

# COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey

## Report 010, comparison of the Alert Levels results

### Summary of findings

#### Social connection and loneliness

- For the substantial majority of respondents (90% and more), communication with family, whānau and friends was either easy or very easy during all ALs.
- The highest proportion of those feeling lonely some of the time, most of the time or all of the time during full lockdown (AL4) was observed among younger adults, 15-29 years old. This proportion decreased while moving to AL1 from 22% to 5%.

#### Perceptions of safety

- During all ALs the overwhelming majority of respondents (95% or more) felt safe or very safe at home. Only 2% of adults felt unsafe or very unsafe for AL4 and this proportion reduced to 0.3% for AL1.
- Perceptions about what is needed to feel safer were changing over time. As the alert levels reduced from AL4 through to AL1, respondents perceived that factors like pandemic control, strict following the rules, staying home and certainty about the future become less critical whereas the perceived importance of factors like home security and a safer neighbourhood steadily increased.
- The proportion of those who worried about being a victim of crime most or all the time was stable across the ALs, between 2-3%, which is lower than the NZCVS results.
- The proportion of those with moderate and high level of psychological distress reduced substantially from 8% at AL4 to 3% at AL1.

#### Experiencing crime and reporting to Police

- An overwhelming majority of respondents across the entire period did not experience property crime and personal non-violent crime. The only offence type reported by more than 2% of respondents within a particular AL was COVID-19 related scam.
- We did not find any robust trends of crime dynamics over different ALs.

#### Perception of the Criminal Justice System

- Around three quarters of respondents think that the criminal justice system response to the COVID-19 pandemic was good or excellent. This proportion was markedly stable over the entire period.
- Analysis shows that as Alert Levels dropped there was an evolving shift of respondents' prioritisation from policing and enforcement (during AL4) to system and services improvement (during AL1).

#### Financial pressure

- The level of financial pressure was reasonably stable over all ALs, and consistent with the NZCVS 2018/2019 results.

## How to read this report

This report summarises findings of nine previously released weekly reports of the COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey, a telephone survey informing about how safe people feel and what crime and safety issues matter to them most. The report covers the following key topics:

- **Social connection and loneliness**
- **Perceptions of safety**, including reasons why people feel unsafe
- **Experience of some types of crimes** (for example, fraud and COVID-19 related scams which are increasingly of concern internationally)
- **Crimes reported and not reported to Police**
- **Perceptions of the Criminal Justice System**

This report provides and compares the key results for each COVID-19 Alert Level (AL) introduced in New Zealand during the period of interviewing between **Saturday 12 April and Monday 15 June** after interviewing **2642** randomly selected adult respondents (15 years old and above). For comparison between ALs we used only the questions that have been in place during at least three ALs.

When people were interviewed, they were asked to think about the **seven days prior to the interview**.

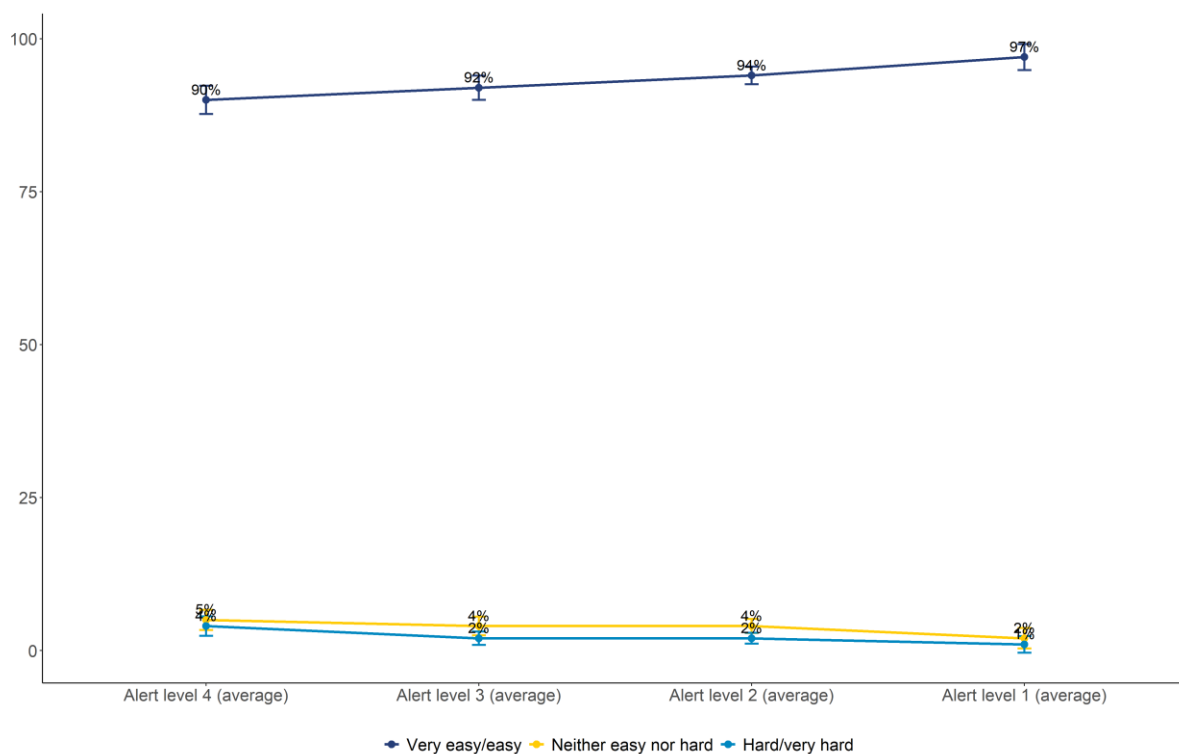
Where available and appropriate, data collected by the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) between October 2018 and September 2019 are presented alongside the survey results. **These data are intended to provide a reference to similar topics and questions before the introduction of Alert Level 4. Looking at the pattern of difference can be informative. However, unless otherwise suggested, readers are advised to avoid direct comparison of these survey results with the NZCVS. A key difference is that the NZCVS data is based on 12 months experience rather than on one week and there are differences in the way questions are asked and the research methods used.**

## Detailed findings

### Social connection and loneliness

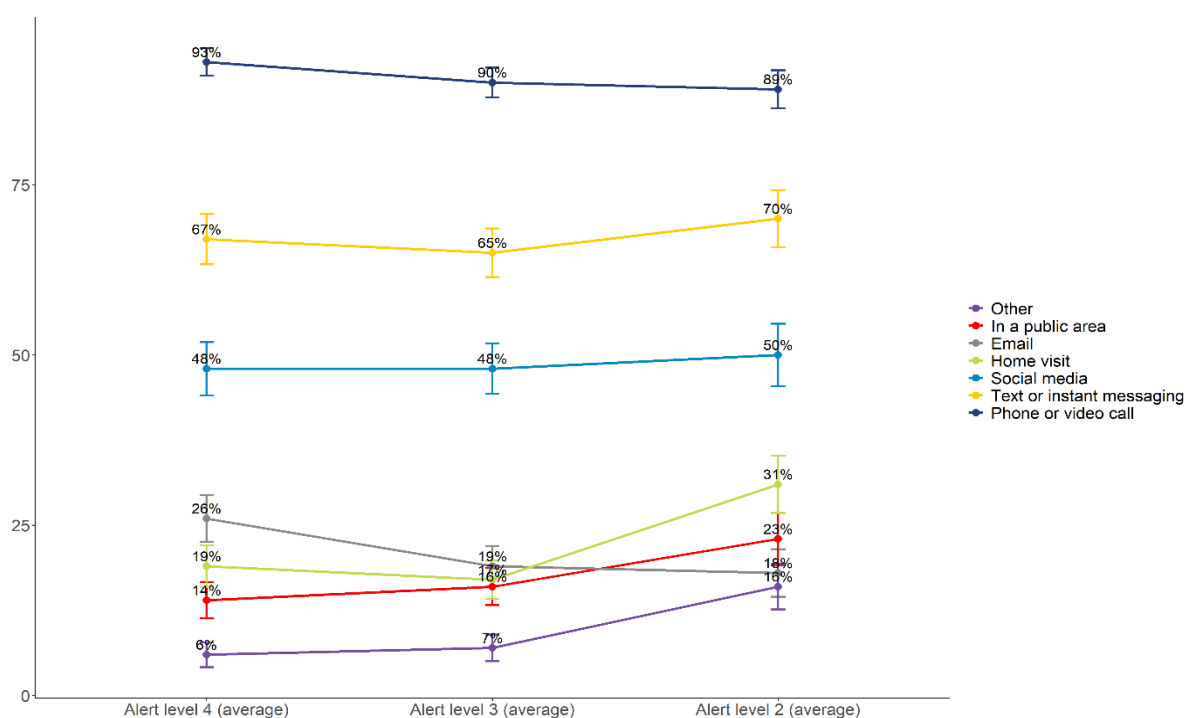
- The proportion of adults who communicated with family, whānau or friends outside of their household at least 4 times a week remained stable (81-82%) for the three ALs. **Note:** we excluded this question after moving to AL1 as all communication restrictions were removed.
- 90% of respondents on AL4 said that communication with family, whānau and friends was either easy or very easy. This proportion increased to 92% at AL3, 94% at AL2 and 97% at AL1.
- During AL1, 4% found communication with family, whānau and friends hard or very hard. This proportion reduced to 2% at AL3 and AL2 and to 1% at AL1.

**Figure 1: How easy was it for you to communicate with family, whānau or friends outside of your household?**



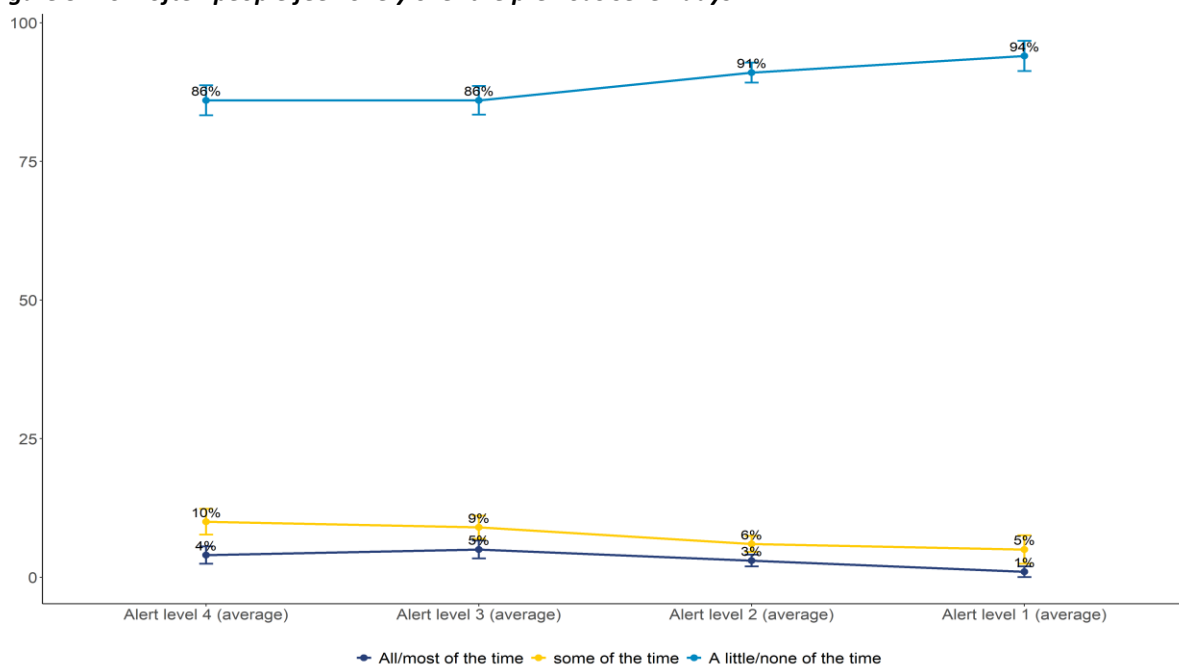
- The most popular communication channel was through phone or video call – it was used by around 90% of respondents. Around two thirds of respondents were using text or instant messages and about half – social media.

**Figure 2: How did you communicate?**



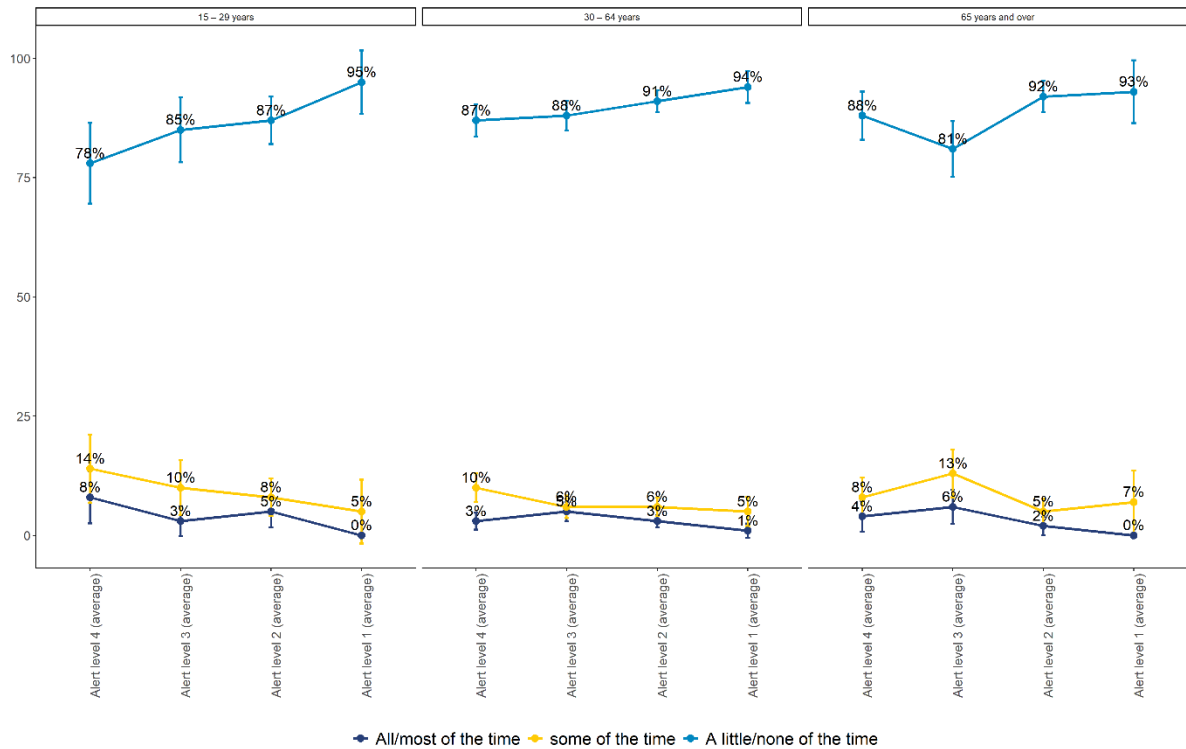
- Most respondents did not feel lonely at all or only a little of the time during AL4 and AL3 – 86% for both Alert Levels. This proportion increased to 91% for AL2 and to 94% for AL1. Proportion of adults who felt lonely most or all of the time was 4% for AL4, 5% for AL3, 3% for AL2 and 1% for AL1.
- These patterns of loneliness are similar to those reported in the 2018/2019 NZCVS, in which 86% of adults said they did not feel lonely at all or only a little of the time over the past four weeks, and 3% felt lonely all or most of the time.

**Figure 3: How often people feel lonely over the previous seven days**



- The highest proportion of those feeling lonely some of the time, most of the time or all of the time during full lockdown (AL4) was observed among younger adults, 15-29 years old. This proportion decreased while moving to AL1 from 22% to 5%.

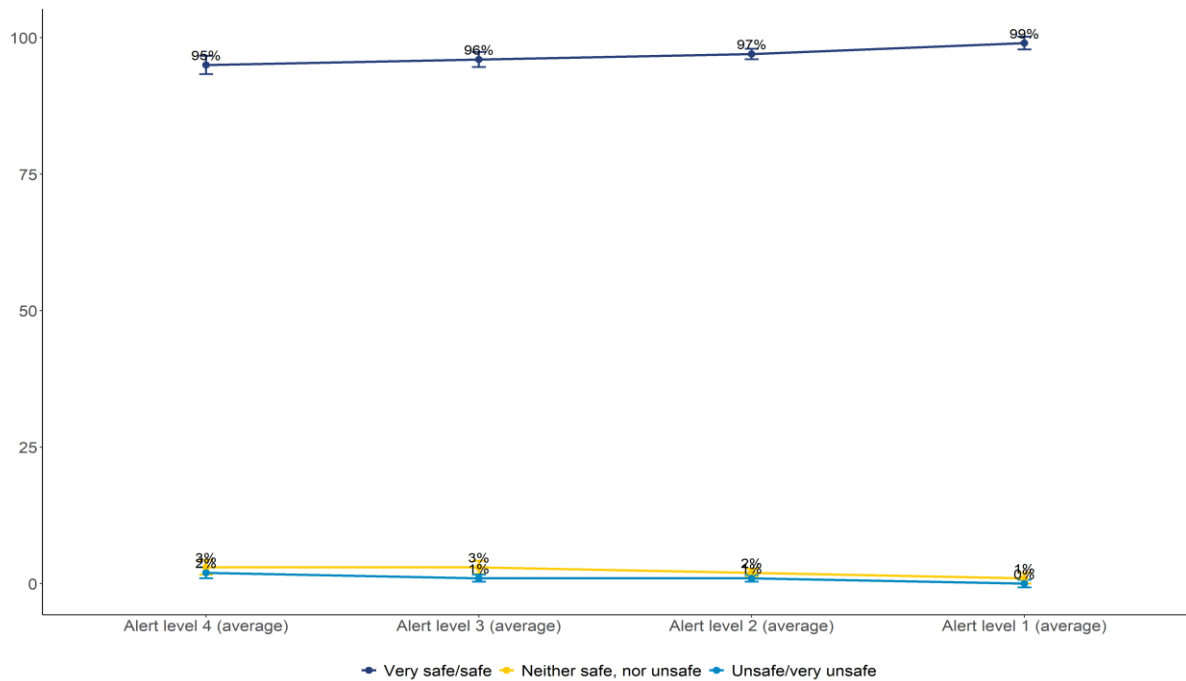
**Figure 4: How often people feel lonely over the previous seven days**



### Perceptions of safety

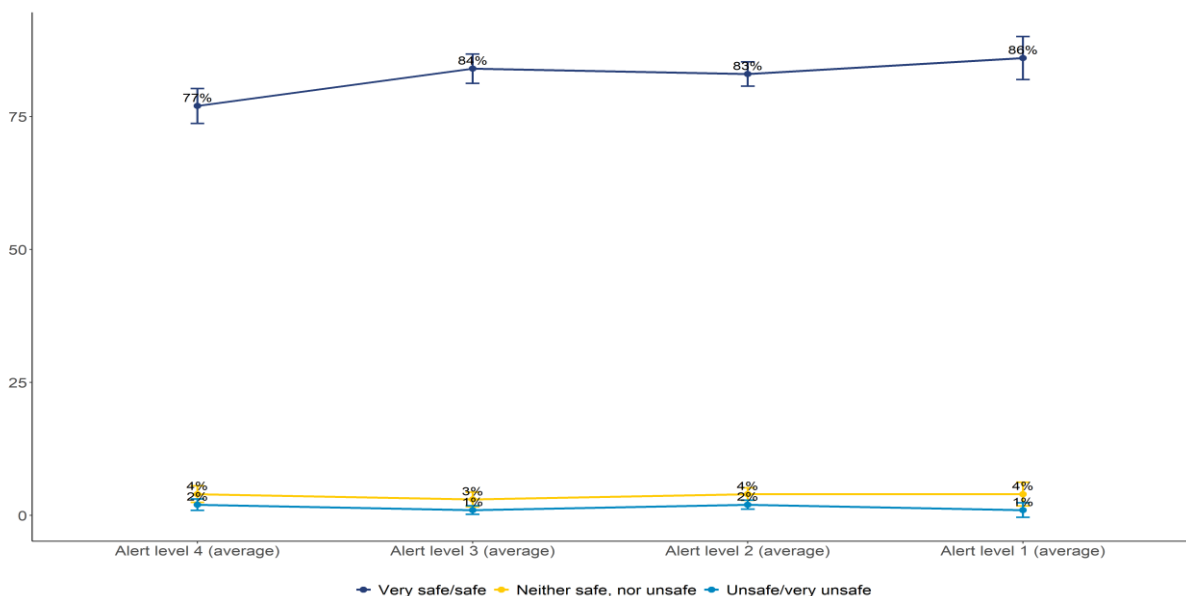
- **Note** that the questions in this section were modified after moving to AL2. We added questions about feeling safe when alone at home at night and when walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark. We removed a question about feeling safe on the way to/from essential services. This reflected changes in the communication and social distancing requirements.
- During all ALs, the overwhelming majority of respondents (95% or more) felt safe or very safe at home. Only 2% of adults felt unsafe or very unsafe for AL4 and this proportion reduced to 0.3% for AL1.

**Figure 5: How safe or unsafe people feel at home**



- During AL4, 3 out of 4 respondents were feeling safe or very safe in their neighbourhood. This percentage increased to 86% at AL1.
- We also asked essential services employees about their feeling of safety when travelling to and from essential services during AL4, AL3 and AL2. The proportion of those feeling safe or very safe was accordingly 76%, 83% and 88% while the proportion of those feeling unsafe or very unsafe did not exceed 2% across all ALs.

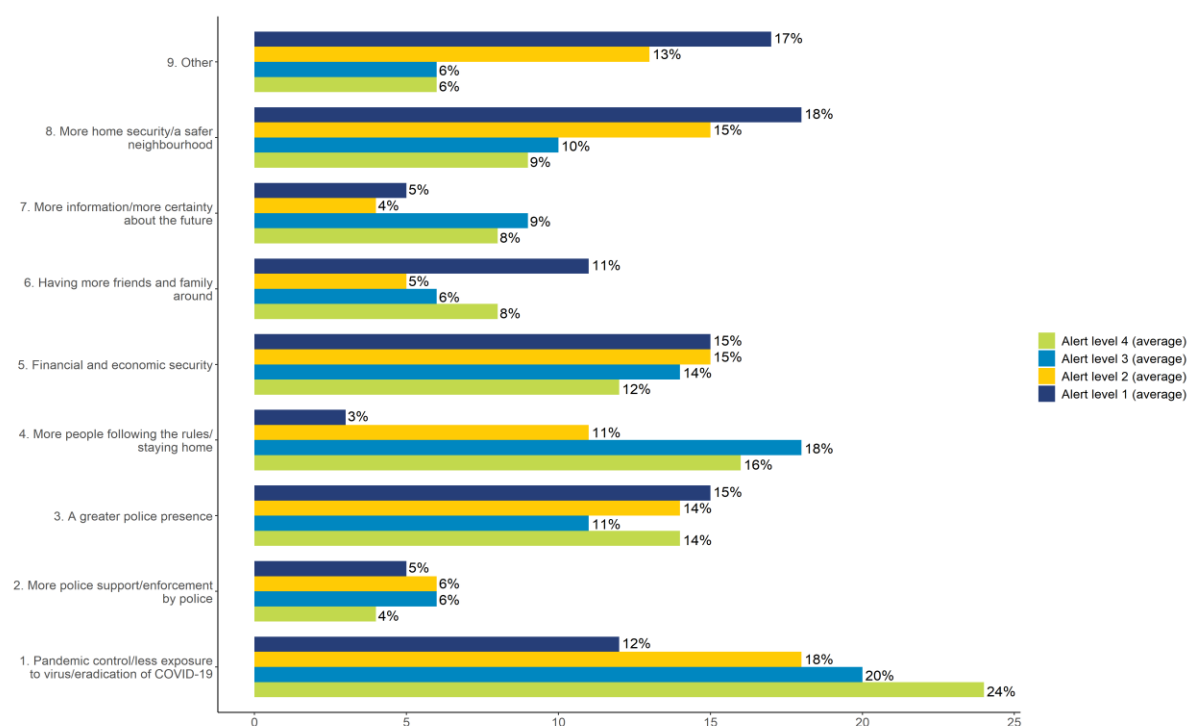
**Figure 6: How safe or unsafe people feel in their neighbourhood**



- We asked people, what are the most common things that would make them feel safer. The answers revealed some interesting trends. In particular, as the alert levels reduced from AL4 through to AL1, the need for “Pandemic control/less exposure to virus/eradication of COVID-19”, “More people following the rules/staying home” and “More information/certainty

about the future” has reduced markedly. Whereas, the need for “Home security/a safer neighbourhood” and “Other” varied solutions has steadily increased.

**Figure 7: Answers to the question, “What, if anything, would make you feel more safe at this time?”**



- Almost a third of respondents noticed a problem in their neighbourhood or local area. This proportion have remained relatively steady throughout different alert levels (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Problems in the neighbourhood / local area over the past 7 days**

Problems	Alert level 4	Alert level 3	Alert level 2	Alert level 1	NZCVS 2018/19
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Noisy neighbours / loud parties	8	11	11	12	29
Vandalism / graffiti	2	2	3	3	11
Burglary / break-ins / theft	4	3	4	7	23
Assaults	1	2	2	2	7
Harassment	2	2	1	1	6
People using or dealing drugs	2	3	3	5	14
People being drunk in a public place	1	2	5	5	16
Dangerous driving	14	12	15	16	38
Other	5	7	6	5	4
None of these	72	72	70	70	37

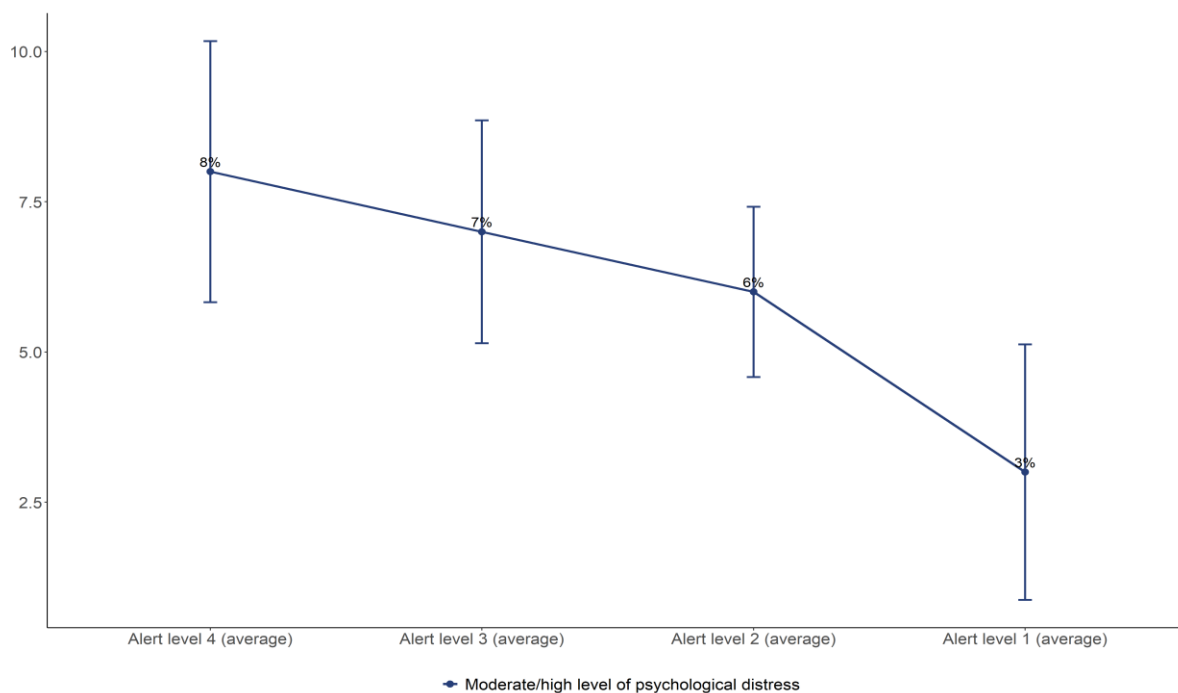
**Note:** The NZCVS 2018/2019 results are based on problems in the neighbourhood / local area over the past 12 months.

- Issues with noisy neighbours and dangerous driving were also the most often mentioned neighbourhood problems for New Zealanders before the pandemic: 29% of NZ adults in the 2018/2019 NZCVS said they had an issue with noisy neighbours in their neighbourhood or local

area in the last 12 months, and 38% had an issue with dangerous driving. **Note** that any comparison of these results to the current survey needs to be understood with caution as the time periods used in these questions are different between the two surveys.

- Across all ALs, four out of five respondents did not worry at all about being the victim of a crime while a further 11-14% worried only a little of time. These proportions are very stable and did not change significantly between ALs. The proportion of those who worried about being the victim of crime most or all the time was also very stable across the ALs, between 2-3%. These results indicate that during the COVID-19 response period adult New Zealanders were less worried about crime than usual, with 40% of adults worrying none of the time, 33% a little of the time and 8% worrying all or most of the time in the 2018/2019 NZCVS.
- Across AL4, AL3 and AL2 over 90% of respondents said that it will be easy or very easy to talk with someone if they felt unsafe or fearful. Only 3% said that it will be difficult or very difficult. Note: this question was withdrawn for AL1.
- Some respondents reported signs of psychological distress<sup>1</sup>. However, across all ALs more than 90% of respondents demonstrated a low level of psychological distress. The proportion of those with moderate and high level of psychological distress reduced substantially from 8% at AL4 to 3% at AL1.
- The proportion of respondents with a low level of psychological distress was slightly higher than the proportions reported in NZCVS (2018/19) data, where 88% of respondents had a low level of psychological distress.

**Figure 8: The level of psychological distress**



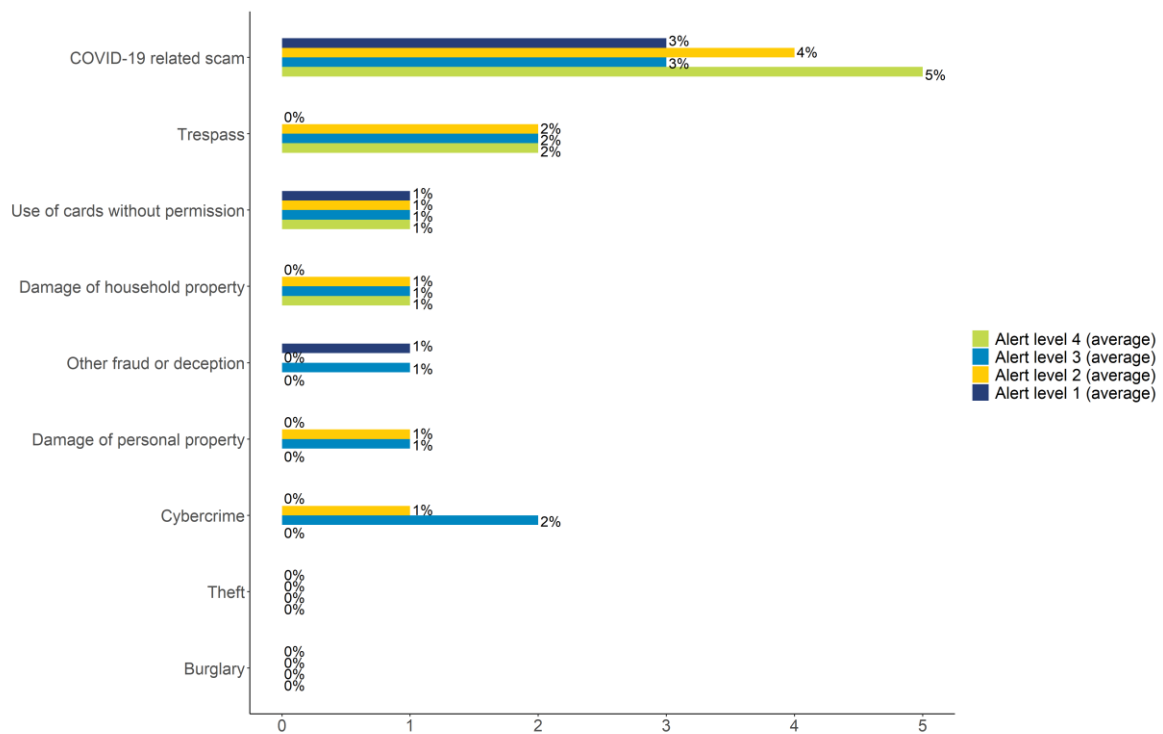
<sup>1</sup> The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) was used in the survey. The K6 is a psychometric scale which asks the respondent to report how they have been feeling over the past 4 weeks across six different areas. The scale is also used in the NZCVS and New Zealand Health Survey. However, for this survey, we have derived psychological distress from information on how people have been feeling over the past seven days instead of the past 4 weeks.



## Experiencing crime and reporting to Police

- An overwhelming majority of respondents across the entire period of interviewing did not experience property crime and personal non-violent crime. The only offence type reported by more than 2% of respondents within a particular AL was COVID-19 related scam. Crimes like theft and burglary were not reported at all. We did not find any robust trends of crime dynamics over different ALs.

**Figure 9: Percent of respondents experiencing non-violent crime over the last 7 days**



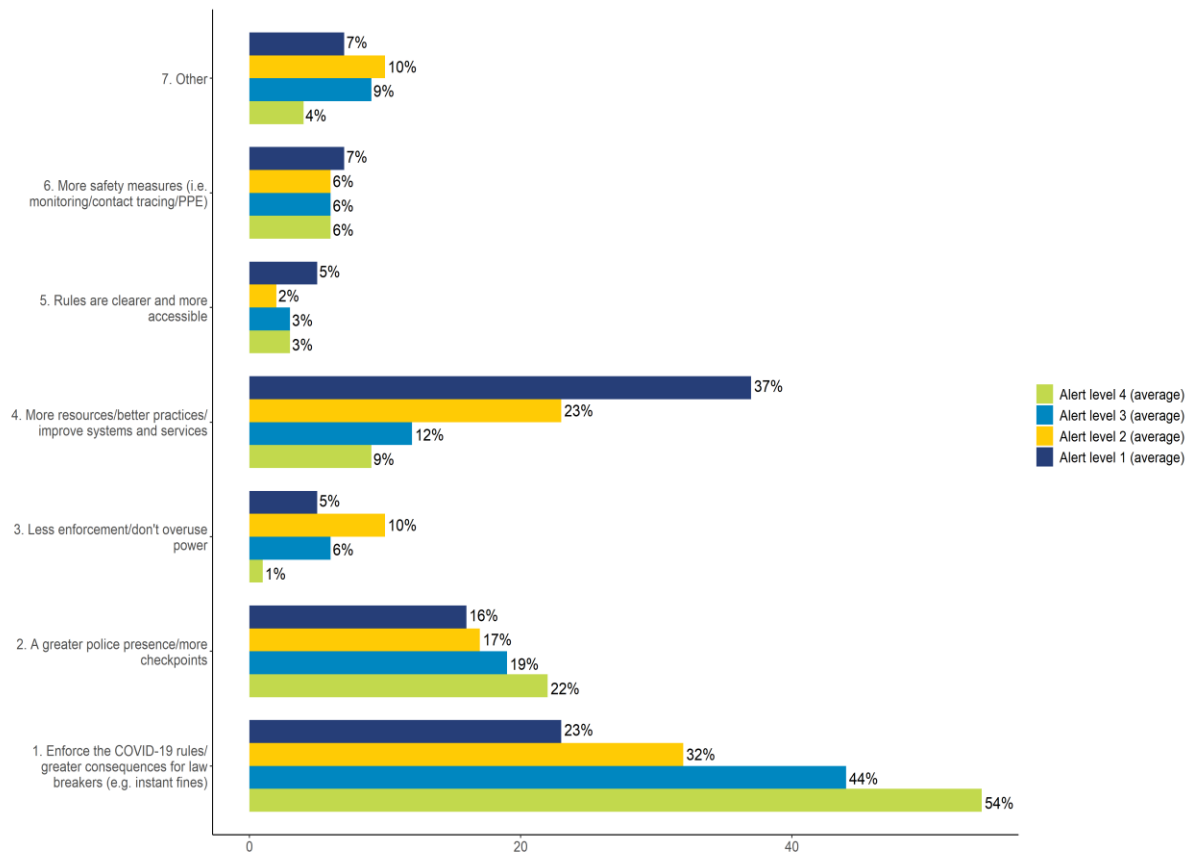
**Note:** This survey does not ask about violent crime including family violence due to potential risk for respondents.

- Due to a very small number of respondents experienced crime, the proportion of incidents reported to Police appears very unstable across ALs. It varied from 21% for AL2 and 18% for AL3 to 2% for AL4 and 0% for AL1. No statistically significant results were observed.

## Perception of the criminal justice system

- A clear majority of respondents, around three quarters, think that the criminal justice system response to the COVID-19 pandemic was good or excellent. This proportion has been markedly stable over the entire period of interviewing, varying between 73% - 77% for seven out of nine weeks of observation. The proportion of people who perceive the criminal justice system response to the COVID-19 pandemic as poor or very poor was extremely low, 2% for AL4, AL2 and AL1 and 3% for AL3.
- Respondents were asked (in a free format) what, if anything, the criminal justice system could be doing better at this time. These questions were then grouped to reflect the most popular topics. The graph below demonstrates a clear and consistent shift in public opinion from policing and enforcement for AL4 and AL3 to system and services improvement for AL2 and AL1.

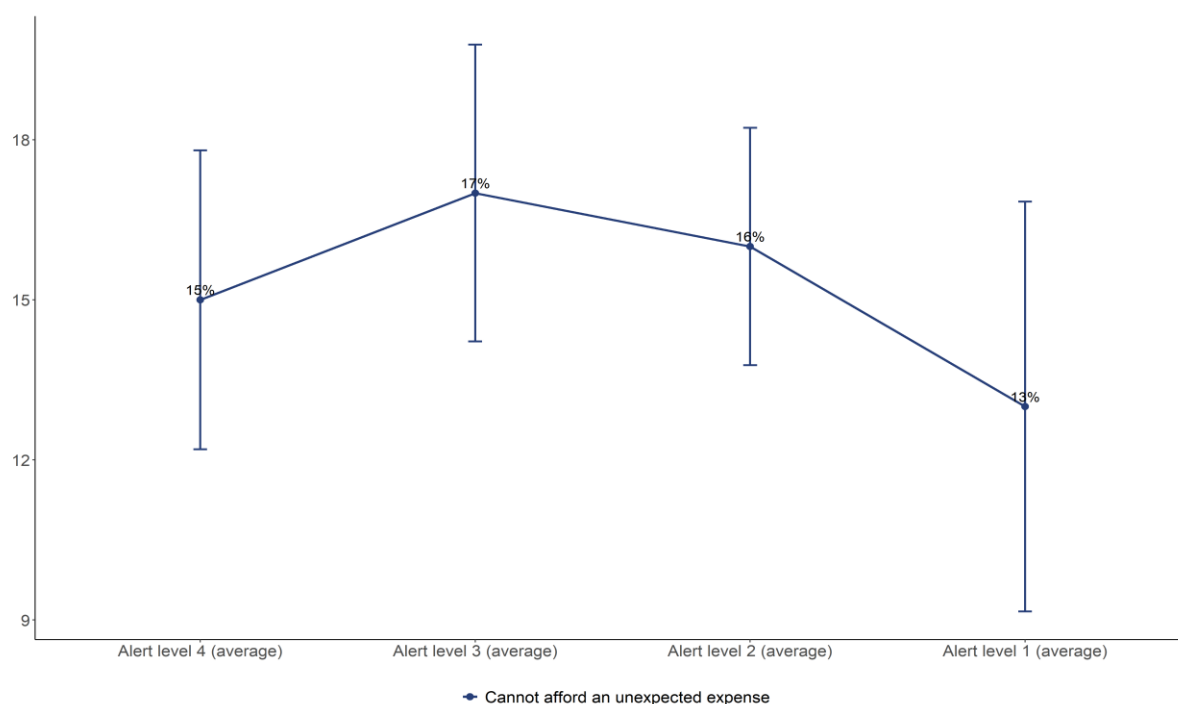
**Figure 10: Answers to the question, “What, if anything, the criminal justice system could be doing better at this time?”**



### Financial pressure

- To analyse the level of financial pressure during the time of COVID-19 respondents were asked if they could afford an unexpected expense of \$500 in the next week without borrowing money. The results were reasonably stable over all ALs, and consistent with the NZCVS 2018/2019 results.

**Figure 11: Percent of respondents experiencing financial pressure**



- In line with the above data, reasonably minor proportion of respondents attempted to access their long-term investments. This proportion varied from 9% for AL4 and 10% for AL3 and AL2 to 6% for AL1. Of those who attempted to access long term investments, substantial majority (between 80-90% for different ALs) did not experience any problem doing so. The results are stable across all ALs.

### Survey methodology

COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey is a phone survey (CATI - Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) with weekly reporting. The survey interviews people who have taken part in the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) and have said they are happy to participate in future research.

NZCVS uses a randomly selected nation-wide sample. The proportion of people who consented to participate in future research is very high (more than 90%). This means that a sample used by COVID-19 Justice Sector Survey may be also considered random.

Overall, 2642 adult (15 years and above) randomly selected New Zealanders were interviewed over 9 weeks between 12/04 and 15/06.

The survey covers all four Alert Levels. Table 2 below provides information about the length of the ALs and the number of interviews within each AL.

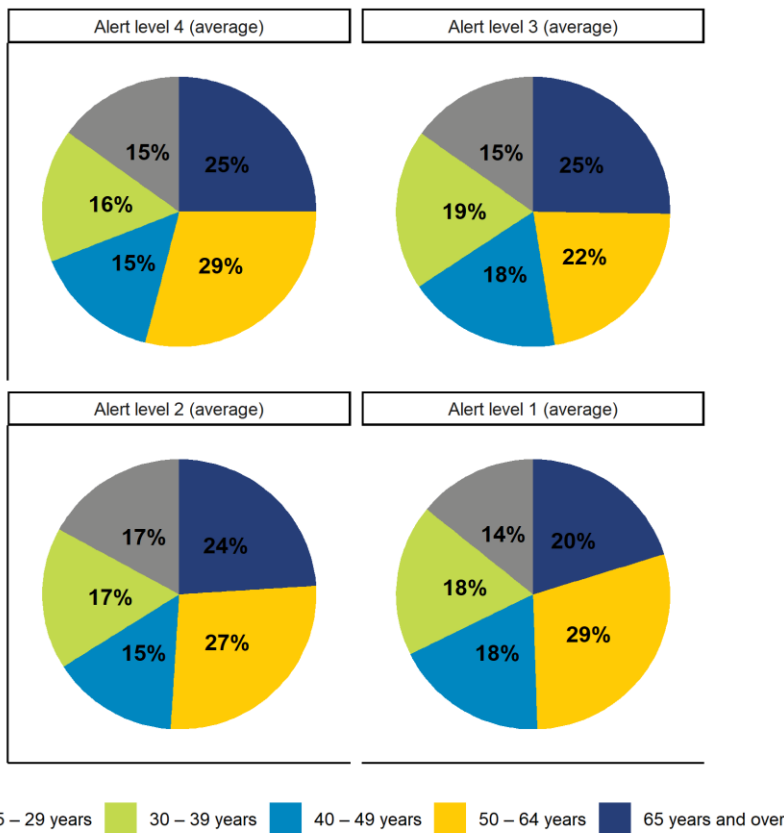
**Table 2: The length of ALs and the number of interviewed adults.**

Alert Level	Time period	Number of interviews
AL4	25/03 – 27/04 (interviews started 12/04)	629
AL3	27/04 – 13/05	693
AL2	13/05 – 8/06	1033
AL1	From 8/06 (interviews terminated 15/06)	287
Total	Interviews continued between 12/04 – 15/06	2642

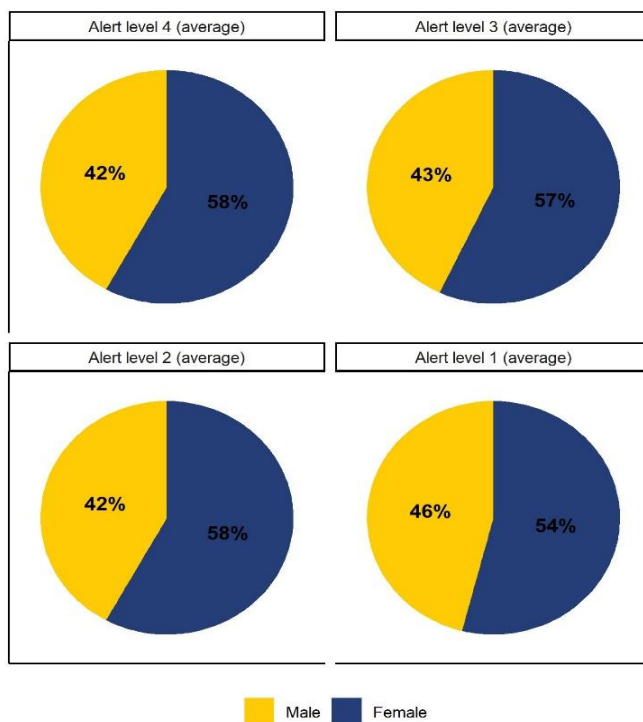
**Note.** Each AL started at 23.59 of the day listed in the table.

The randomness of the selection is re-confirmed by stable age and sex structure of the sample over time. The breakdown of the respondents by sex and age is presented in the following charts.

**Figure 12: Age of respondents by ALs**



**Figure 13: Sex of respondents by ALs**



Approximately 370 people were contacted each week aiming to achieve approximately 300 finalised interviews (the response rate during the last week of interviewing was 82%). The average length of an interview is about 12 minutes. The survey follows the NZCVS strict approach to privacy and confidentiality and no contact details of interviewed adults are released.

**June 29, 2020**

**Sector Group**

**Research and Evaluation Unit**