

## Written evidence from Reunite Families UK (CIL0076)

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### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the individuals and families who responded to the surveys for this study.

## Executive Summary

**Reunite Families UK** has done a study in response to calls for evidence for the parliamentary inquiry **The Government's response to COVID-19: human rights implications of long lockdown** ( <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/855/the-governments-response-to-covid19-human-rights-implications-of-long-lockdown/> ) run by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. In particular, the inquiry called for evidence relating to *'the human rights impact on family life and mental health for these communities'* (that have experienced extended lockdown).

In 2012 a Minimum Income Requirement for spousal visas was introduced in the UK, resulting in the enforced division of thousands of British citizens from their non-EEA partners. This group of people have therefore anticipated in many cases the family division created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

For participants, the most common length of separation between 3 months and 3 years with various mental, physical, emotional and financial impacts.

### *Physical impact*

95% of those surveyed reported a negative impact on their physical health. 78% of those with children reported negative impacts on their children's physical health.

### *Mental health impact*

93% of those surveyed reported a negative impact on their mental health. 84% of those with children reported negative impacts on their children's mental health.

### *Relationships*

82% of those surveyed reported a negative impact on their relationships with their partners; 64% experienced negative impacts with friends and extended family members.

### *Finance*

95% reported a negative impact on their career and finances due to long term separation.

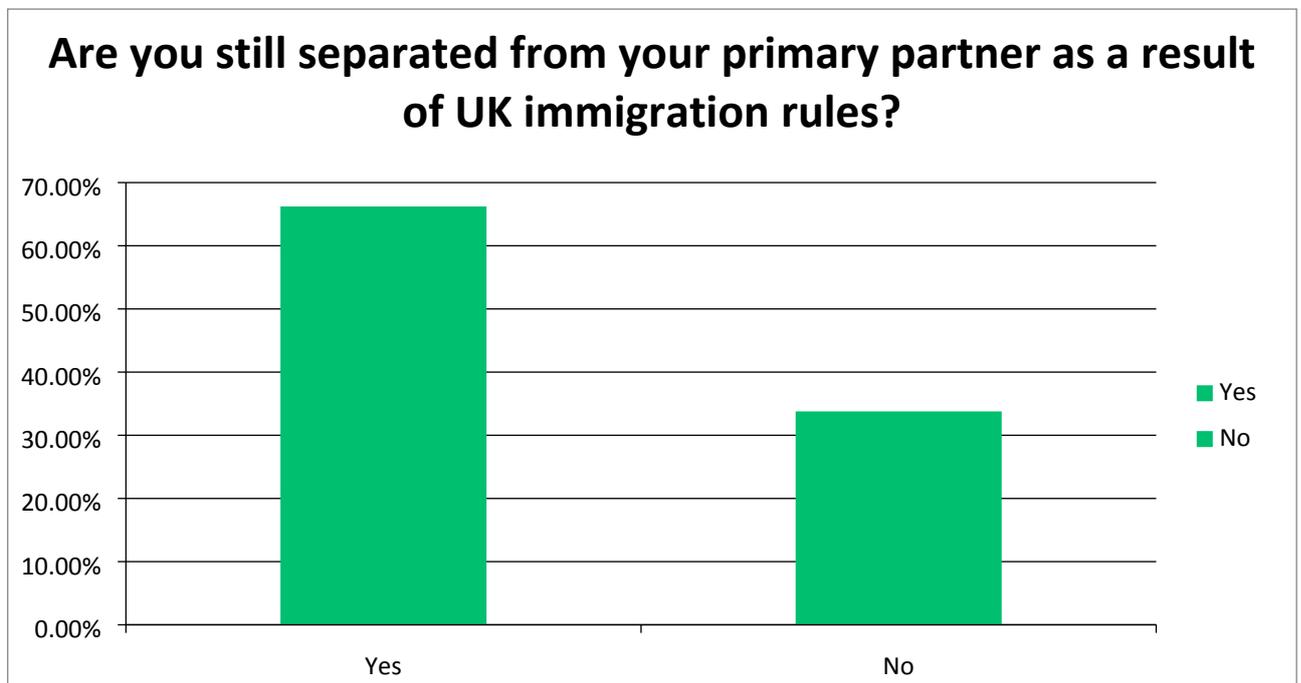
The results of this study – and from what we have all now experienced due to Covid-19 – it is clear that 'living online' is absolutely no substitute for physical in person presence, especially as familial relationships are concerned, with major implications for mental health and family life.

Study: Human Rights Implications of Long Lockdown – Summary Responses

The survey elicited 74 responses, producing a range of different experiences. Note that percentage figures are rounded so may not add up to 100% in all cases.

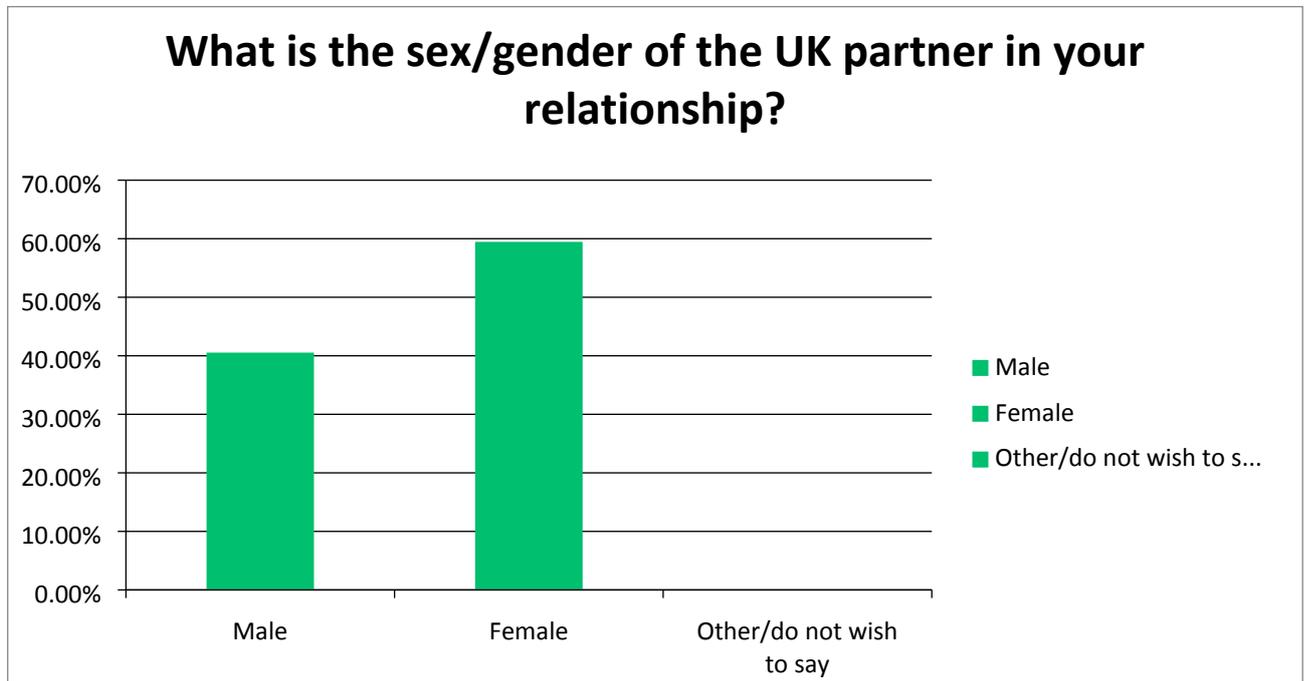
**1a/ Are you still separated from your primary partner as a result of UK immigration rules?**

66% of our respondents were experiencing ongoing separation, with 34% no longer separated.



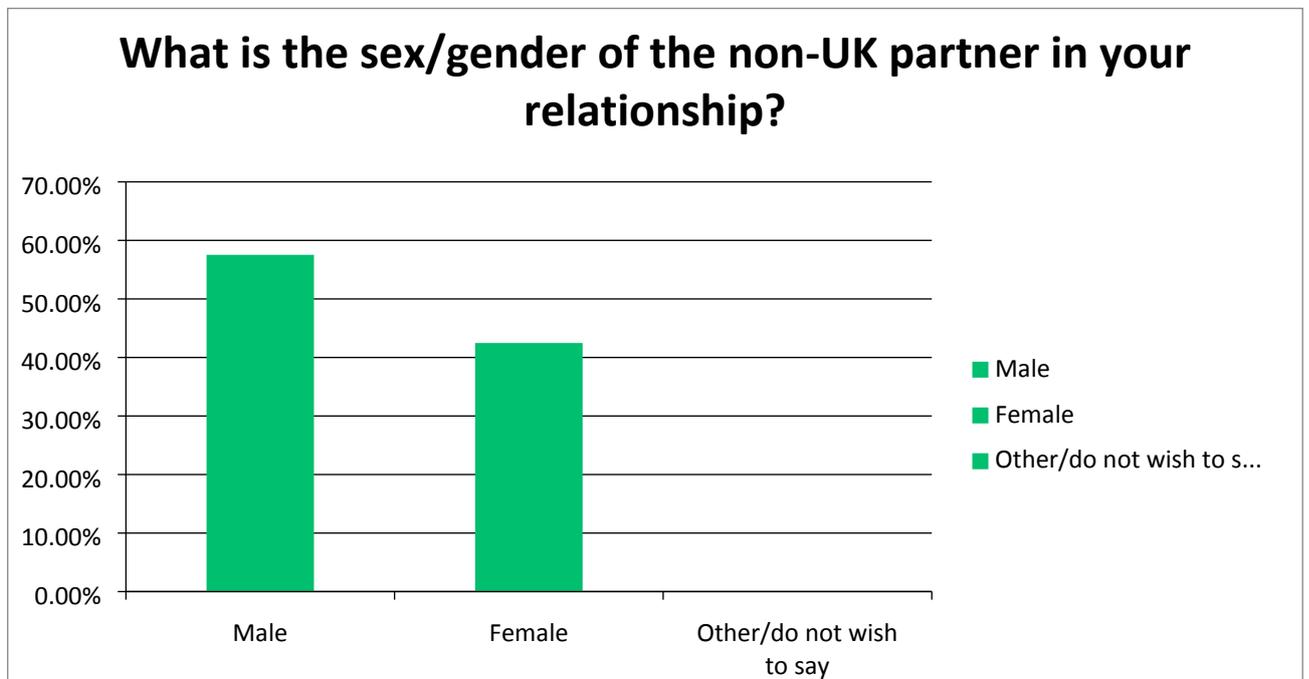
**1b/ What is the sex/gender of the UK partner in your relationship?**

41% of our respondents stated that the UK partner was male, 59% that the UK partner was female.



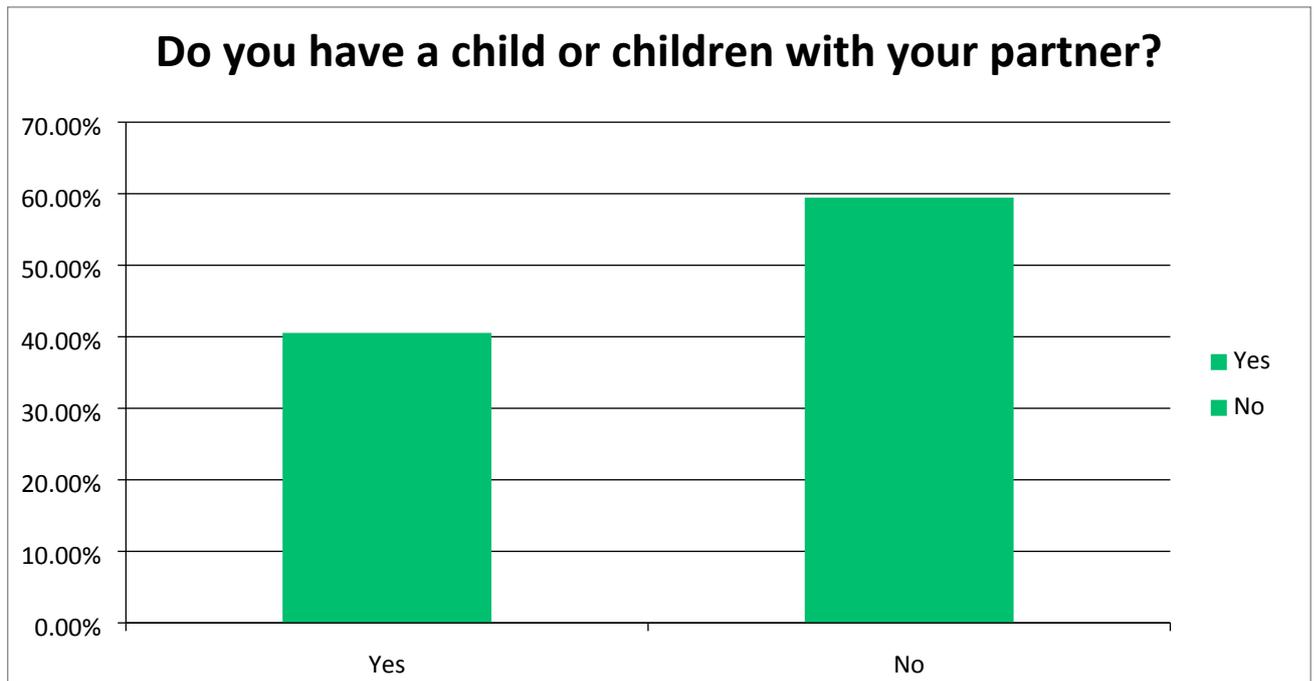
#### 1c/ What is the sex/gender of the non-UK partner in your relationship?

58% of our respondents stated that the non-UK partner was male, 42% that the non-UK partner was female.



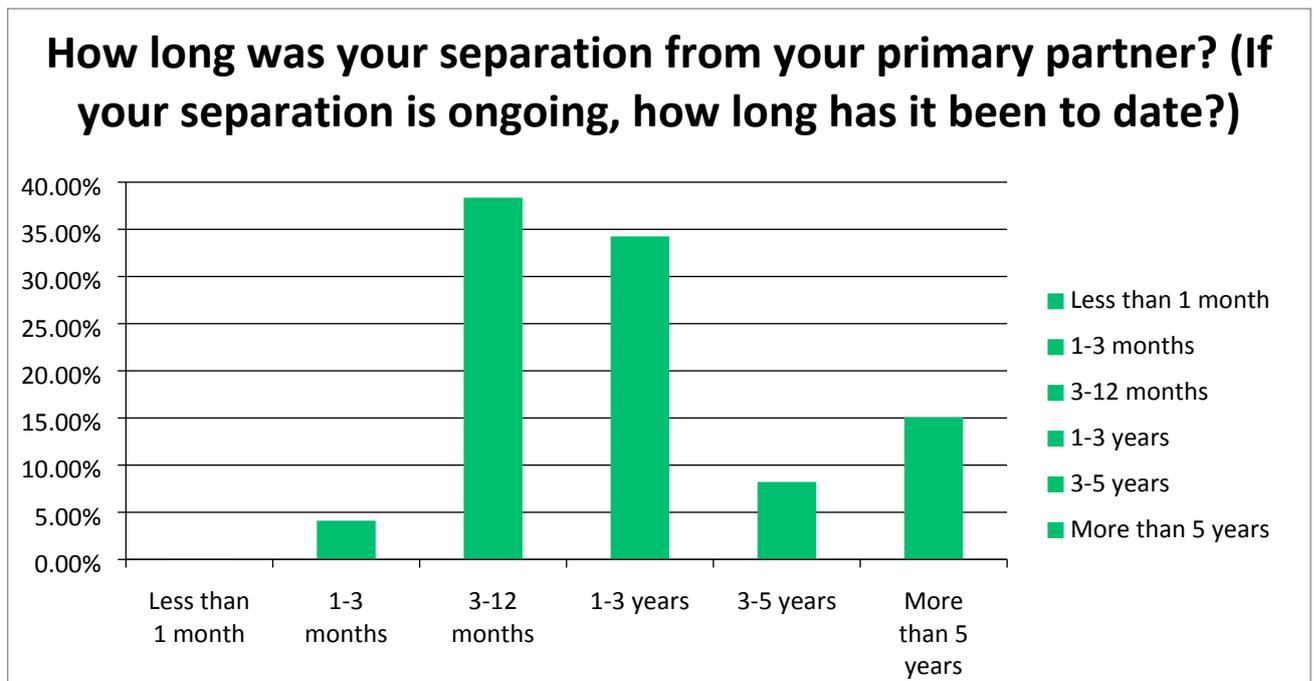
#### 1d/ Do you have a child or children with your partner?

41% of our respondents stated they had a child or children with their partner, 59% did not.



**1e/ How long was your separation from your primary partner? (If your separation is ongoing, how long has it been to date?)**

None of our respondents had experienced a separation of less than 1 month. 4% experience separation between 1 and 3 months, 38% between 3 and 12 months, 34% between 1 and 3 years, 8% between 3 and 5 years, and 15% of 5 years or more. The most common separation period was between 3 months and 3 years.



*Impacts*

The next set of questions focused on the impact of separation on various aspects of the family's health and relationships. As documented in the September 2020 e-book 'Kept Apart: couples and families separated by the UK immigration system' (<https://www.reunitefamiliesuk.co.uk/kept-apart-project>), individuals reported physical, mental and emotional impacts of separation.

The impacts were measured on a self-reported 5 points scale as follows:

*Terrible* – likely lifelong impact

*Very negative* – but possible to overcome with support

*Negative* – a setback

*Neither negative nor positive*, or mixed

*Positive*

**1f/ Please rate the impact of this separation on the physical health of your family**

*Physical health impact on the UK partner in the relationship:*

Terrible: 30%

Very negative: 30%

Negative: 35%

Neutral or mixed: 5%

Positive: 0%

Not applicable: 1%

(Median response: between 'Very negative' and 'Negative')

*Physical health impact on the non-UK partner in the relationship:*

Terrible: 26%

Very negative: 34%

Negative: 28%

Neutral or mixed: 9%

Positive: 0%

Not applicable: 3%

(Median response: between 'Very negative' and 'Negative')

*Physical health impact on the child(ren) in the relationship:*

Terrible: 14%

Very negative: 14%

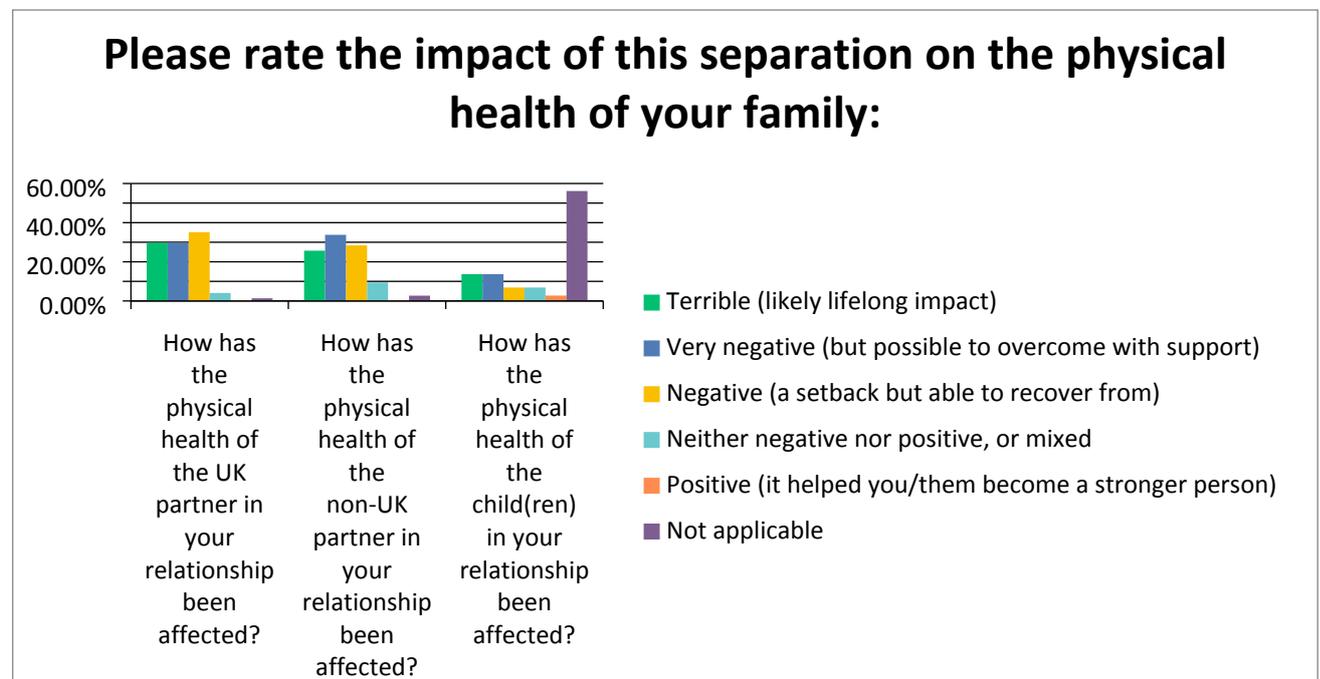
Negative: 7%

Neutral or mixed: 7%

Positive: 3%

Not applicable: 66%

(Median response for those with children: between ‘Very negative’ and ‘Negative’ though with responses more spread across the spectrum)



**1g/ Please rate the impact of this separation on the mental health of your family**

*Mental health impact on the UK partner in the relationship:*

Terrible: 35%

Very negative: 35%

Negative: 23%

Neutral or mixed: 1%

Positive: 4%

Not applicable: 1%

(Median response: ‘Very negative’)

*Mental health impact on the non-UK partner in the relationship:*

Terrible: 34%

Very negative: 36%

Negative: 22%

Neutral or mixed: 7%

Positive: 1%

Not applicable: 0%

(Median response: 'Very negative')

*Mental health impact on the child(ren) in the relationship:*

Terrible 17%

Very negative: 13%

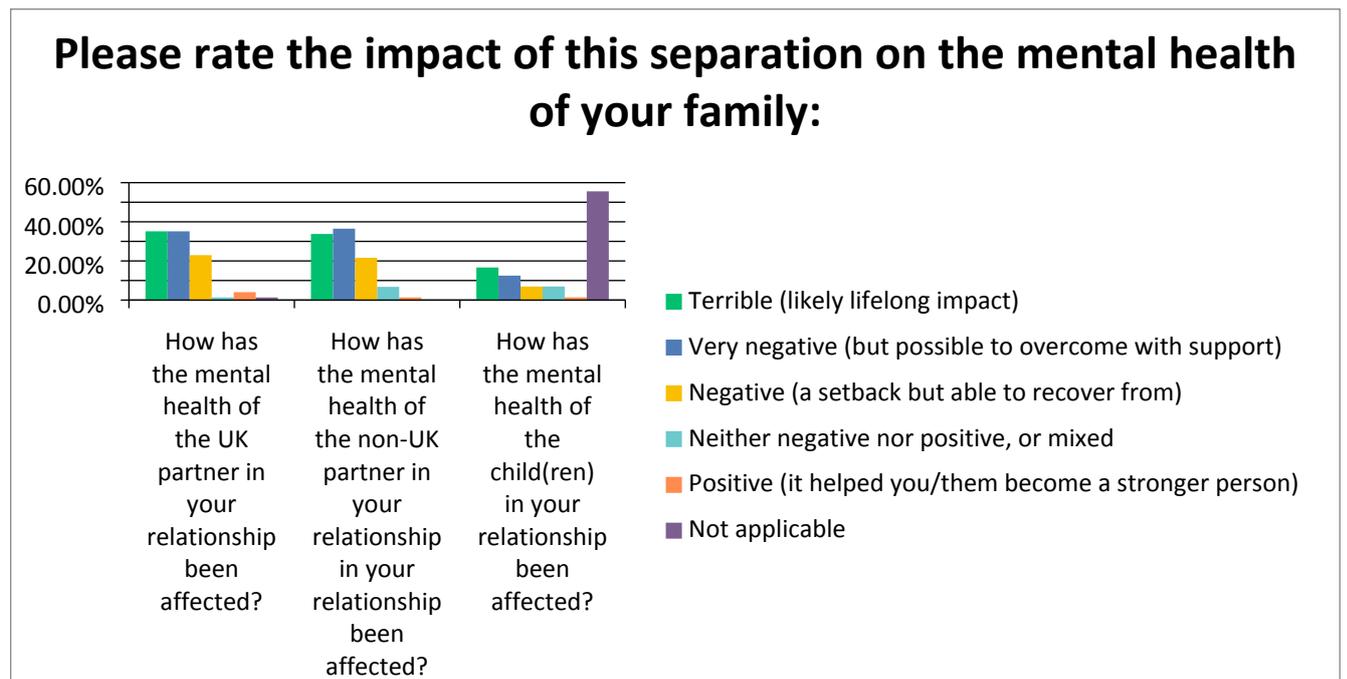
Negative: 7%

Neutral or mixed: 7%

Positive: 1%

Not applicable: 56%

(Median response for those with children: 'Very negative', but with responses spread across the spectrum).



**1h/ Please rate the impact of this separation on the primary relationships in your life**

The relationship questions were also marked on a 5-point scale as follows:

*Permanently and irreparably damaged*

*Severely tested but not damaged beyond repair*

*Tested but we have overcome this*

*Neither negative nor positive, or mixed*

*Strengthened*

The results are tabulated below.

*Relationship with your partner:*

Permanently and irreparably damaged: 5%

Severely tested but not damaged beyond repair: 43%

Tested but we have overcome this: 34%

Neutral or mixed: 3%

Strengthened: 15%

Not applicable: 0%

(Median response: between 'Severely tested' and 'Tested', with a fortunate few saying 'Strengthened').

*Relationship with your child(ren), if applicable:*

Permanently and irreparably damaged: 3%

Severely tested but not damaged beyond repair: 27%

Tested but we have overcome this: 8%

Neutral or mixed: 3%

Strengthened: 3%

Not applicable: 56%

(Median response where applicable: 'Severely tested'. This very negative impact on relationships with children is a worrying aspect to these results and reflects the findings of the Children's Commissioner 2015 report:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2015/09/09/skype-families/> ).

*Relationship with other family members (e.g. parents, grandparents):*

Permanently and irreparably damaged: 15%

Severely tested but not damaged beyond repair: 32%

Tested but we have overcome this: 27%

Neutral or mixed: 12%

Strengthened: 3%

Not applicable: 11%

(Median response where applicable: between ‘Severely tested’ and ‘Tested’).

*Relationship with close friend(s):*

Permanently and irreparably damaged: 13%

Severely tested but not damaged beyond repair: 19%

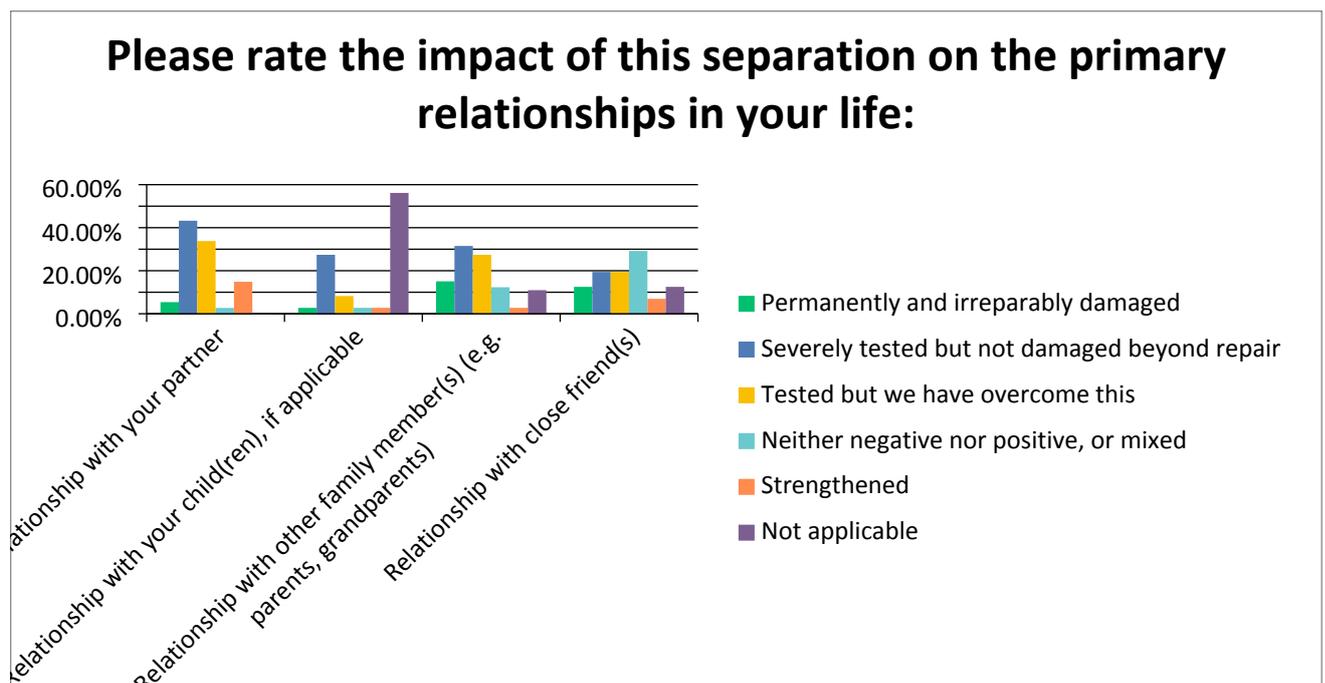
Tested but we have overcome this: 19%

Neutral or mixed: 29%

Strengthened: 7%

Not applicable: 13%

(Median response where applicable: ‘Tested’, although responses are across the spectrum with the largest group reporting a ‘Neutral or mixed’ impact).



**1i/ Please rate the impact of this separation on your career and finances**

Given the documented costs of the process and attention to detail needed, here the respondents were asked to assess the impact on their career and financial health. Once again, a 5-point scale was used:

Terrible: 12%

Very negative: 42%

Negative: 41%

Neutral: 5%

Positive: 0%

(Median response: between 'Very negative' and 'Negative', indicating long term career damage for many and indeed many being forced onto benefits).

Study: Human Rights Implications of Long Lockdown – Selected Individual Responses

*'I suffered a heart attack which has left me with lifelong heart problems. I've also lost my driving licence because of it. I had my own company as a HGV driver, so it's been devastating for us regarding the Minimum Income Requirement and ability to reapply for a spouse visa. I can't prove it, but I'm convinced that the stress and worry of visa refusals, being apart as a family, working long hours and 6-day weeks to meet the MIR, was a big cause of my heart attack. '*

'Both adults have experienced mental health trauma and a physical manifestation of severe stress and anxiety due to this situation. Our daughter has also suffered due to these circumstances.'

*'As the spouse I try and remain positive and throw myself into my work but have had dark thoughts, depression and personality and character changes. For my wife she has been in very dark places, depression, anxiety and character and personality changes. The question of should we divorce has been raised before. Only happy when I visit and we are together. '*

'Families need a physical touch, a hug, a presence. Technology fails all too often, different time zones and work commitments, falling asleep from working double shifts while waking for matching off work time. Covid restrictions are a perfect example of how detrimental to health being unable to even place a hand into your loved one's hand can be.'

06/01/2021