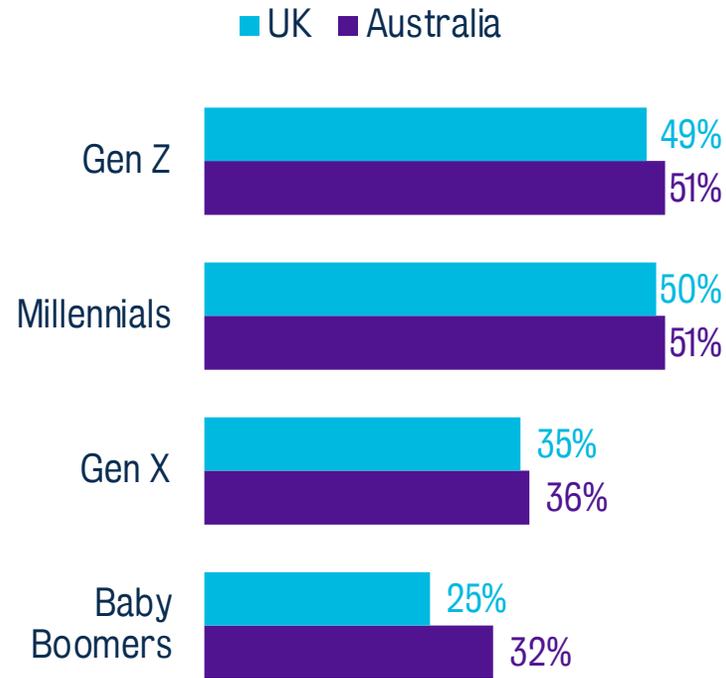


# ...while Baby Boomers are least likely to think the greater cost of living or worse economic or employment prospects are a factor, and are by far the *most* likely to blame greater use of drugs and alcohol

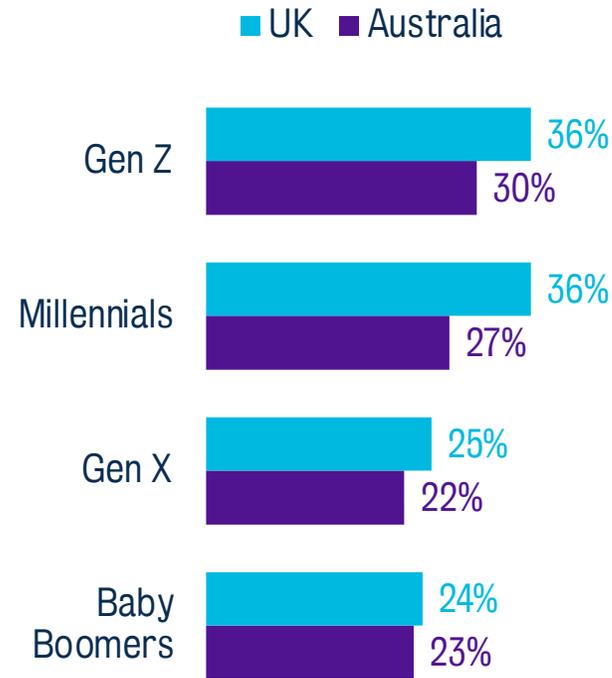
Which three or four of the following reasons, if any, do you think are the most important in explaining this increase [in mental health issues among young people]?

% who say...

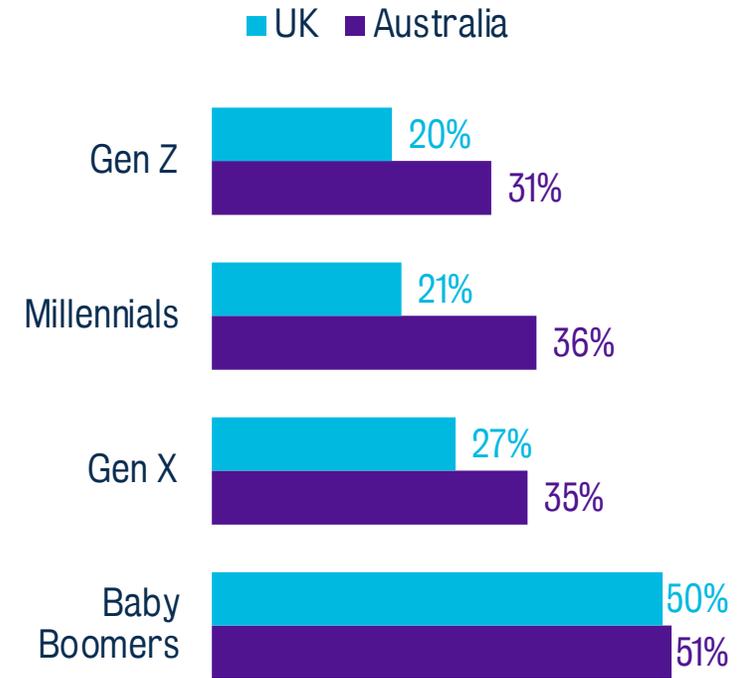
## The increased cost of living



## Worse economic or employment prospects



## Increased use of drugs and alcohol

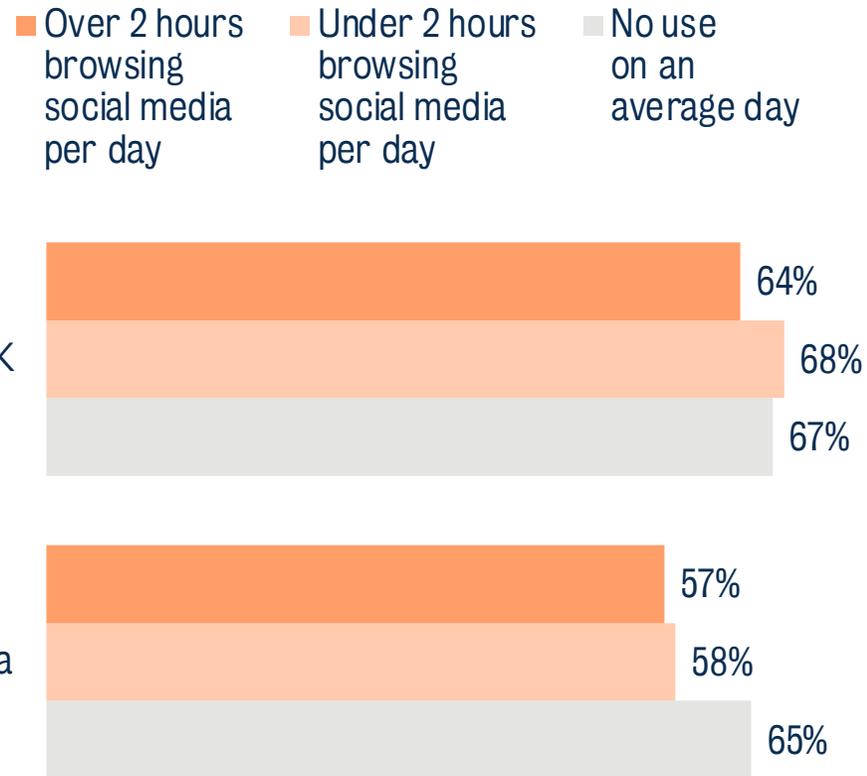


# Social media is seen as harming young people's mental health, including among those who use it frequently

Which three or four of the following reasons, if any, do you think are the most important in explaining this increase [in mental health issues among young people]?

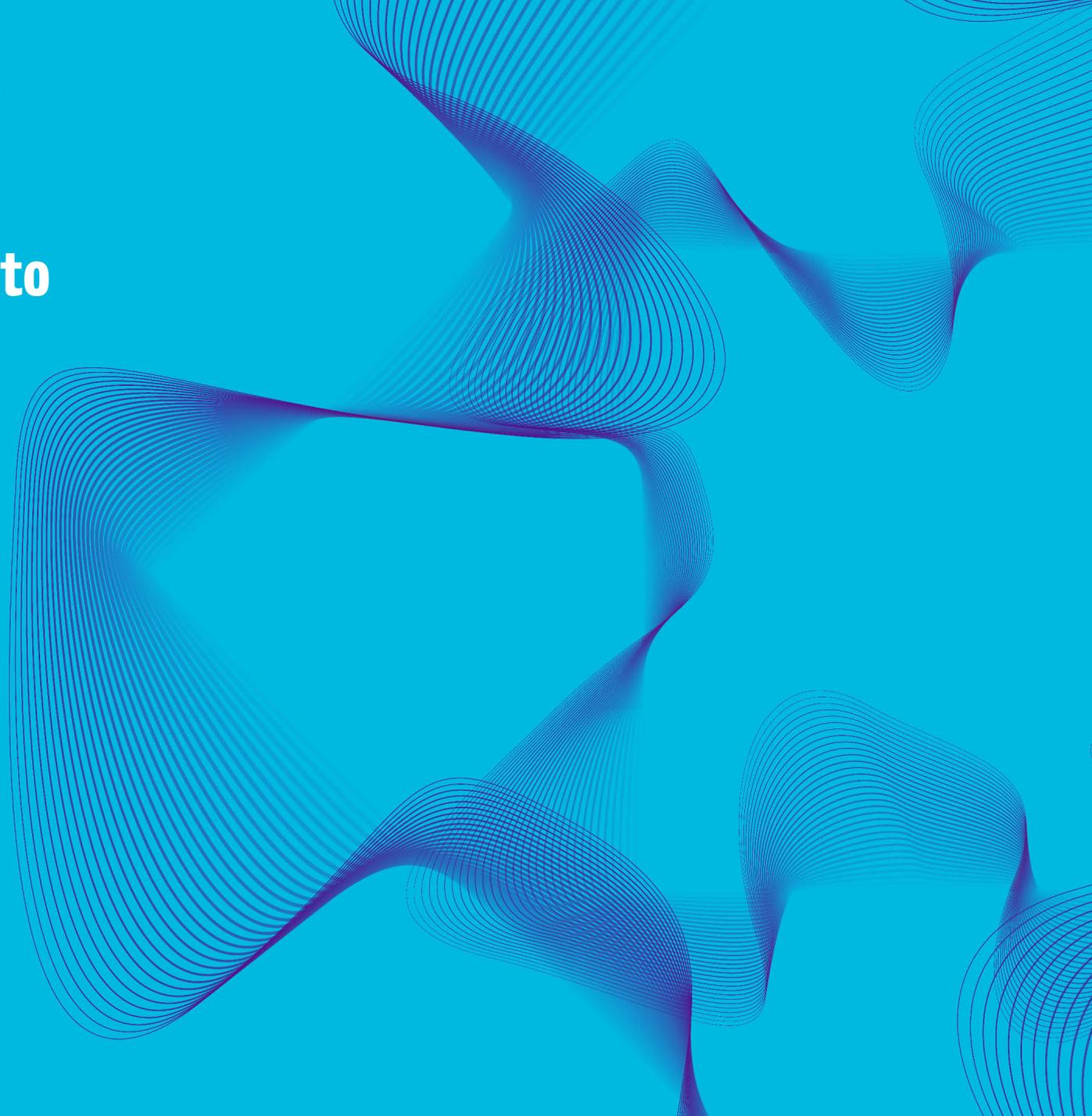
% who say...

## Increased use of social media



**Social media and smartphones are mostly seen as having a negative impact on young people's health, with older generations more likely to overlook key benefits reported by the young**

Gen Z and Millennials are notably more likely than older generations to say social media and smartphone use help with self-expression, community building, emotional support and loneliness

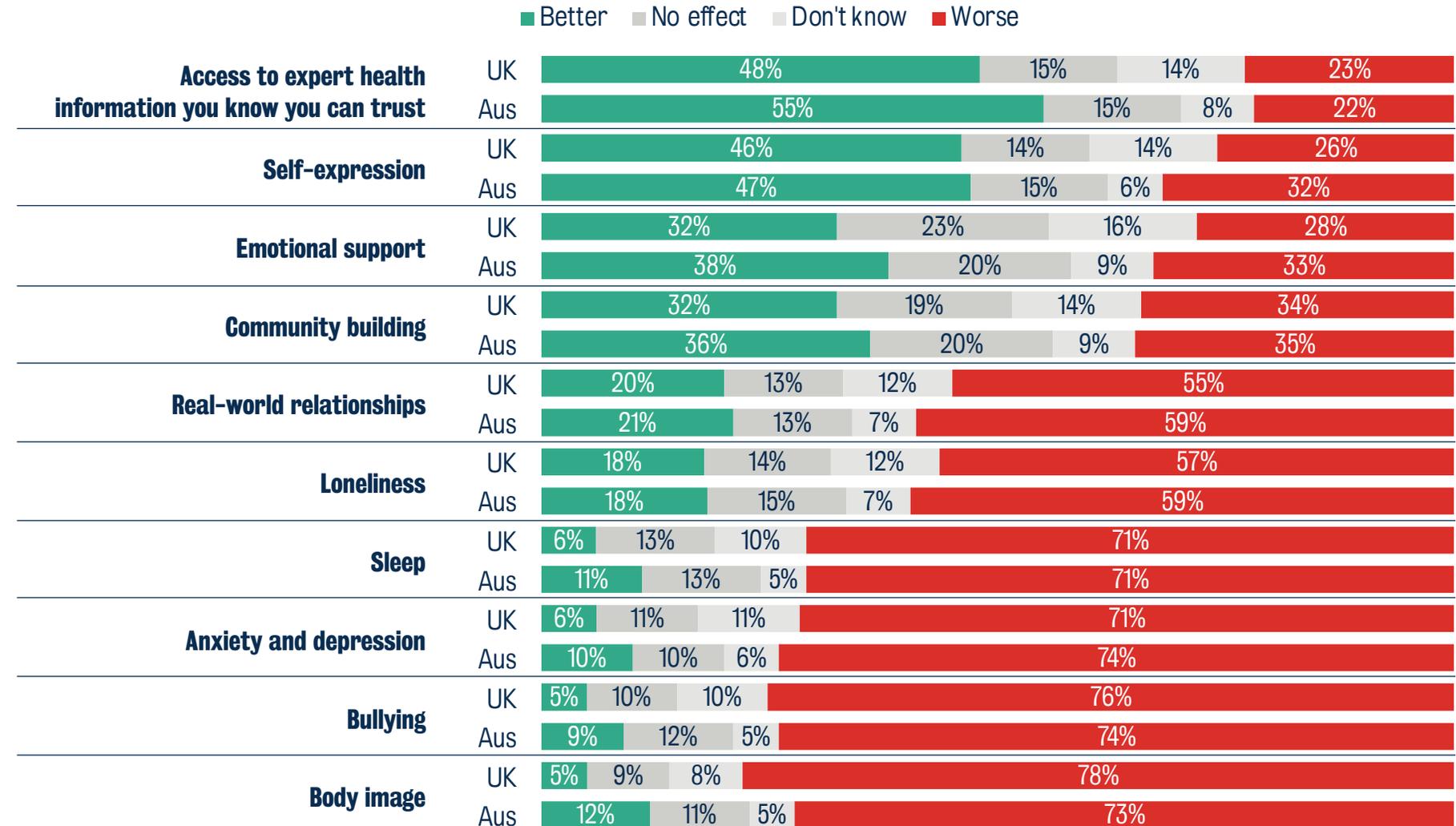


# Perceptions of the health impact of social media and smartphones for young people are largely negative, though the public do see access to expert information and self-expression as key benefits

Over two-thirds of UK and Australian respondents feel social media and smartphone use has made body image, sleep, and anxiety and depression worse for young people.

Views are more positive on access to expert health information and self-expression, where over two in five say smartphones and social media have actually made things better.

To what extent, if at all, do you think that social media and smartphone use make the following health-related factors better or worse for young people today?



# Gen Z and Millennials are notably more likely than older generations to say social media and smartphone use help with self-expression, community building, emotional support and loneliness

To what extent, if at all, do you think that social media and smartphone use make the following health-related factors better or worse for young people today?

% who say it makes \_\_\_\_\_ better...

## Self-expression

## Community building

## Emotional support

## Loneliness

■ UK ■ Australia

■ UK ■ Australia

■ UK ■ Australia

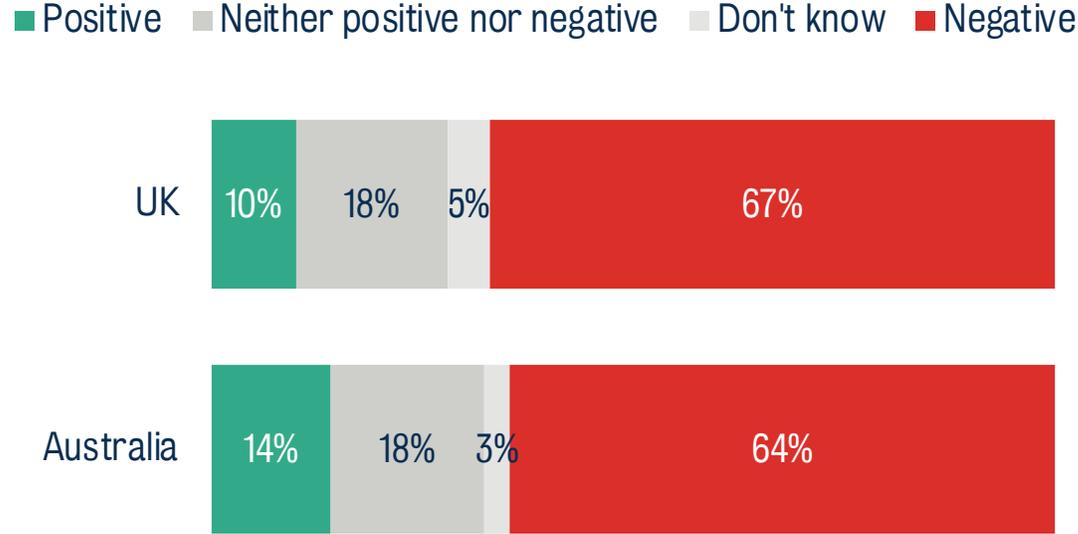
■ UK ■ Australia



# Overall, people feel that social media and smartphones have a negative impact on young people’s mental health – but views vary by generation

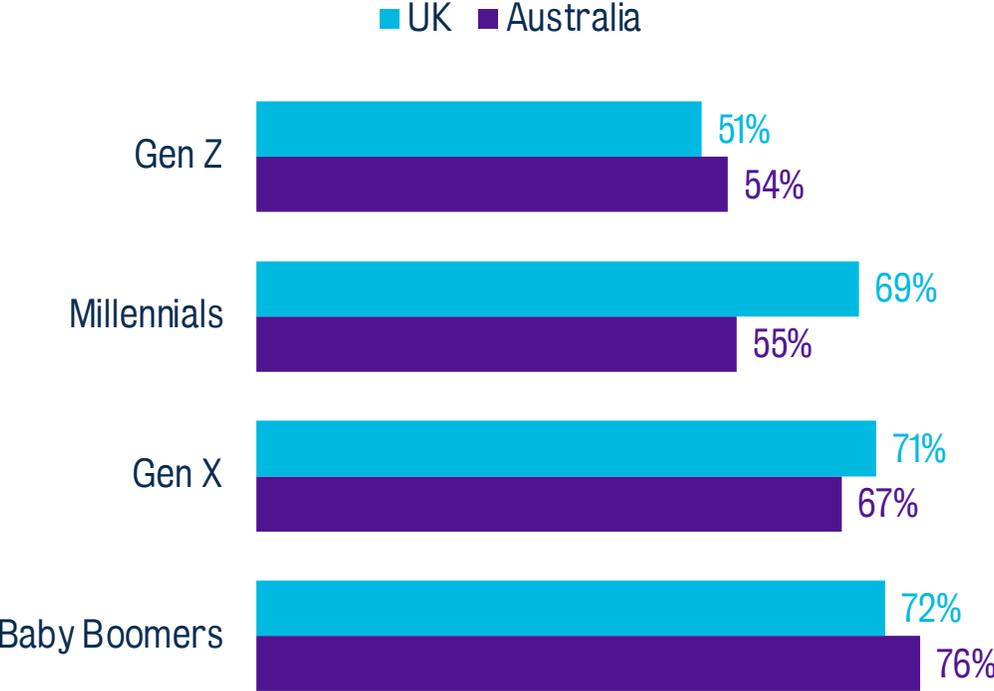
And overall, do you think that social media and smartphone use has a positive or negative effect on young people’s mental health?

## Views overall



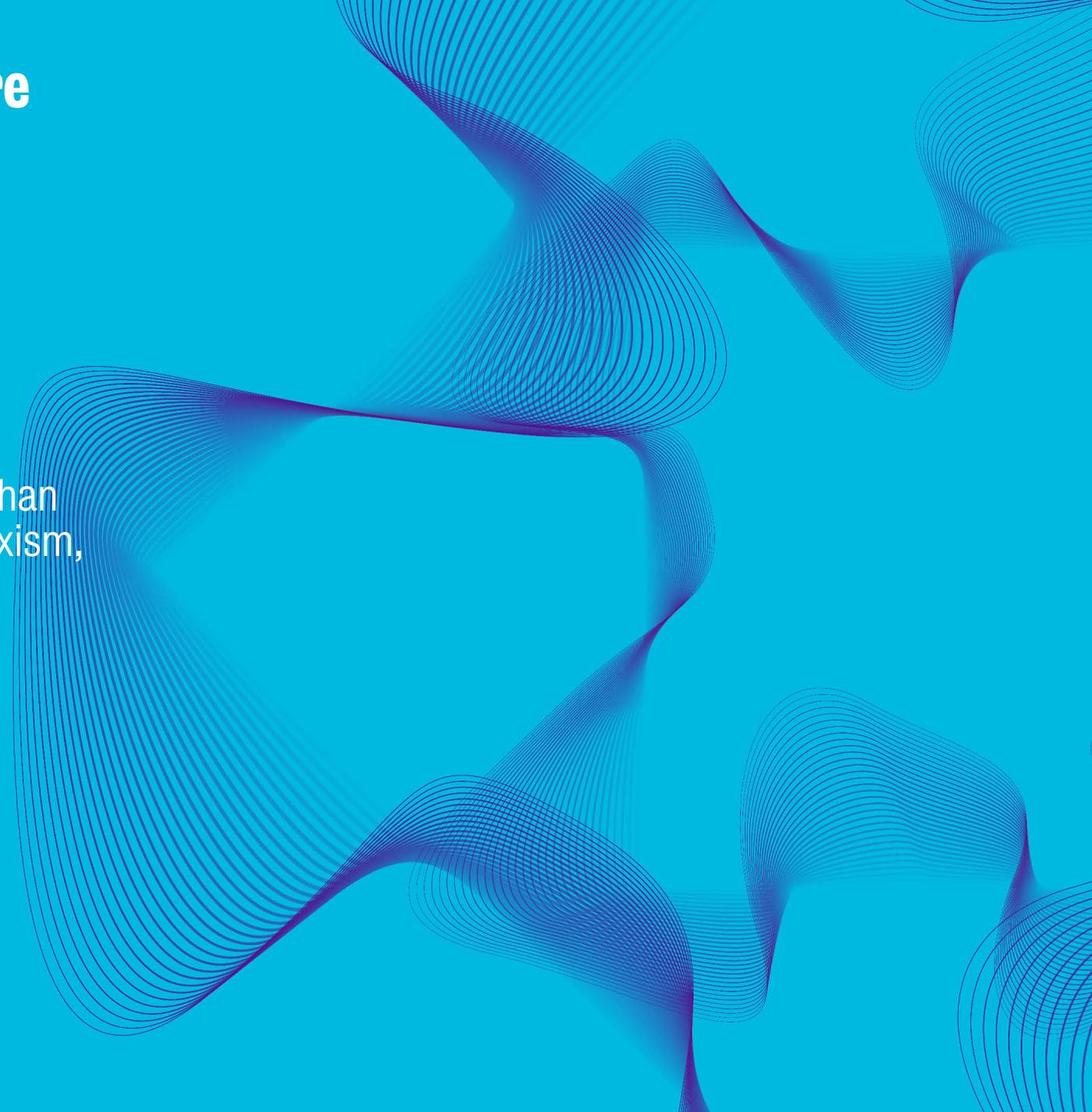
## % who say...

### It’s had a **negative** impact



# **The public prefer policies that more immediately seek to tackle youth mental health issues, rather than those focused on longer-term structural drivers**

Additional mental health services and action on bullying in schools are seen as more important than things like tackling broader problems such as sexism, racism and discrimination

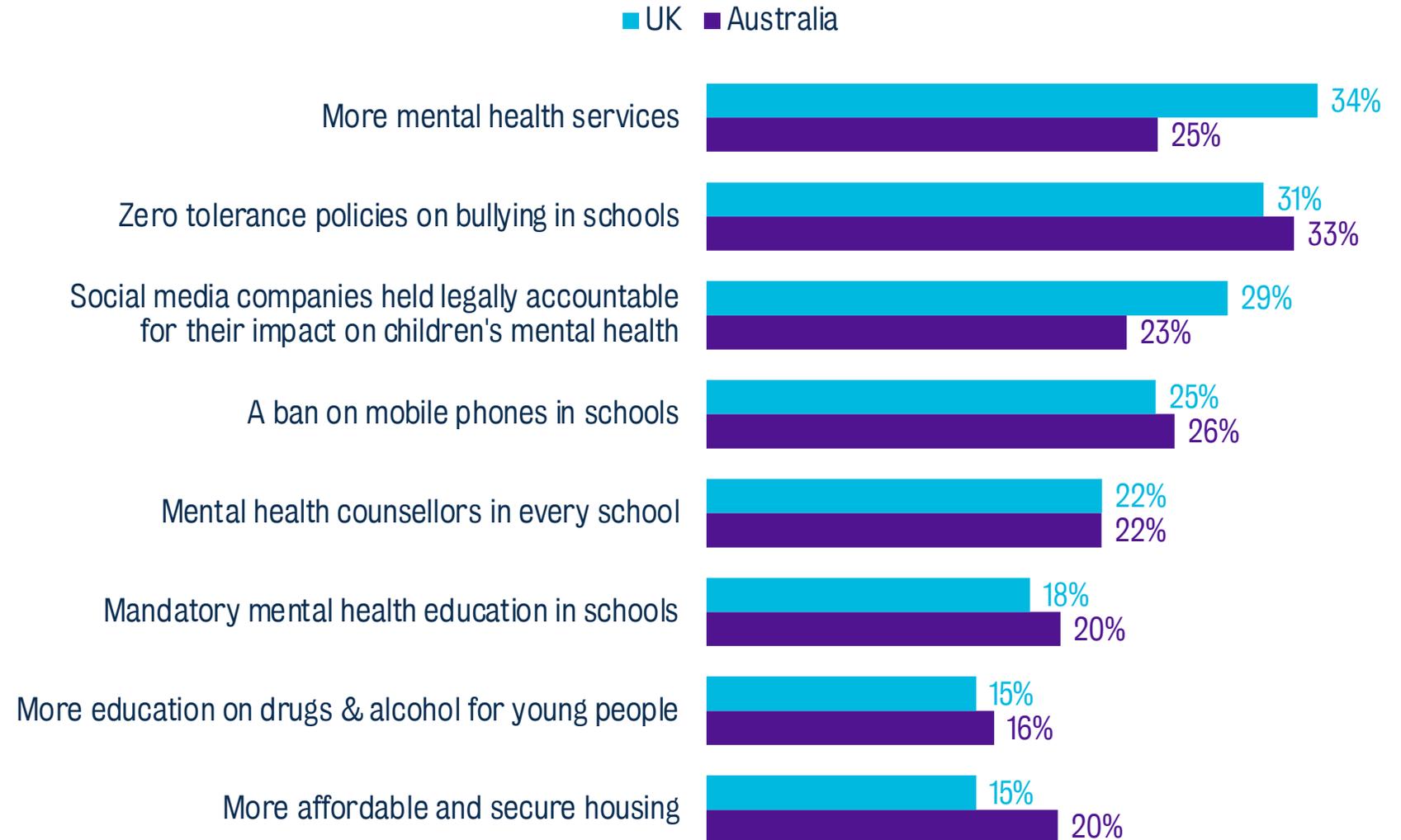


## Policies focused on social media and schools receive among the most support...

Policies which focus on more direct forms of support, such as extra mental health services or cracking down on bullying in schools, as well as those linked to social media and mobile phone use, tend to be most popular among the public.

And there is little differences in preferences between those in the UK and Australia, although the UK public are more in favour of providing additional mental health services.

Governments can support young people and their mental health. Which of the following do you think are the most important things government should do to support young people's mental health?

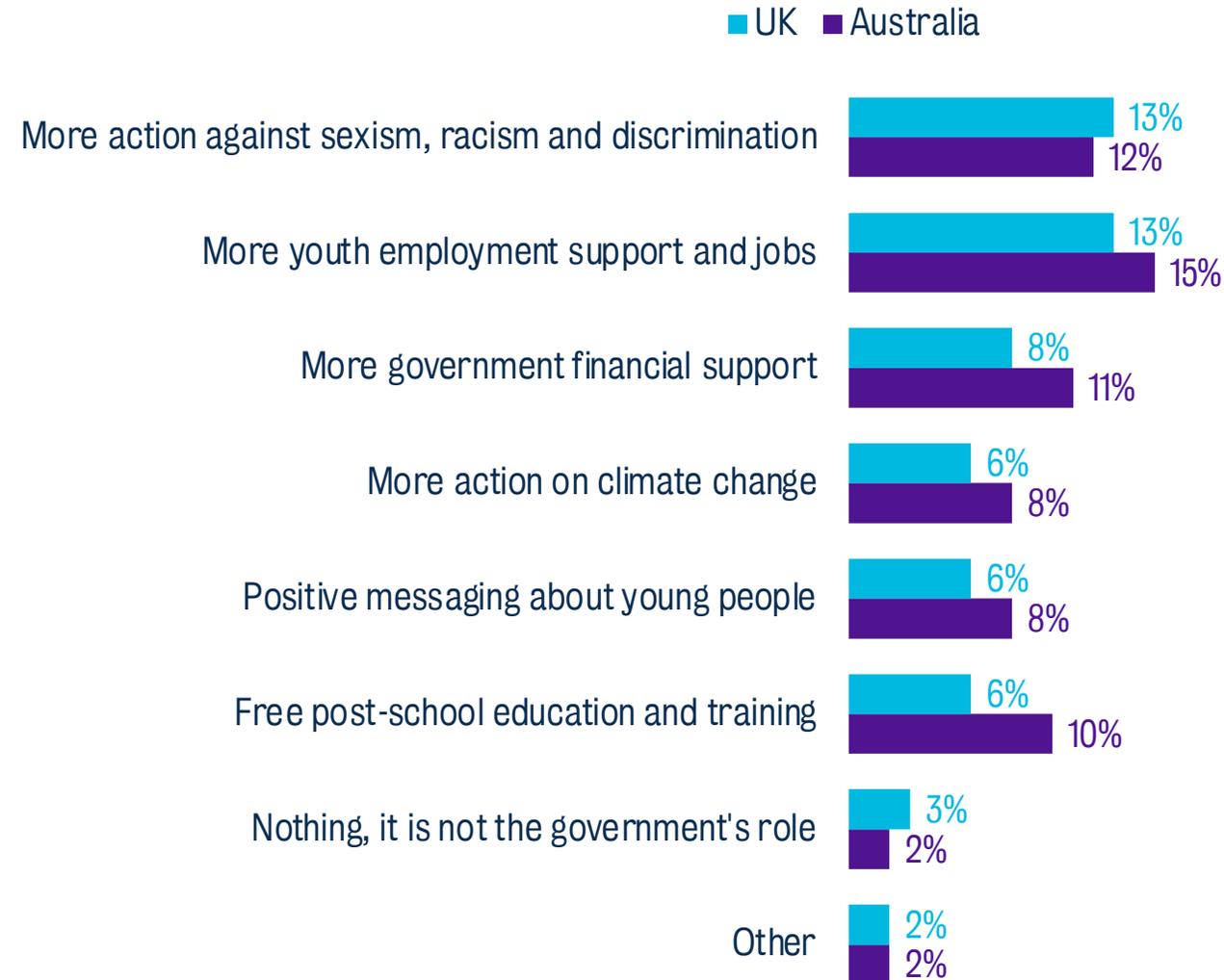


## ...while policies focused on larger structural drivers are seen as less important

In both the UK and Australia, policies focused on potential structural drivers of mental health, such as sexism, racism and discrimination and youth employment, are perceived to be less of a priority for government.

Action against climate change and positive messaging about young people were among the least popular measures, while hardly anyone feels that the government should make no attempts to support youth mental health.

Governments can support young people and their mental health. Which of the following do you think are the most important things government should do to support young people's mental health?

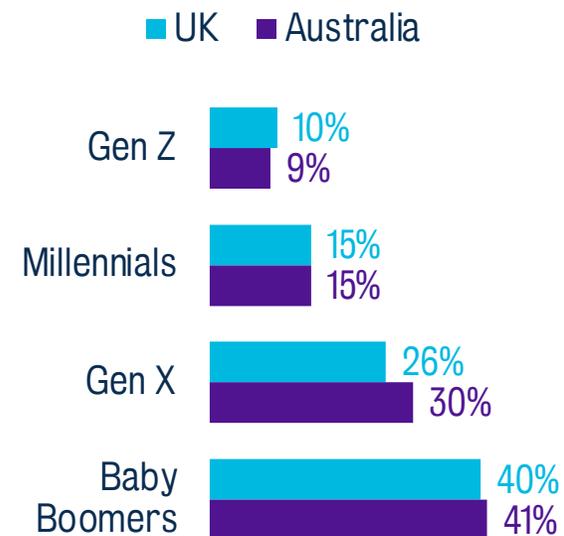


# Older generations are more likely to think a ban on mobile phones in schools and a zero tolerance approach to bullying would help support young people's mental health, while younger generations are more in favour of extra financial support from government

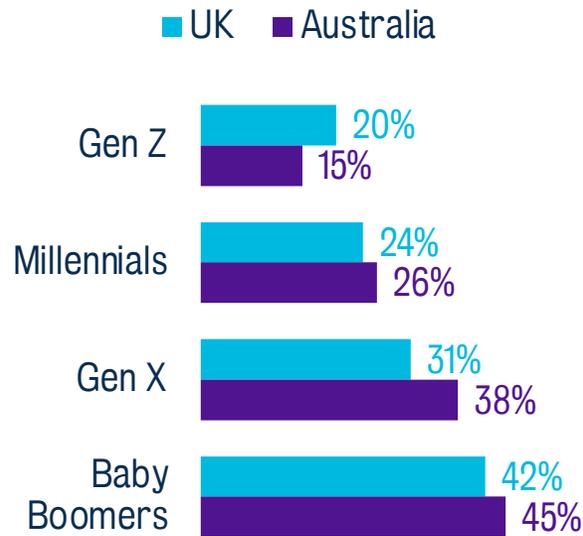
Governments can support young people and their mental health. Which of the following do you think are the most important things government should do to support young people's mental health?

% who say...

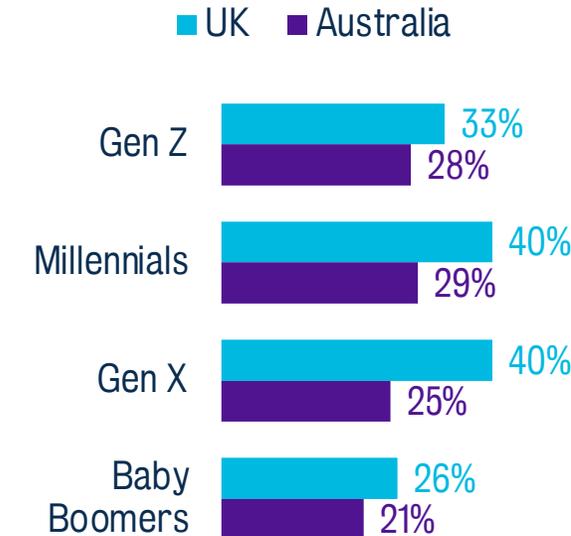
## A ban on mobile phones in schools



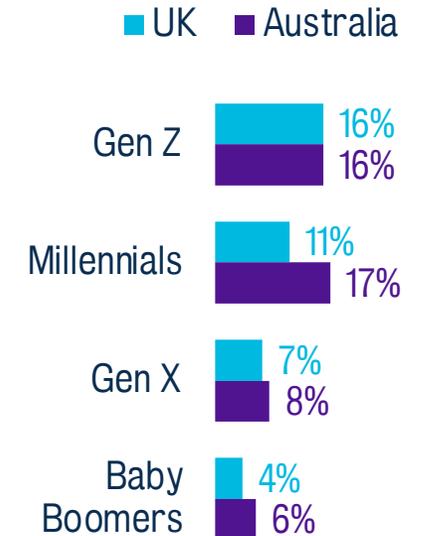
## Zero tolerance policies on bullying in schools



## More mental health services



## More government financial support



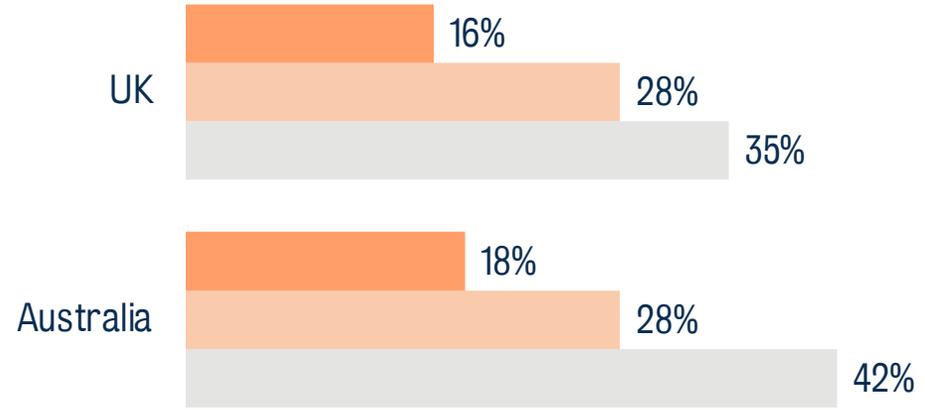
# Particularly in Australia, social media users are more sceptical than non-users of crackdowns on smartphones in schools and of holding social media companies legally accountable for their impact

Governments can support young people and their mental health. Which of the following do you think are the most important things government should do to support young people's mental health?

% who say...

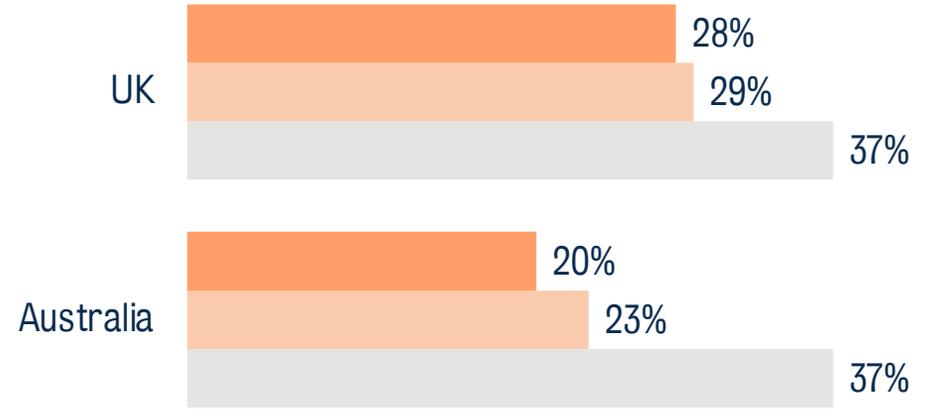
## A ban on mobile phones in schools

■ Over 2 hours browsing social media per day
 ■ Under 2 hours browsing social media per day
 ■ No use on an average day



## Social media companies held legally accountable for their impact on children's mental health

■ Over 2 hours browsing social media per day
 ■ Under 2 hours browsing social media per day
 ■ No use on an average day





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