

HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED THE UK'S MENTAL HEALTH

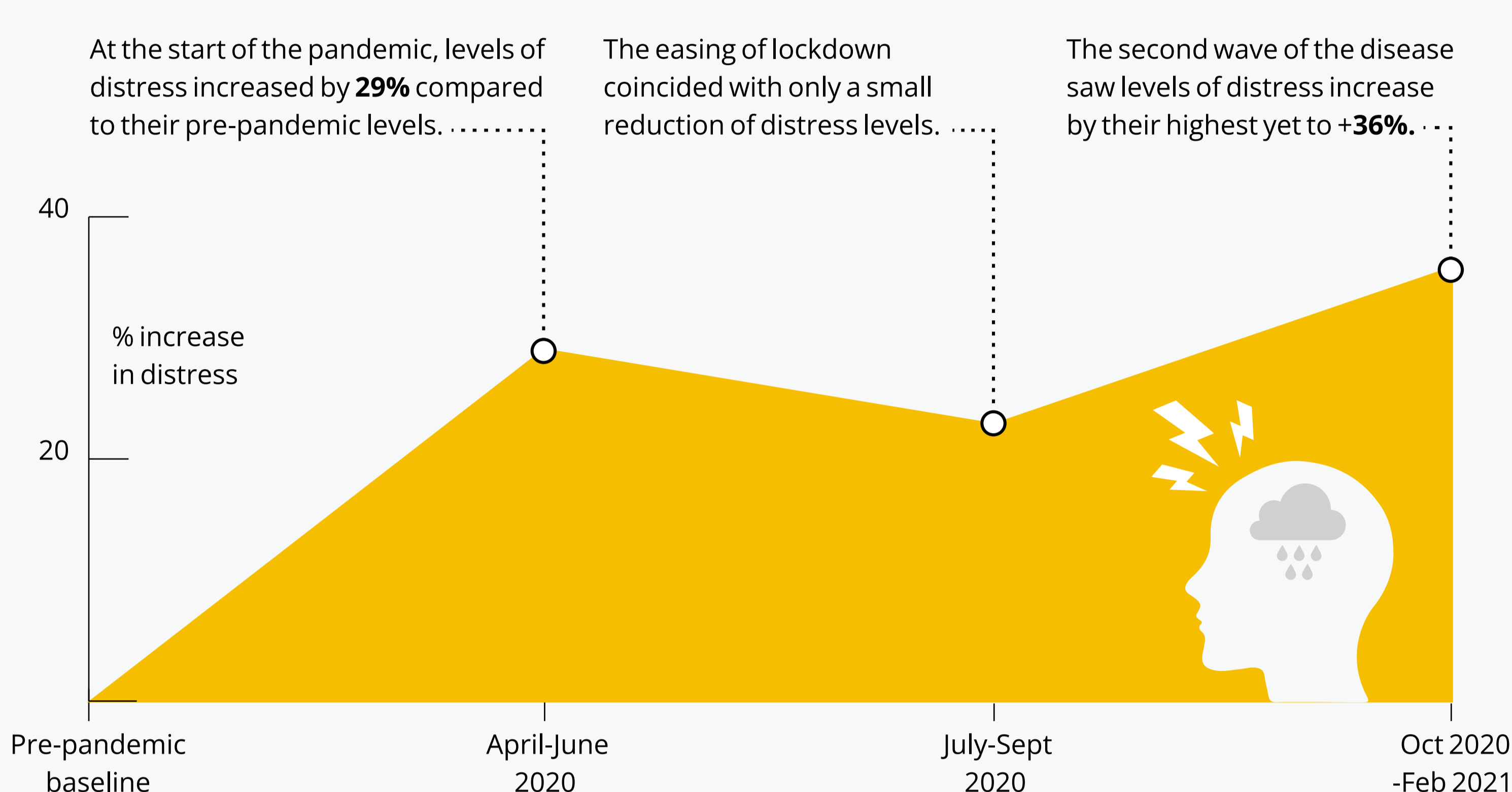


Levels of distress varied by sex, age and education level.



A nation in distress

There was a sustained increase in mental distress in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to results from 11 longitudinal studies.

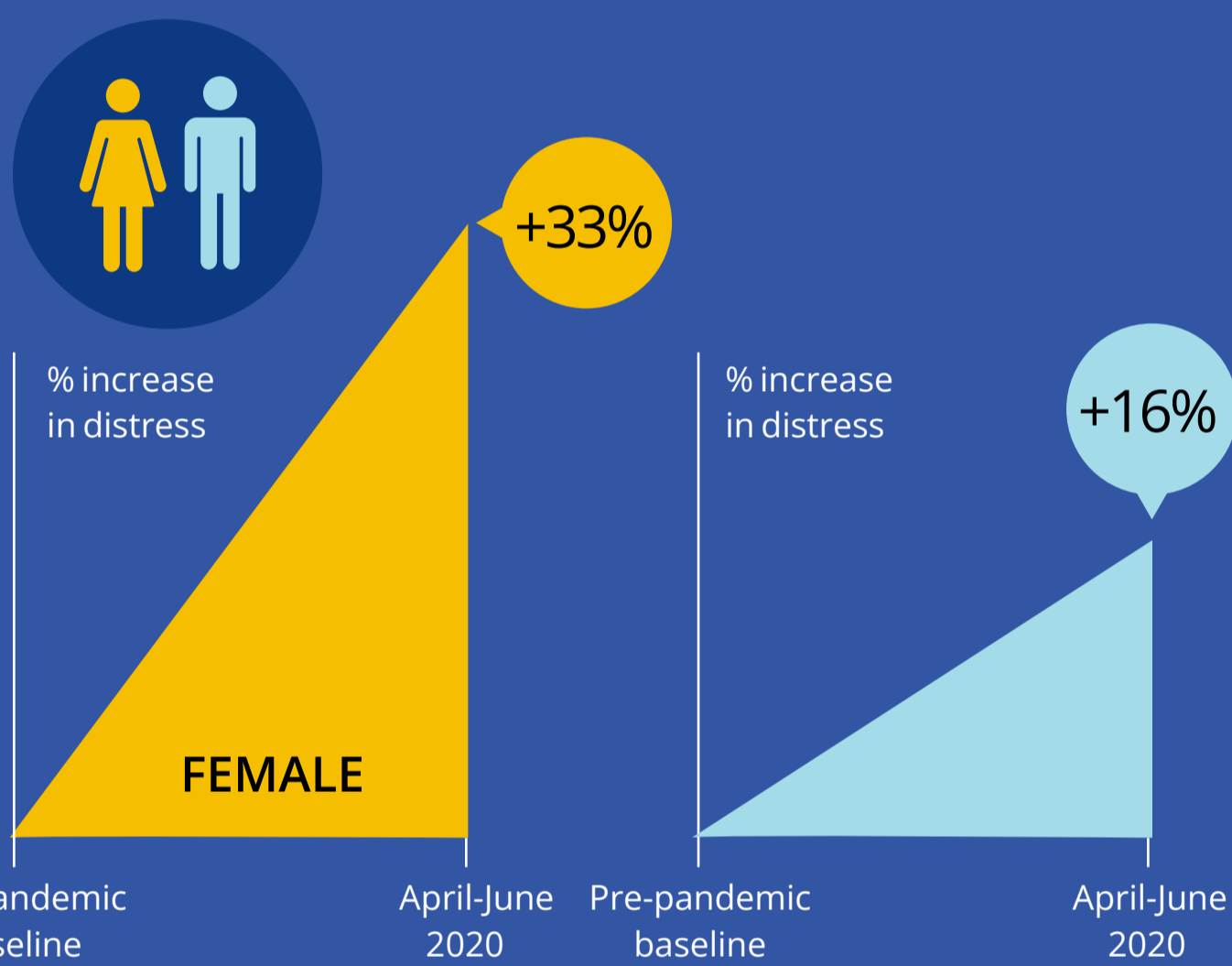


But the pandemic did not affect everyone equally

Age, sex and education levels affected people's experiences of the pandemic.

Sex

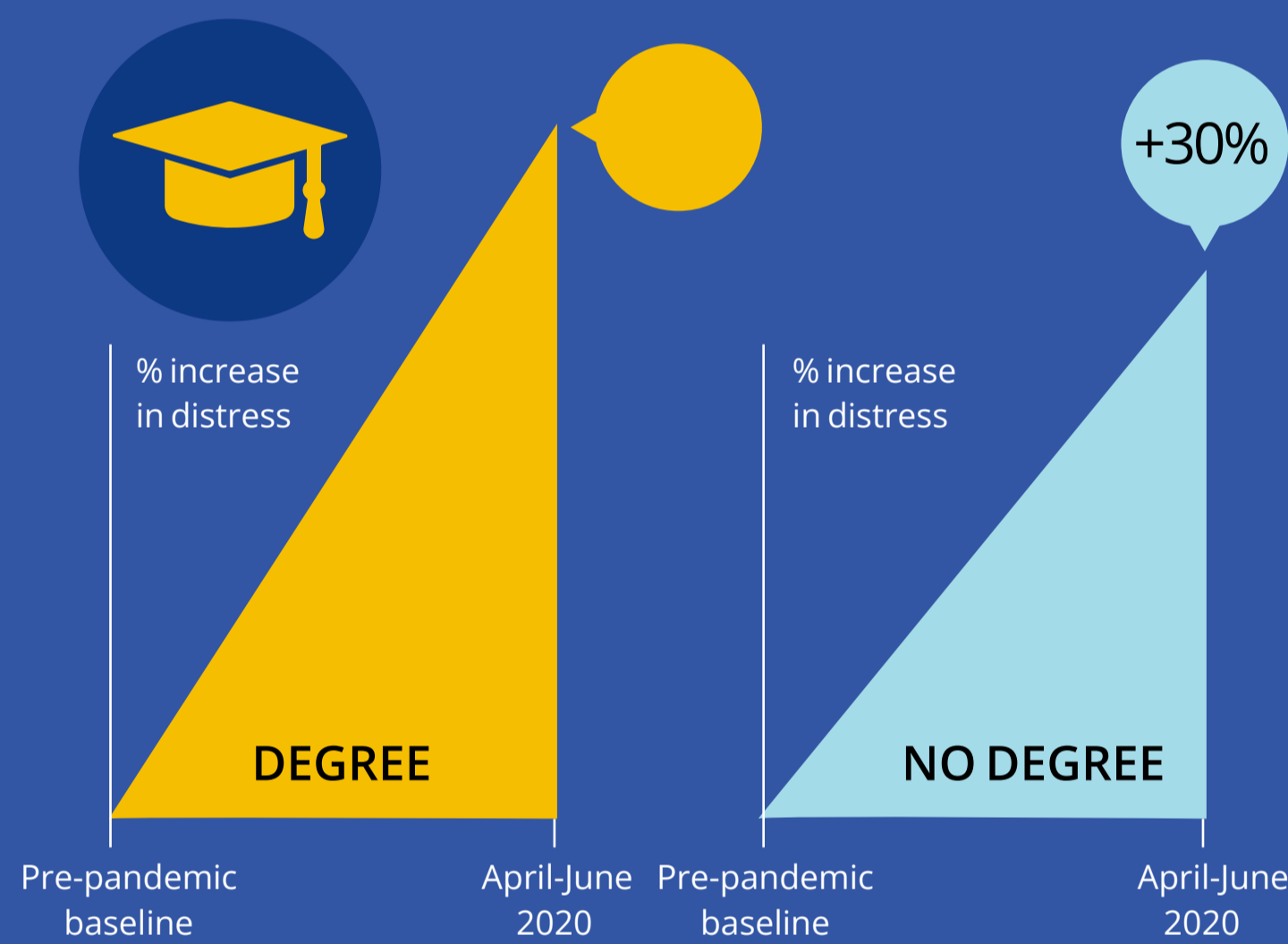
Females experienced more mental distress than males.



This might be due to a range of reasons including greater caring duties taken on by females and worse employment outcomes during the pandemic. Females also make up the majority of frontline health workers¹.

Level of education

People with degrees saw their mental distress increase more compared to those without degrees during the pandemic.

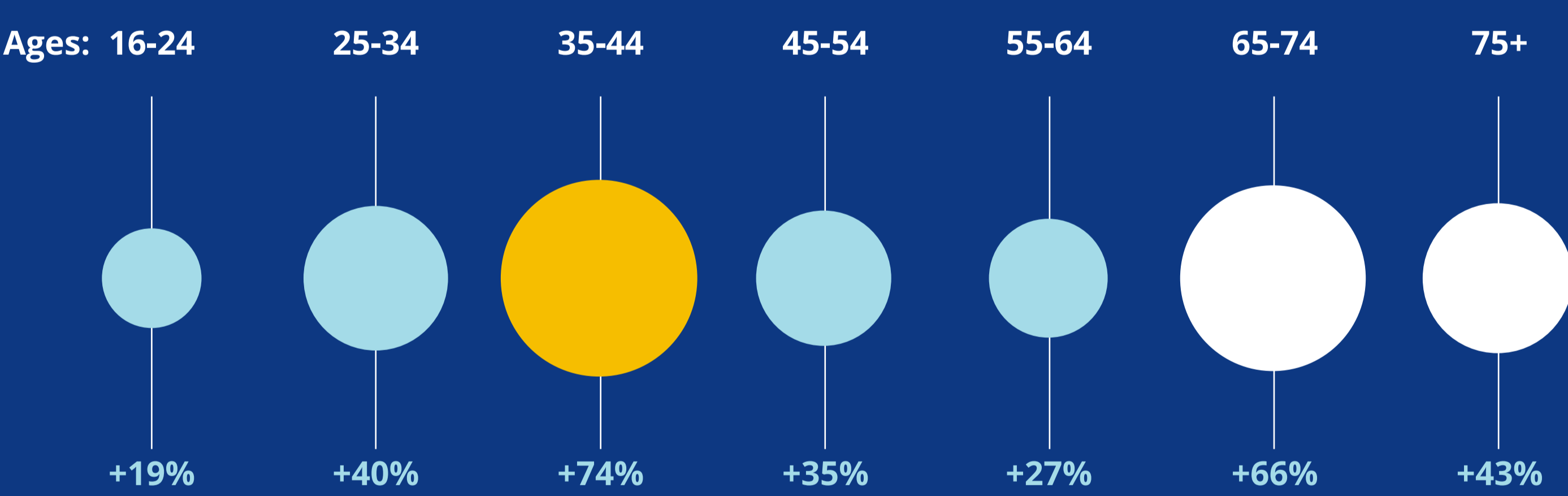


Note however that pre-pandemic distress was lower in those with degrees, so their increasing mental distress was from a lower baseline level of difficulties.

Age

Middle-aged people (35-44) and older people (65 and over) saw the highest increase in their distress levels.

% Increase Apr-June 2020 (from zero/ pre-pandemic baseline)



35-44

year olds are the most likely to have had primary school aged children to care for and home school during lockdown.



Over 65

Distress levels may have been higher for those 65 and over in the first lockdown as they were the most at risk from COVID-19.



90% of people who died in Covid's first wave were 65 and over².

Conclusion



The pandemic was a uniquely stressful time for people in the UK.



Relaxing restrictions did not coincide with a significant reduction in distress levels.



Levels of distress varied, depending on sex, education level and age.



Any future pandemic planning should include strategies for prevention and treatment of mental ill-health.

Sources

- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/divergence-mental-health-experiences-during-pandemic>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/what-do-we-know-about-people-who-died-covid-uk>

Patel, Robertson, Kwong, Griffith, Willan, Green et al. Psychological Distress Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Adults in the United Kingdom Based on Coordinated Analyses of 11 Longitudinal Studies. JAMA Network Open; 2022. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.7629