

# Teen Mental Health



June 2020



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PART 1:

# Introduction & Methodology



# Background & Objectives

## Hypotheses

- Young people who are resilient are **less likely to**: engage in negative health behaviors (e.g., excessive screen time, drug abuse/substance use), engage in negative health behaviors as coping mechanisms during COVID-19, or experience mental health issues (e.g., anxiety and depression)
- Young people who are resilient are **more likely to**: speak with their peers about mental health in person/on social media and be able to identify and seek out positive coping mechanisms

## Research Objectives

- Assess youth perspectives on the state of mental health issues in their community and the nation, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Explore the role of resilience in mental health and health behaviors
- Pave a path forward, as desired by teens



# Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of 4-H from May 4 to May 14, 2020 with 1,516 respondents ages 13-19.

We also collected data on 4-H participation (n=230 4-Hers and n=1,286 non 4-Hers).

We defined “resilient teens” as those who agreed with the following statement: “I consider myself to be resilient” (top 2 box), which was 68% of those surveyed.





# Executive summary

- Teens today are more confident in their physical health than their mental health, with 81% saying mental health is a “significant issue for young people in the U.S.” and two-thirds believing “the experience of COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their generation's mental health” (64%). In fact, teens report that they more than 3 times as likely to feel peer pressure to hide their feelings, than to drink or do drugs.
- In particular, teens who are less resilient seem to struggle, reporting more frequent feelings of anxiety and depression, as well as a stronger struggle with ambiguity and pressure from others to hide their feelings. Resilient teens, on the other hand, report higher levels of confidence solving their own mental health struggles, as well as helping others with theirs; they also feel more equipped to tap into support networks than their non-resilient counterparts.
- Ultimately, teens are calling for major change in the mental health conversation, with 81% saying, “it's time for Americans to talk more openly and honestly about mental health issues in this country.” 4H-ers are especially likely to have taken action by donating to mental health charities, joining mental health clubs and online communities, and advocating for mental health legislature.



PART 2:

# The state of teen mental health



# Teens in America are facing unprecedented stress today, amplified by COVID-19

Many believe COVID-19 will have lasting long-term impacts on their generation, their families, and society overall

67%

“Sometimes the pressure I feel at school, home, etc. feels like too much to handle.”

43% also say, “the way things are going, I don't know how I'm going to cope with the stress if it continues at this pace.”

64%

“The experience of COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on my generation's mental health.”

71% also feel misunderstood by other generations, saying, “most older people do not understand the struggles of young people today.”

65%

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of society overall.

65% also say, “the current pandemic has increased stress on my family.”





# School and an uncertain future are top stressors for teens during the pandemic

Teens who are less resilient are also more likely to face mental health issues as a result of ambiguity

Which of the following can make you anxious or depressed?



71%  
School  
Work



65%  
Thinking About  
My Future



58%  
No Identifiable  
Reason  
63% non-resilient  
vs 55% resilient



55%  
Pressure From  
Family



48%  
Social  
Isolation



47%  
Concerns About  
The World



46%  
Social  
Interactions



43%  
Pressure  
To Fit In  
51% non-resilient  
vs 39% resilient



41%  
Using  
Social Media



34%  
Family Financial  
Stress



22%  
Defining  
My Identity  
27% non-resilient  
vs 20% resilient



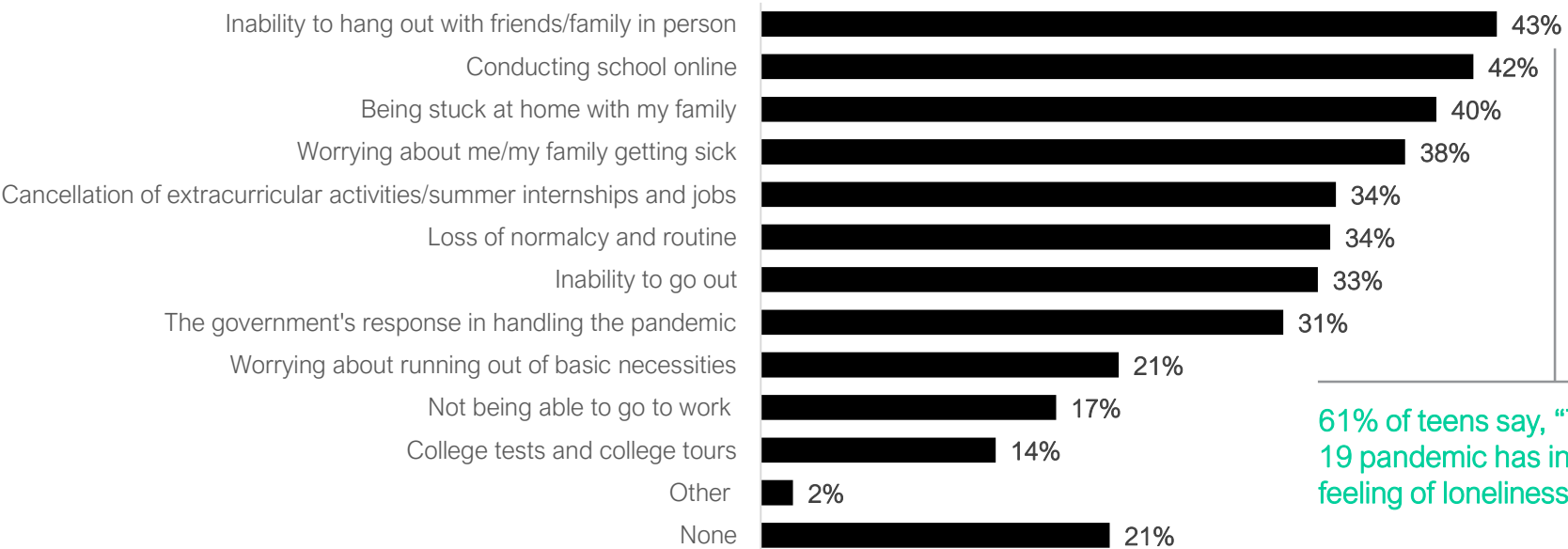
11%  
Drinking or  
Doing Drugs



# COVID-19 has also brought on its own set of unique stressors

Many struggle with isolation as 6 in 10 teens say their sources of support are harder to reach during COVID-19 than usual

During the COVID-19 pandemic, has any of the following made you feel anxious or depressed?



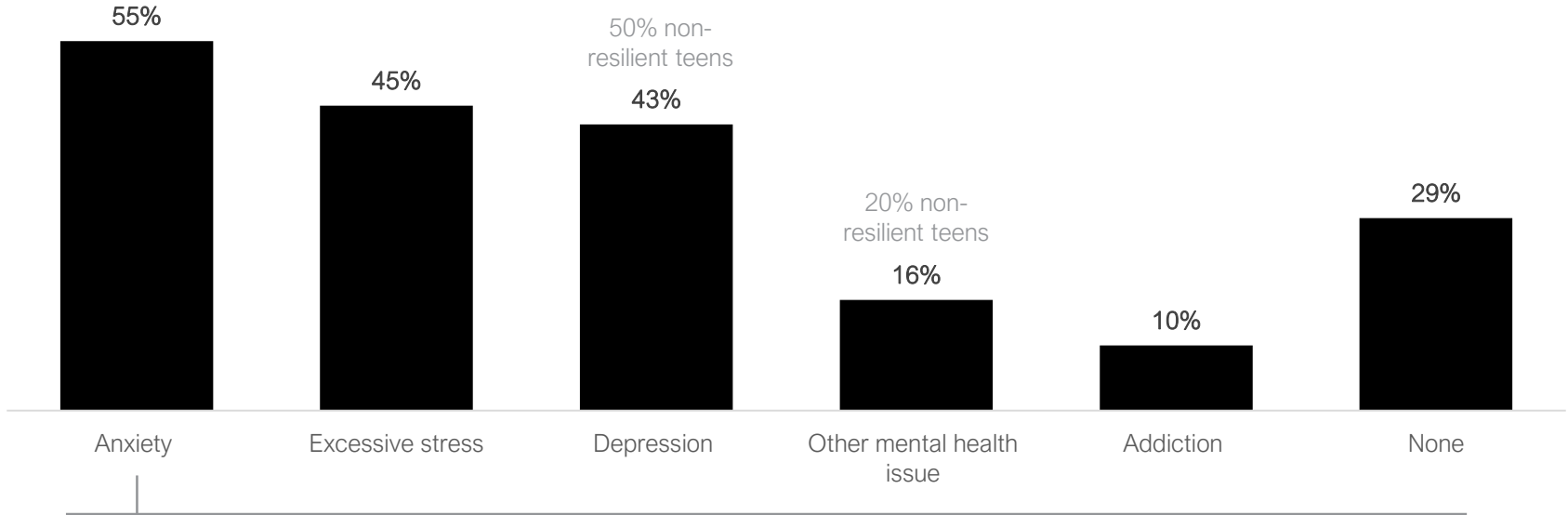
61% of teens say, "The COVID-19 pandemic has increased my feeling of loneliness."



# In this stressful climate, 7 in 10 teens have experienced struggles with mental health

Non-resilient teens are especially likely to battle depression and other mental health issues

Have you ever experienced any of the following?



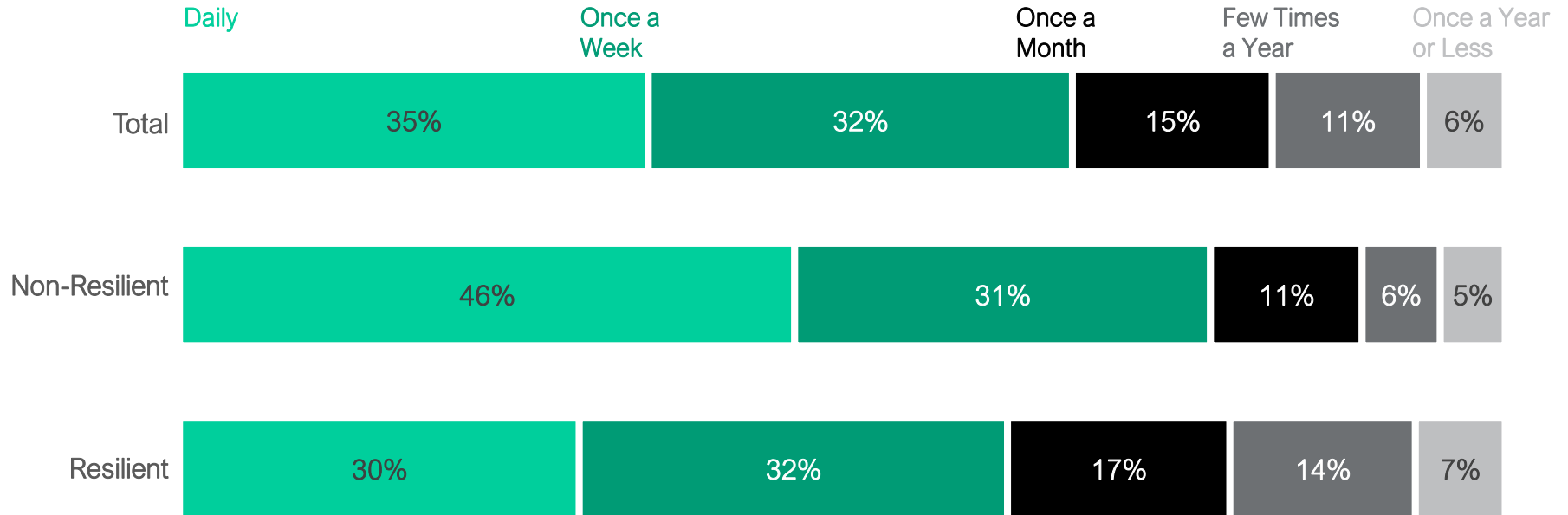
Half of teens say they feel anxious or depressed “more frequently than their peers” (48%)



# More than a third feel of those who feel anxious or depressed feel it daily

Non-resilient teens are especially likely to report frequent mental health struggles

How often do you feel anxious or depressed?

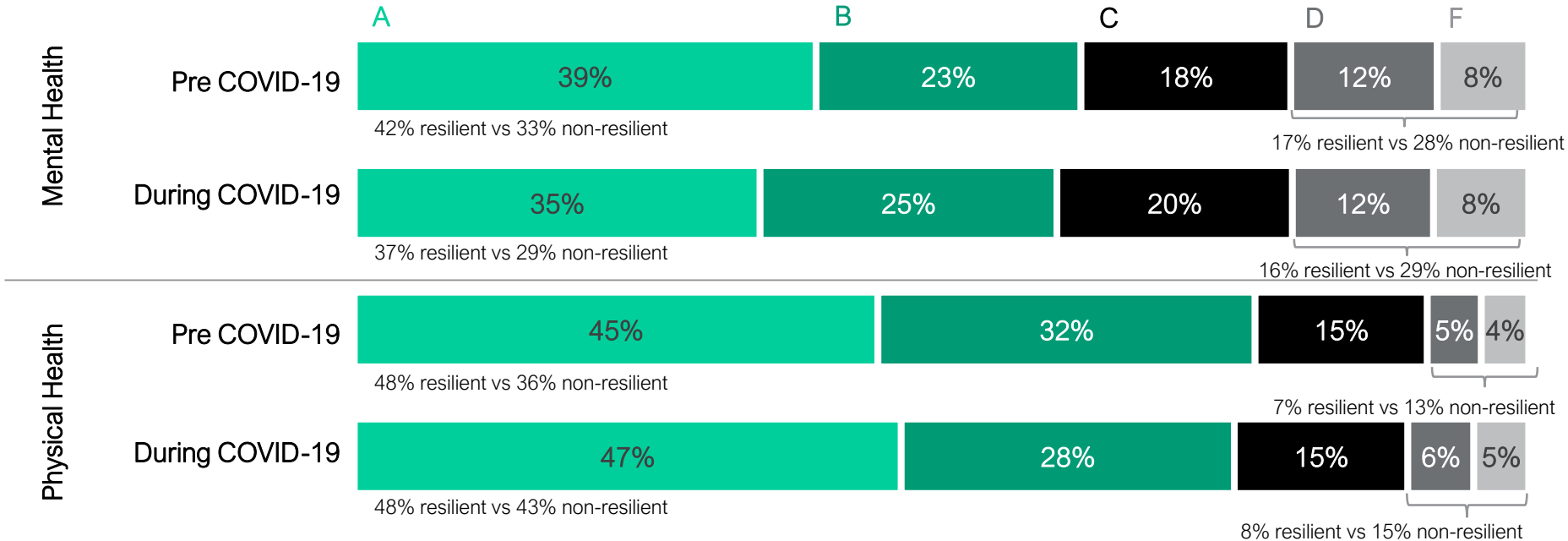




# Teens are more confident in their physical health than their mental health, with only 1 in 3 giving themselves an “A” for mental wellbeing during COVID

Two-thirds believe, “mental health is a more important issue for my generation than physical health” (64%)

If you had to give yourself a letter grade for your physical and mental health, what would it be?





# Teens also report feeling 3 times as likely to experience peer pressure to hide their feelings, then they do to drink or do drugs

Have you ever felt pressure to do any of the following from others?



67%

Keep my feelings to myself



67%

Pretend to feel better to not worry anyone



65%

Deal with my feelings on my own



64%

Put my feelings aside to get something else done



19%

Use drugs, drink alcohol, vape

75% say, “there is still a stigma around mental health issues in this country,” while 62% say they are “tired of pretending to be happy all the time, being sad or anxious sometimes is part of a human experience.”

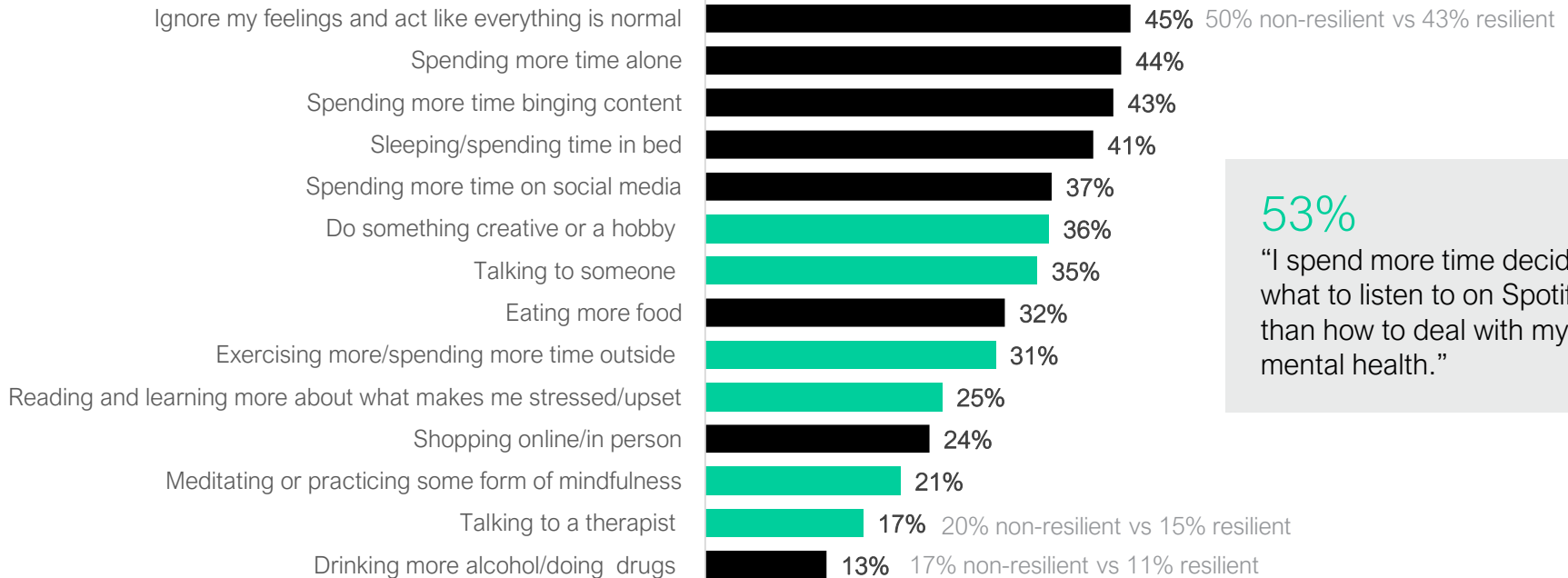


# Most are ignoring their feelings to cope, especially non-resilient teens

They are more likely to turn to screen time binging content and social media than talking to someone about their issues

Which of the following do you use to help you when you feel anxious or depressed during normal times?

■ Unhealthy coping mechanisms ■ Healthy coping mechanisms



53%

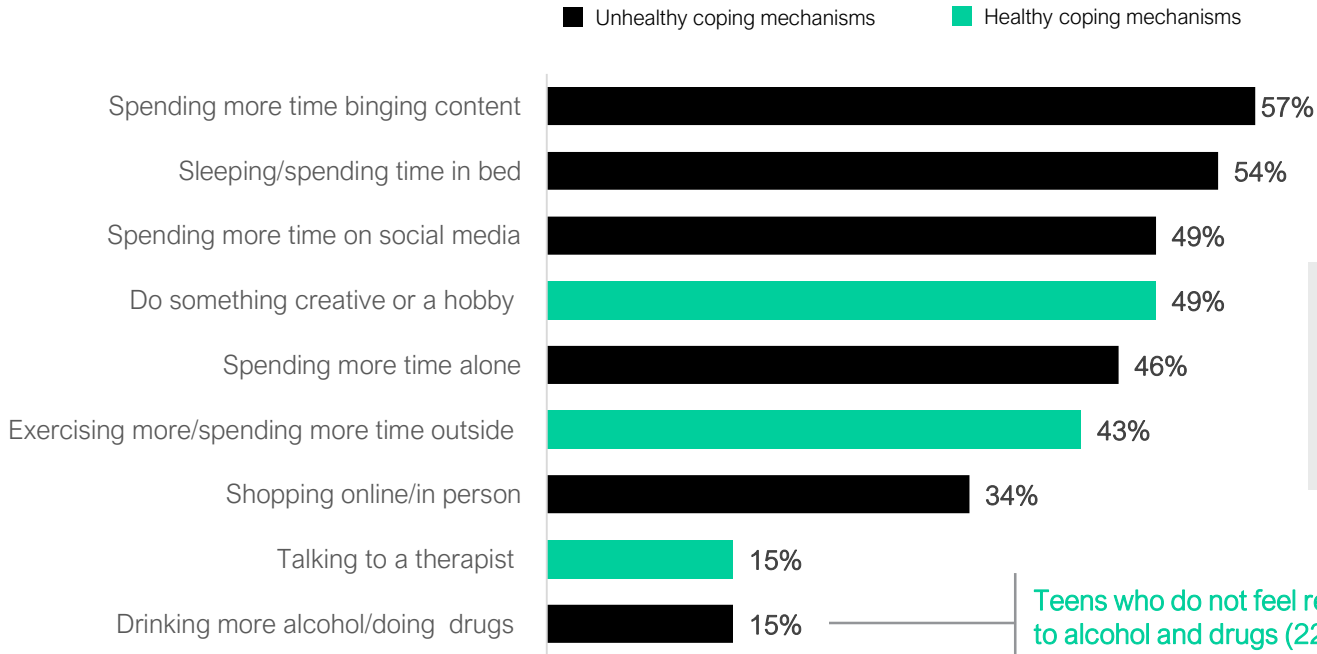
“I spend more time deciding what to listen to on Spotify than how to deal with my mental health.”



# Screen time and sleep are also rising as teens turn to 'vices' to cope during COVID-19

60% say, "it's hard to have healthy coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of COVID-19 under the current stay-at-home orders"

Which of the following do you use to help you when you feel anxious or depressed during COVID-19?



42% of teens admit they've been leaning into their 'vices' (e.g., unhealthy food, vaping) and unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

Teens who do not feel resilient are twice as likely to turn to alcohol and drugs (22% vs 12% resilient teens)

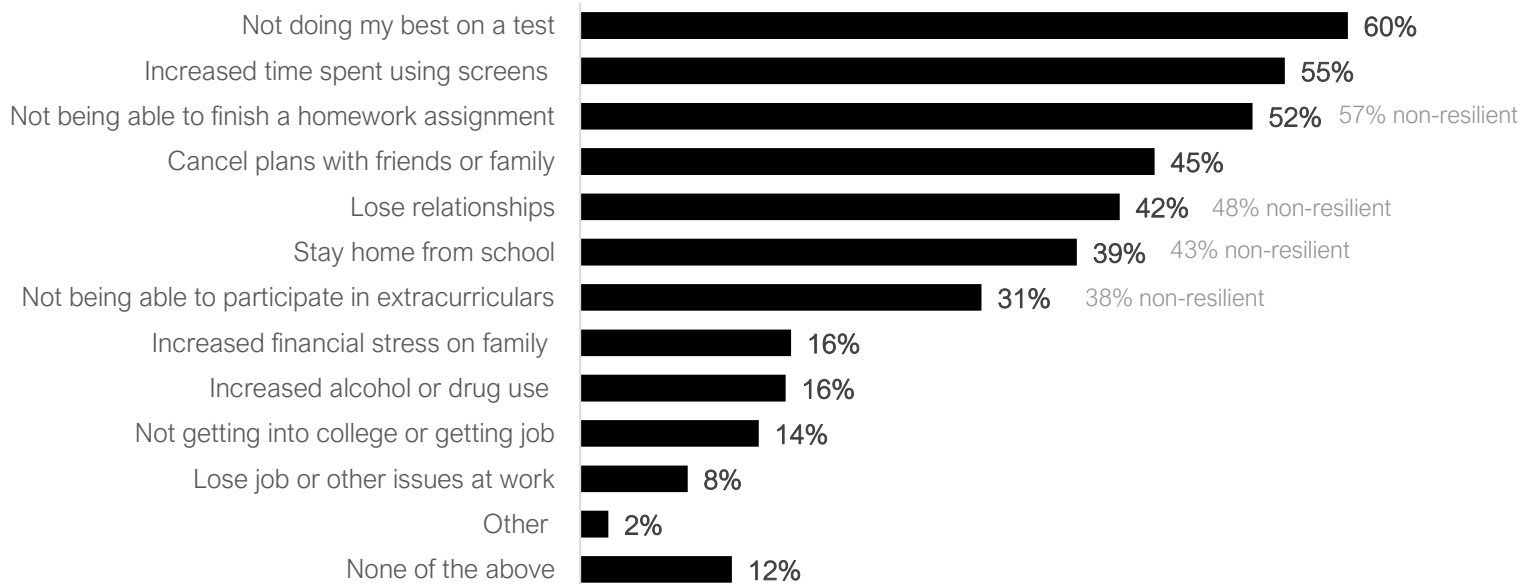




# For most, this cycle results in poor school performance and increased screen time

Non-resilient teens are especially likely to report isolation and withdrawal from activities

Have feelings of anxiety or depression ever caused you to do any of the following?

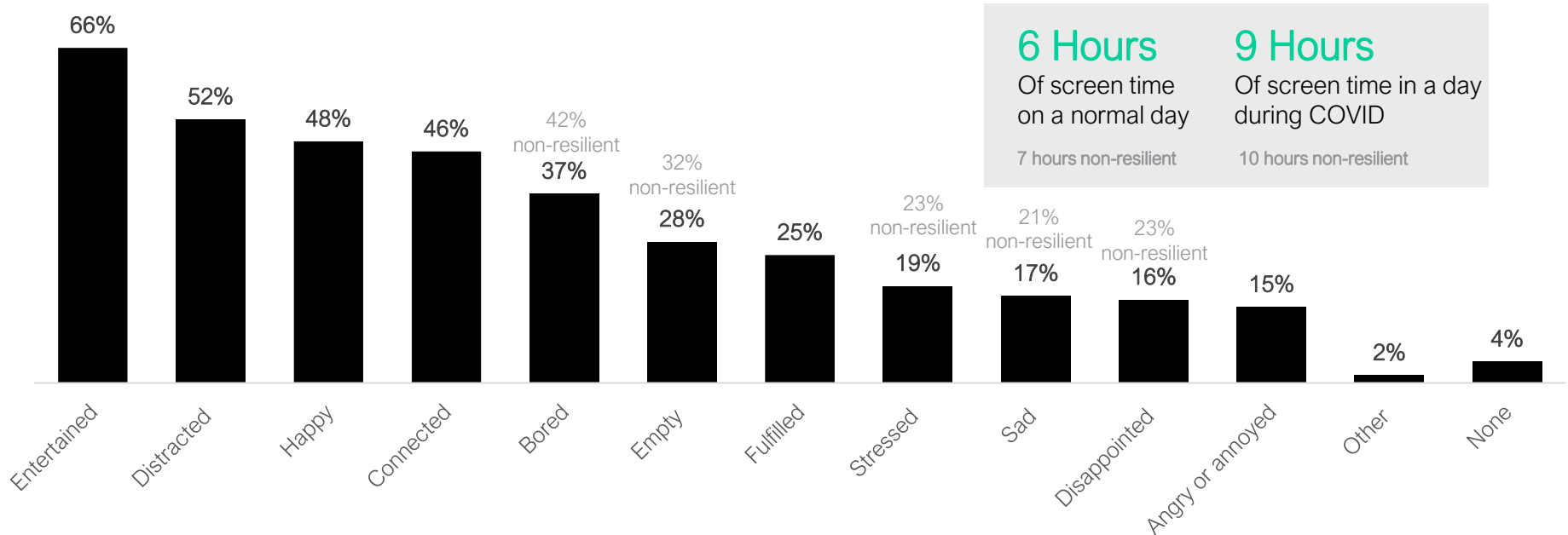




# In fact, teens report spending 75% of their waking hours on screens during COVID-19

Non-resilient teens are especially likely to report negative emotional consequences of screen time – and higher use of screens during the pandemic

How does screen time usually make you feel?

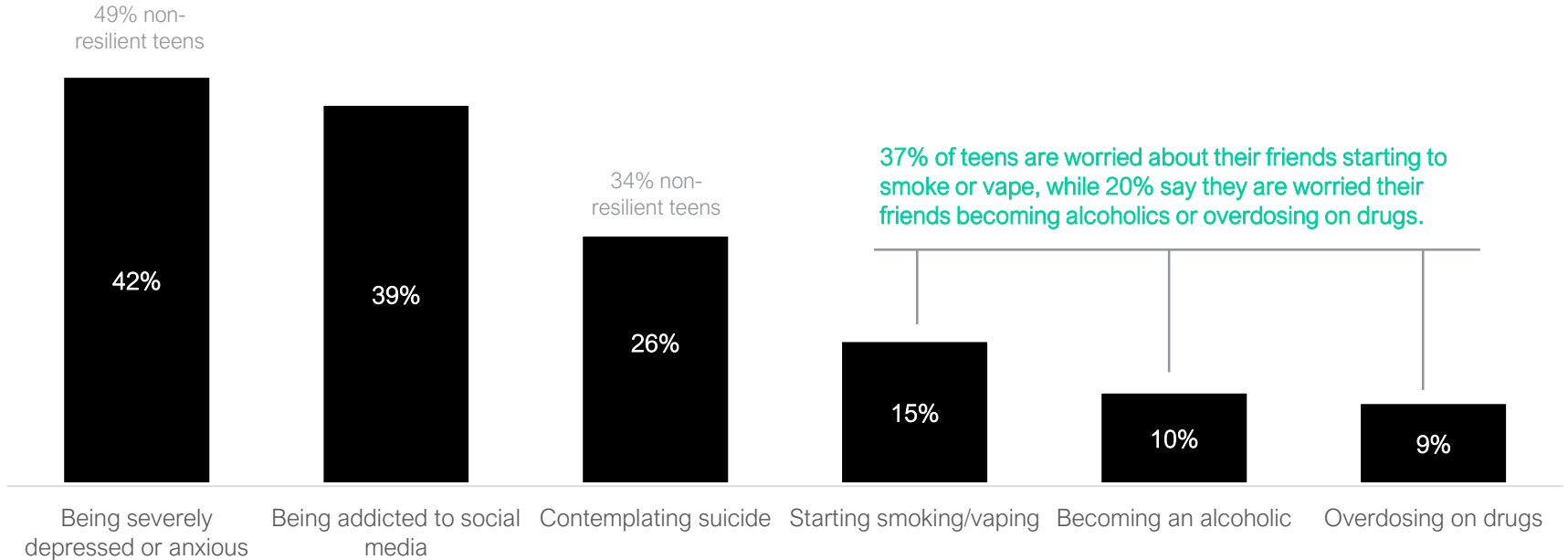




# Leading to concern among many teens that these issues will become more severe

Non-resilient teens are more likely to report concern of experiencing severe anxiety or depression and contemplating suicide

Have you ever been worried about experiencing any of the following yourself?





PART 3:

# The role of resilience in teen mental health



# Despite today's pressures, many teens do feel equipped to handle life's challenges

Specifically, teens who identify as resilient tend to be more confident in combatting mental health issues

68%

"I consider myself to be resilient."

67%

"I am confident in providing advice to help others with their mental health struggles."

72% resilient teens vs 57% non-resilient

61%

"I am confident solving my own mental health struggles."

68% resilient teens vs 46% non-resilient

58%

"I am confident in my ability to cope in a healthy way."

63% resilient vs 48% non-resilient teens



# Resilient teens tend to have stronger empathy and esteem

Which helps equip them to deal with today's pressures

Which of the following, if any, abilities or traits do you have?

	Resilient Teens	Non-Resilient Teens
Actively listen to others	67%	55%
Problem solving skills	64%	45%
Feel empathy for others	63%	53%
Persevere in tough situations	58%	35%
Effectively question things/people	53%	42%
Self-confidence/self-esteem	45%	27%
Communicate my point assertively	44%	31%

## Resilience Recognizes Resilience

Resilient teens are more likely to say their friends would describe them as a **problem solver** (58% resilient teens vs 44% non-resilient) and having **high self esteem** (43% resilient teens vs 30% non-resilient).



# Resilient teens understand the importance of addressing mental health

They acknowledge it is a major issue, especially for their generation

**83%** 87% resilient  
73% non-resilient

“It is important for people to take action with their mental health.”

**81%** 87% resilient  
66% non-resilient

“Mental health issues are a significant issue for young people in the U.S.”

**74%** 80% resilient  
63% non-resilient

“Mental health is a more important issue for my generation than previous generations.”



# Resilient teens are more likely to turn to healthy coping mechanisms

Teens who exhibit 4 or more resilience traits are finding healthier outlets to cope during COVID-19

Which of the following do you use to help you when you feel anxious or depressed during COVID-19?



**Doing Something Creative**

53% resilient

vs 43% non-resilient



**Exercising More**

49% resilient

vs 36% non-resilient



**Talking to Someone**

42% resilient

vs 36% non-resilient

**4-Hers are more likely than non 4-Hers to turn to information and meditation to copy during the pandemic:**

38% say they have turned to reading and learning more about what makes them stressed or upset (vs 27% non 4-Hers), while 34% are meditating or practicing mindfulness (vs 24% non 4-Hers).





## They feel more equipped to tap into support networks, and provide advice

Though all teens feel more equipped to give advice than to seek it, leaving them to desire more outlets for discussion

“I feel comfortable reaching out to others for support when they feel down.”

44% resilient  
34% non-resilient

“I am always available for my friends and family when they want to talk about how they feel.”

82% resilient  
65% non-resilient

### All teens are craving more communication:

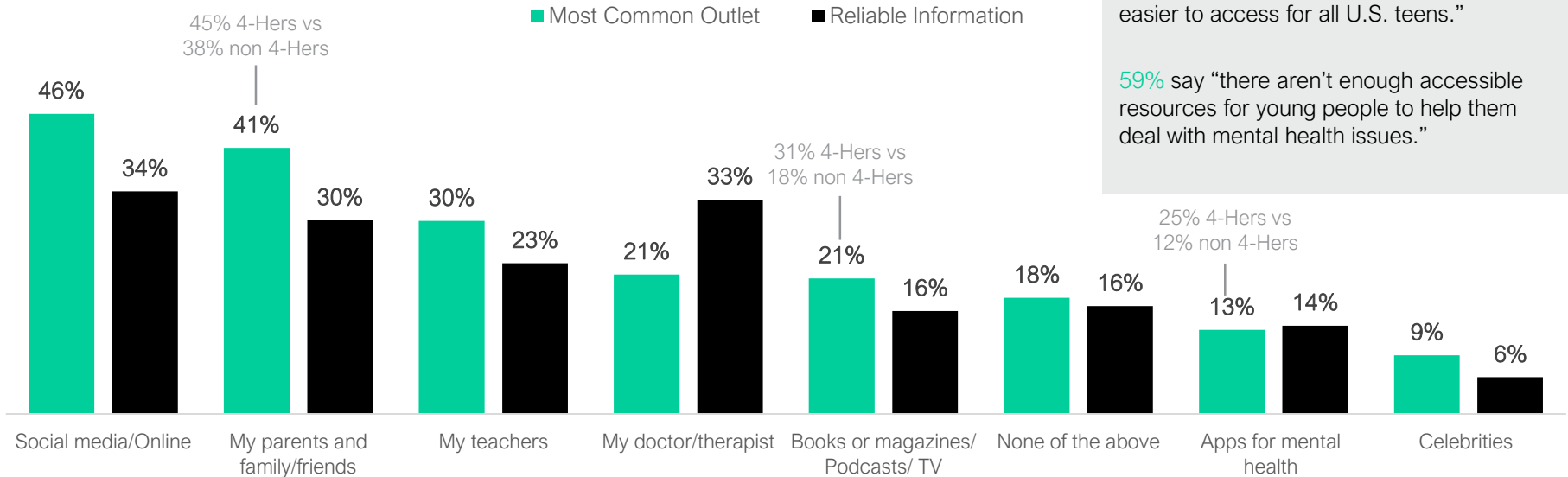
65% of teens say their family rarely talks about mental health issues, while 58% wish they had more outlets to talk about how they are feeling.



# Resilient teens seek information on mental health from a variety of sources

The information they find on social media is perceived to be about as reliable as information from their therapist

How do you normally learn about mental health and healthy coping mechanisms, and which provide the most reliable information?  
(% Resilient Teens)

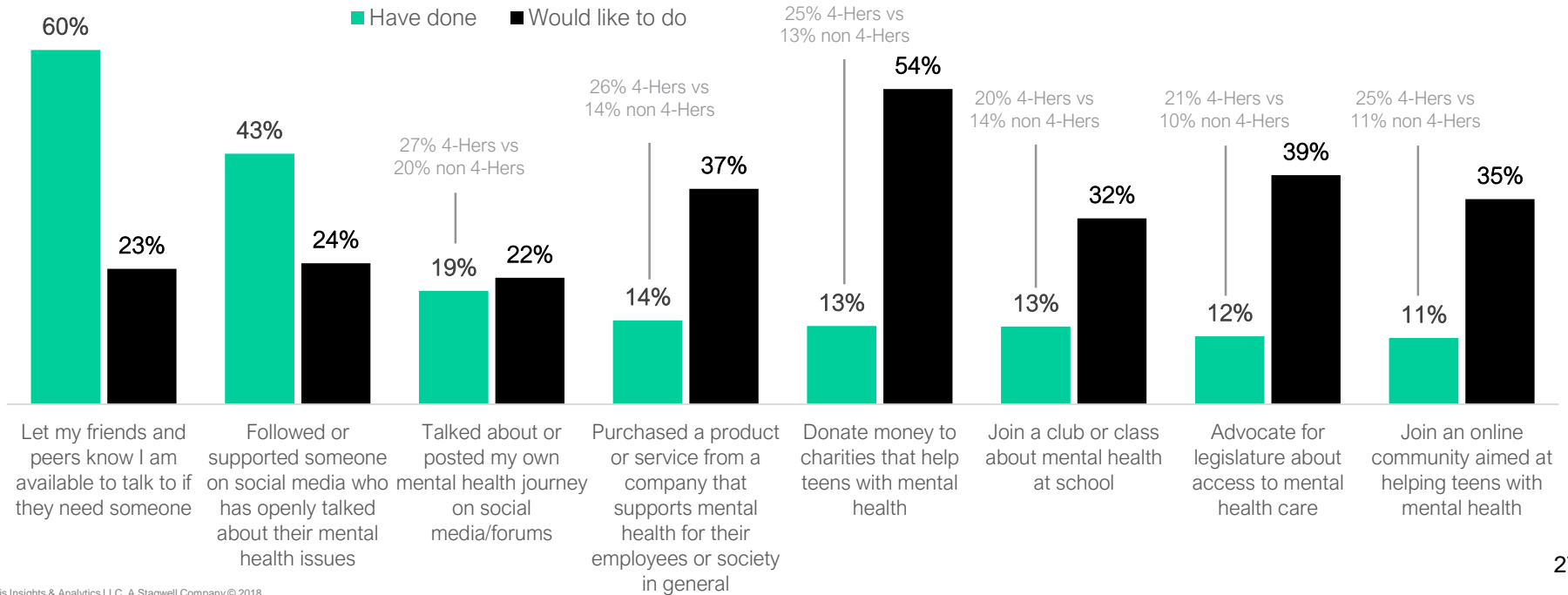




# Resilient teens are also building their own networks of mental health support

72% of resilient teens say they “are confident in providing advice to help others with their mental health struggles”

Have you done/would you like to do any of the following?  
(% Resilient Teens)





All teens want everyone to take more action to reduce stigma and open conversations around mental health – especially those who are resilient

82% 86% resilient  
71% non-resilient

“It's time for Americans to talk more openly and honestly about mental health issues in this country.”

79% 85% resilient  
68% non-resilient

“As a culture, we should embrace both the ups and downs of mental health; it's okay to feel bad sometimes.”

80% 84% resilient  
71% non-resilient

“I wish more young people were more comfortable asking for help when it comes to their mental health.”



# They are especially looking for more outlets and mental health education from their schools

**80%** 86% resilient teens  
67% non-resilient

“Everyone should feel they can be honest and themselves at school, with support from teachers and school staff.”

**79%** 83% resilient teens  
71% non-resilient

“I wish there was an inclusive environment (e.g., a safe space) for everyone in schools.”

**78%** 83% resilient teens  
68% non-resilient

“Schools should support “mental health days” to allow students to prioritize their health.”

**76%** 81% resilient teens  
68% non-resilient

“My school should offer more outlets for students struggling with mental health.”

**70%** 73% resilient teens  
64% non-resilient

“I wish I learned more about mental health and coping mechanisms in school.”



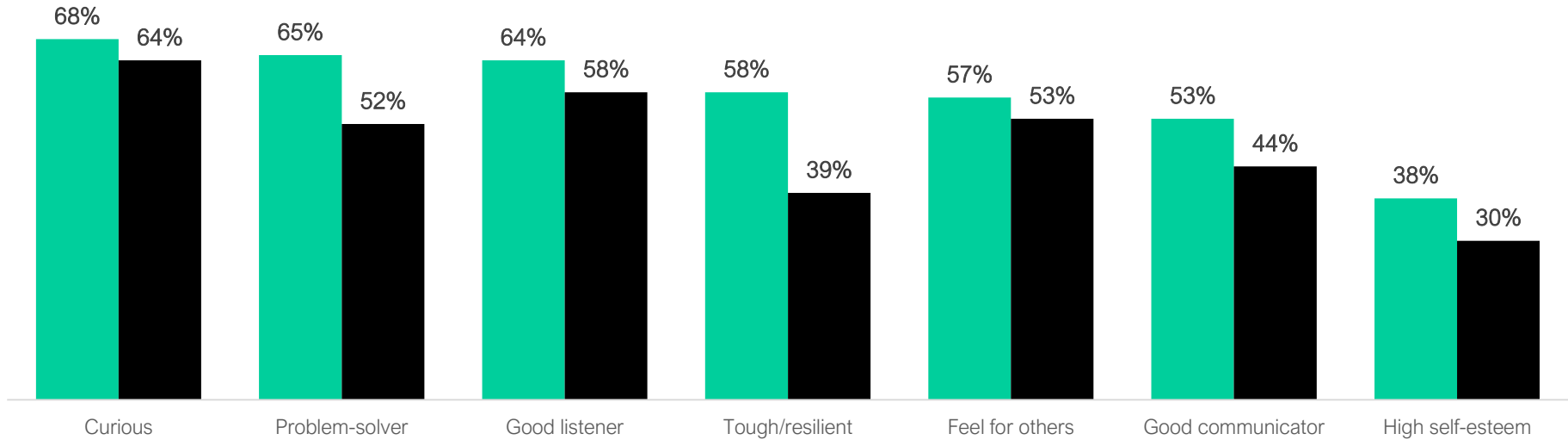
PART 4:

# Appendix



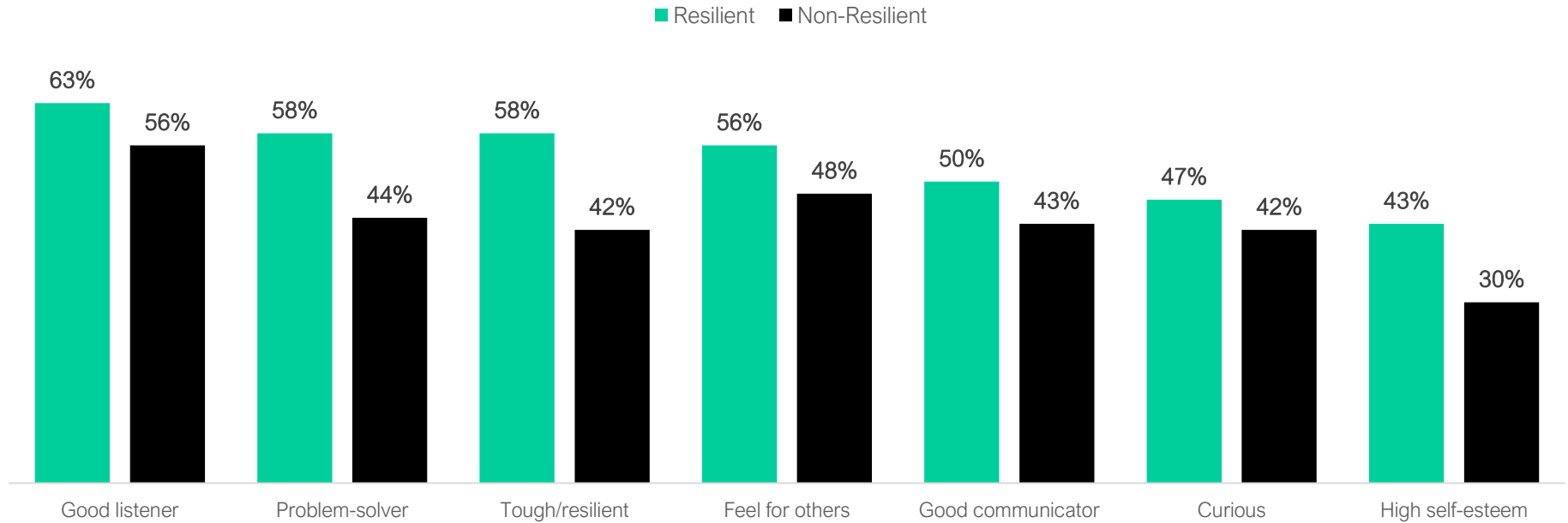
Which of the following traits, if any describe you?

■ Resilient ■ Non-Resilient





Which of the following traits, if any do others use to describe you?







Are you trying to improve any of the following traits?





PART 5:

# Miscellaneous Findings



# 4-Hers have their own set of specific concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic

4Hers are more likely to say that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have felt anxious or depressed due to the following:



**Cancellation of Extracurriculars, Jobs, Internships**  
44% 4-Hers vs  
32% non 4-Hers



**Loss of Normalcy and Routine**  
40% 4-Hers vs  
32% non 4-Hers



**Worrying about Running out of Basics**  
27% 4-Hers vs  
20% non 4-Hers



**Not Being Able to go to Work**  
23% 4-Hers vs  
16% non 4-Hers



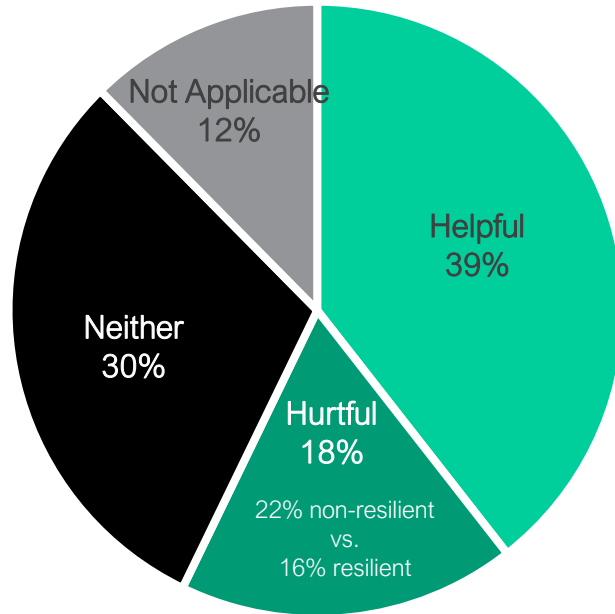
**College Tests and Tours**  
18% 4-Hers vs  
13% non 4-Hers



# Social media is viewed as more likely to be helpful than hurtful as it serves as a distraction in isolation

Screen time has increased for teens during the COVID-19 pandemic

Overall, do you think social media has been more helpful or hurtful to your mental health during COVID-19?



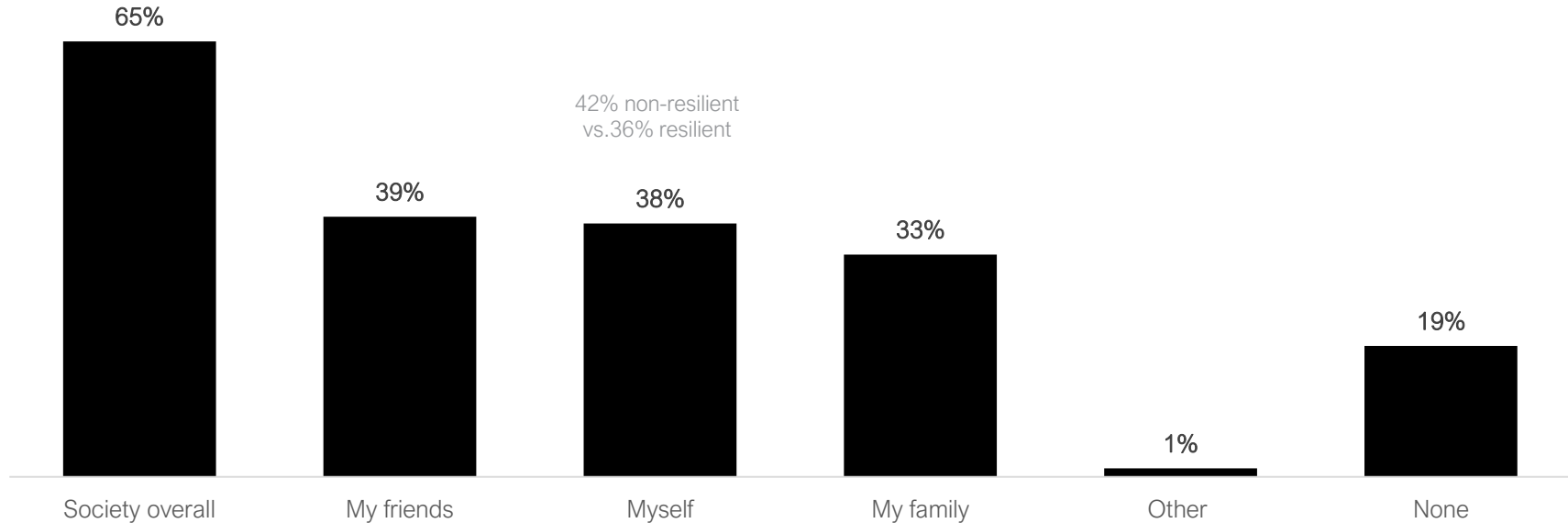
64%

“I have been using social media more to feel connected during COVID-19 pandemic.”



# Teens expect wide societal implications from the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to mental health

Do you believe COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of any of the following people?





# There is growing concern of becoming severely depressed, anxious, and addicted to social media

Have you ever been worried about any of the following groups experiencing the following?

