

A tradesperson, likely an electrician, is shown in profile, focused on his work. He is wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved shirt and blue overalls. He is holding a pair of yellow and black pliers. The background is a workshop or warehouse filled with various tools and equipment, including a rack of pliers and other hand tools. The lighting is bright and industrial.

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At what cost? Mental health and work realities for tradespeople

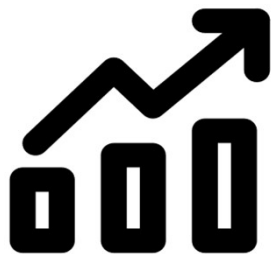
Winter 2021 Report

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Mental health and work realities for tradespeople

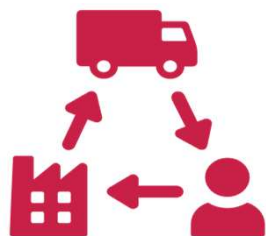
Some key facts and figures



Unprecedented demand
on shoulders of
tradespeople

4 in 5 homeowners
have looked to do some
work to their property
during COVID

**75,000 small trades
businesses[#] impacted by
a potential mental
health issue**



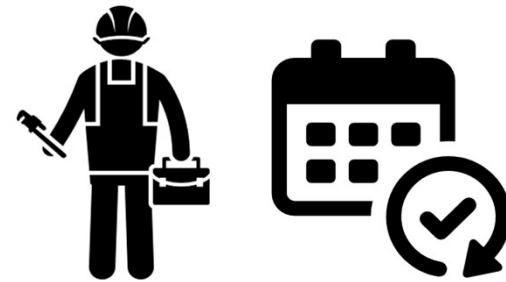
Supply chain problems and
labour shortages are
resulting in lower
productivity for **56%** of
business owners

*Mental health is more likely
to be an issue amongst these
tradespeople*

7 in 10
tradespeople say
that there is still a
stigma towards
seeking help for
mental health
amongst those
working in the sector



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Research methodology

Survey methodology

A short quantitative survey aimed at the plumbing and heating installation community

A representative sample of plumbers and heating engineers was collected during October 2021:



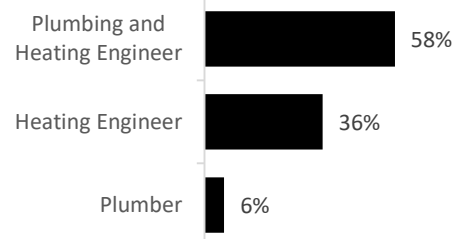
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Online trade surveys

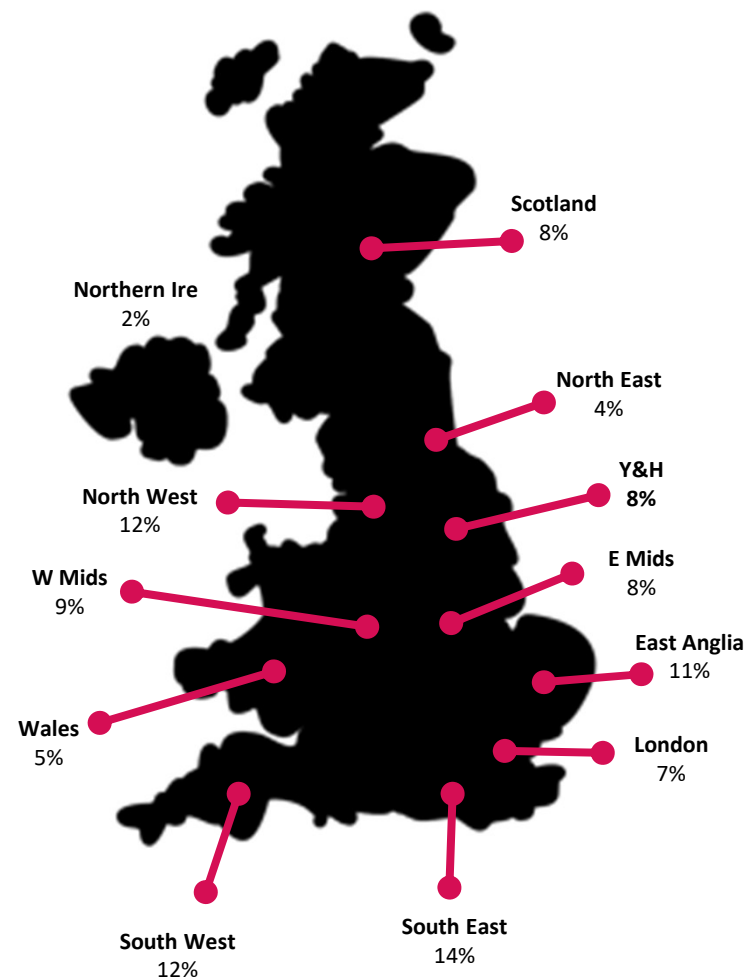
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Fieldwork dates ran from 2nd October – 10th October 2021



Trades from across the UK well represented – percentage of total responses according to region:



Survey methodology

This paper is also supplemented with consumer data from a large online screening exercise we carried out this Summer to assess home improvement activity across the UK



10,600

UK homeowner surveys

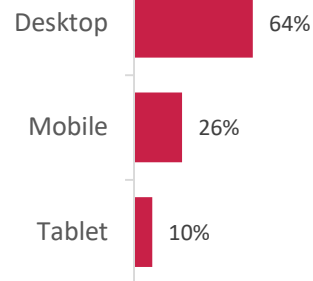


Social renters, private renters and those living with parents were excluded from this process

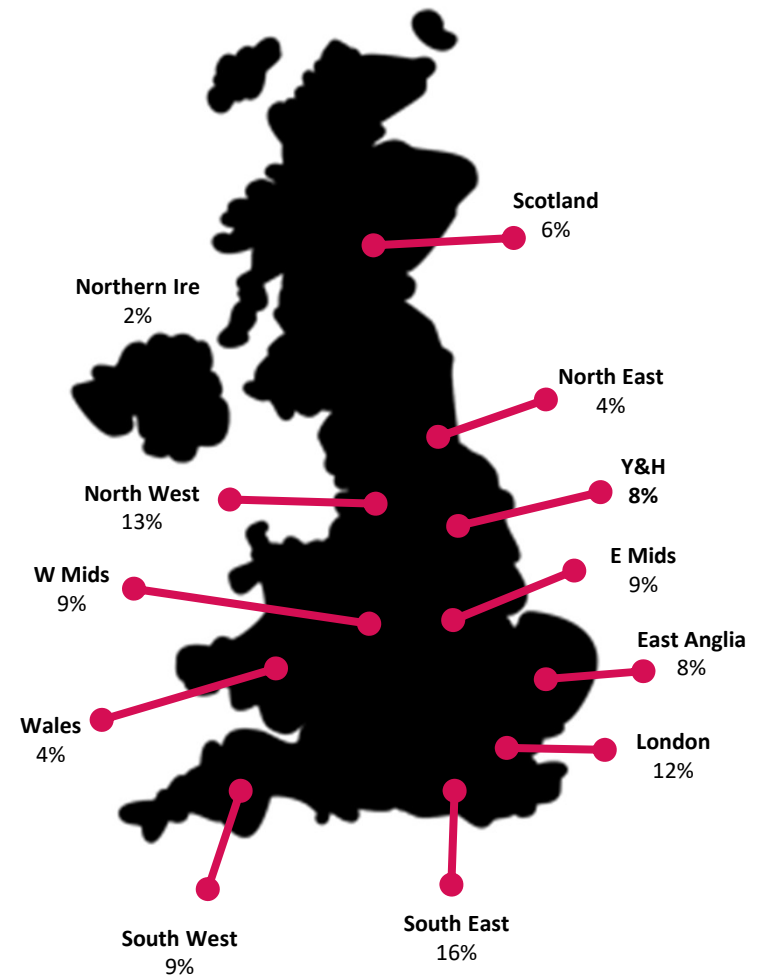


Fieldwork dates ran from 30th May – 30th June 2021

Interviews were undertaken online and homeowners had a choice to how to provide their answers



Households from across the UK well represented – percentage of total responses according to region:

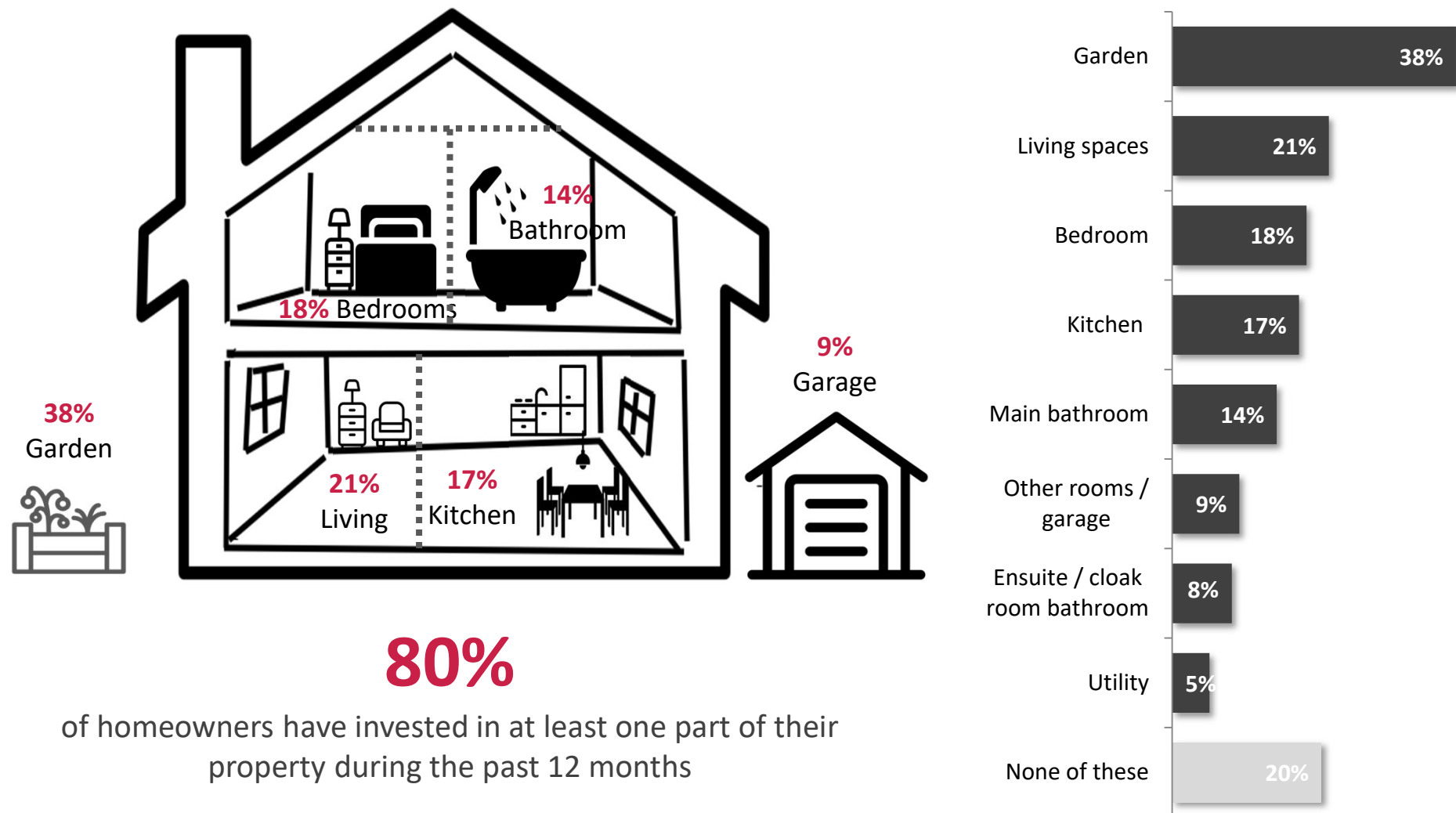




State of the market

Where in the home have consumers been spending money?

It's been a considerably busy time for home improvements with many homeowners choosing to invest cash into their properties



Unprecedented consumer demand

Jobs that might involve using tradespeople have been high across the home

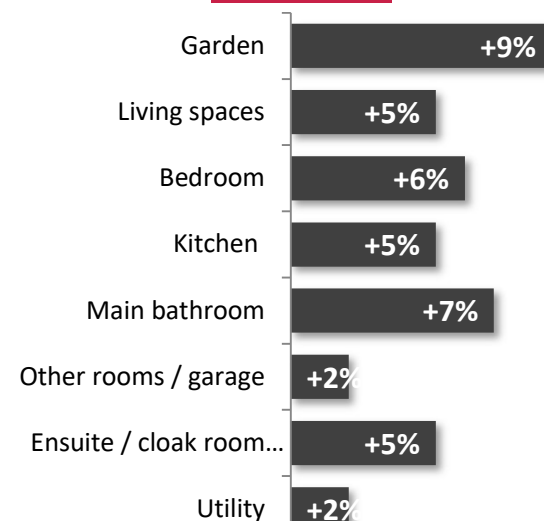


After removing the estimated 31% of homeowners who undertook decorating /painting the room, there has still been considerable work undertaken

	Any improvement work	Renovation / RMI work
Garden	38%	26%
Living spaces	21%	14%
Bedroom	18%	12%
Kitchen	17%	12%
Main bathroom	14%	10%
Other rooms / garage	9%	6%
Ensuite / cloak room bathroom	8%	6%
Utility	5%	3%



Those fortunate enough to experience an increase in their disposable income were, on average, 7pts more likely to invest in their home



Post COVID trading environment

Tradespeople endeavor to react to the consumer demand but openly admit there are significant challenges facing the sector

Sole trades and small business owners are well versed in adapting to economic 'feast and famine', but the trades we talk to on a regular basis paint a picture that is without parallel. Here is a flavour of the narrative we hear from those on the tools during the qualitative work we undertake on a regular basis:



"The phone just hasn't stopped ringing since last Summer"

"I try not to get too stressed about it, if you wanted you could work 7 days a week"

"I'm booking work in for next year now, I don't like to get too ahead of myself 'cos you don't know what's around the corner"

"If it was as easy as taking some more lads on I would but it's not as easy as that"

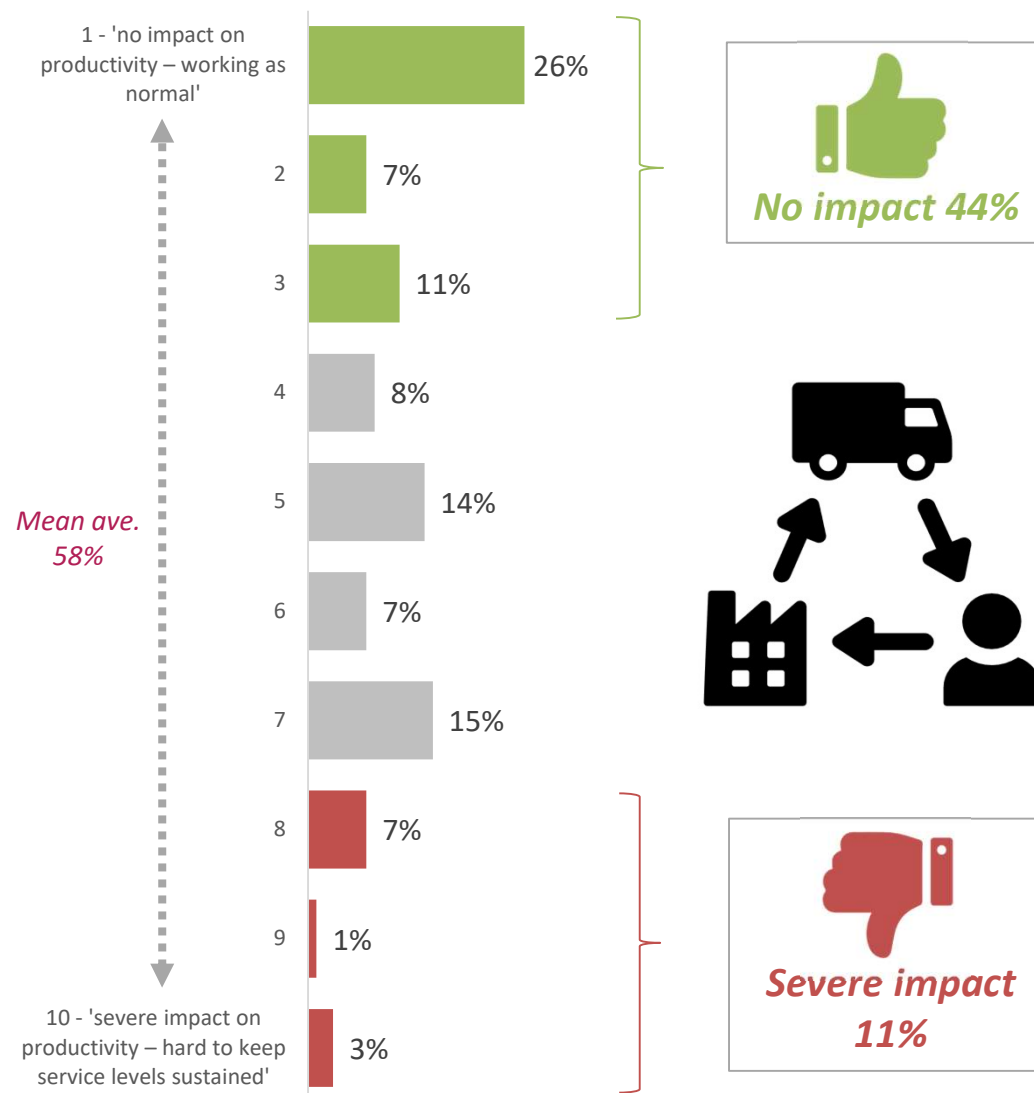
"I can be choosy about the jobs I respond to, yes I suppose I have been doing that"

"Customers have had more time to think about the things they want, some have high standards and I have to bring them back down to earth"

Where jobs haven't been going smoothly, or materials are delayed (we heard several examples of heavy-side and light-side supply issues) this adds further to the high levels of stress. Brands or merchants that mitigate this will succeed in the future

Work productivity challenges

Materials and labour shortages have impacted productivity levels; ultimately this is preventing the whole sector from benefitting from the surge in demand



Our results suggest that tradespeople are operating at an average of **58%** efficiency at the moment due to the net impact of these frictions in the market.

While just over 4 in 10 reported *minimal* impacts operationally, this does leave the remaining 60% with issues. Infact, 1 in 10 tradespeople say that these are 'severe'.

This certainly backs up some of our qualitative conversations where staffing and material supplies were still an issue for some.



We found even lower levels of 'productivity' in the sector last Summer. This was driven primarily by the prevailing COVID / distancing restrictions in place (see our Summer 2020 report for more details)



www.eurekaresearch.co.uk/covid19report

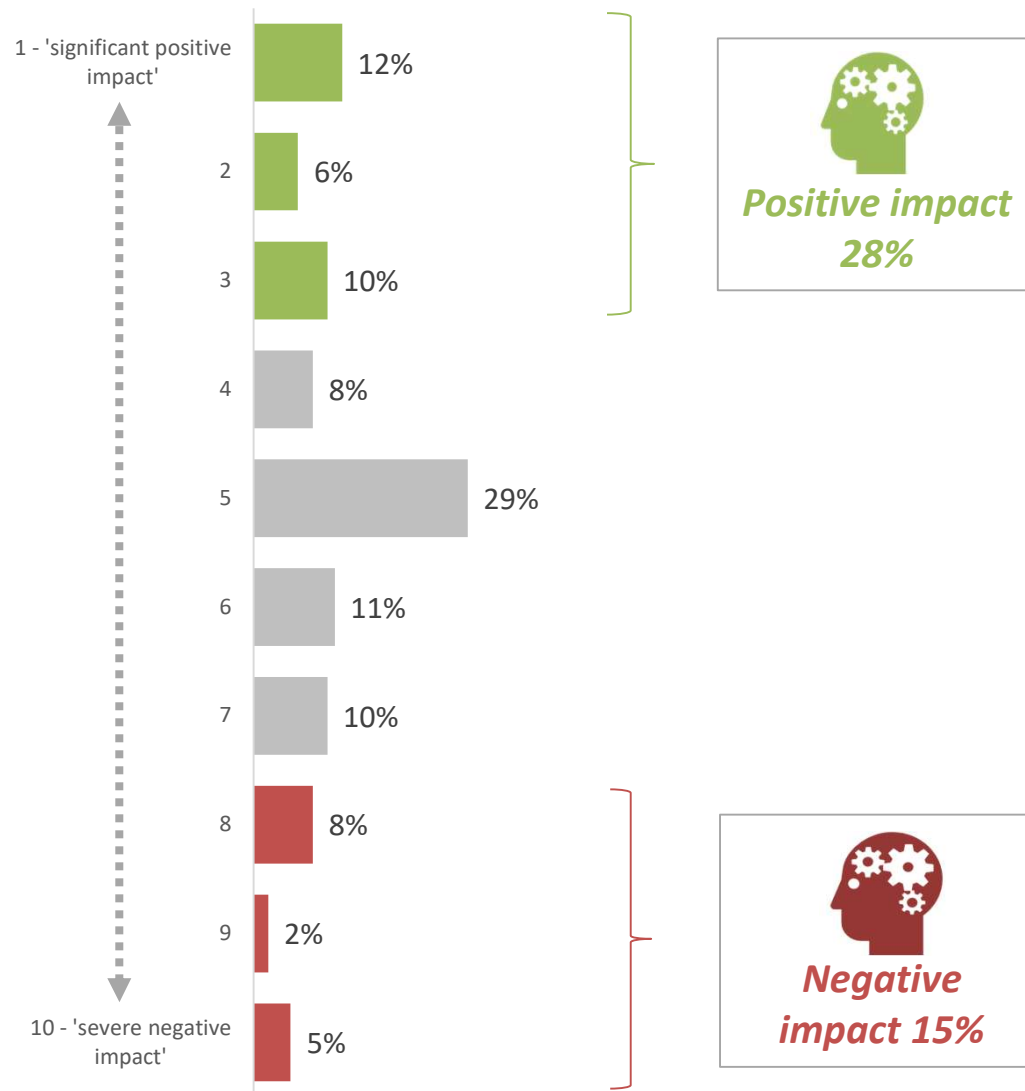
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Impact on mental health

What is the impact on mental health of the past 18 months?

A mixed picture regarding the impact of the past 12-18 months, but a stark warning for the number of trades potentially struggling

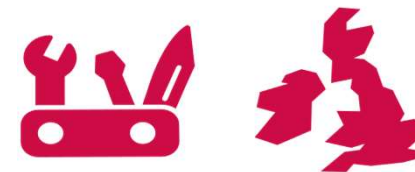


What toll is this having on those for sole traders and in P&H businesses?

3 in 10 actually cite a positive impact on their mental health, perhaps backing up some of the conversations in our recent qual discussions around buoyant demand and striving for a better work life balance being a key priority.

But of most concern is the 15% who report a severe impact on their mental health – 1 in 7 installers stating this.

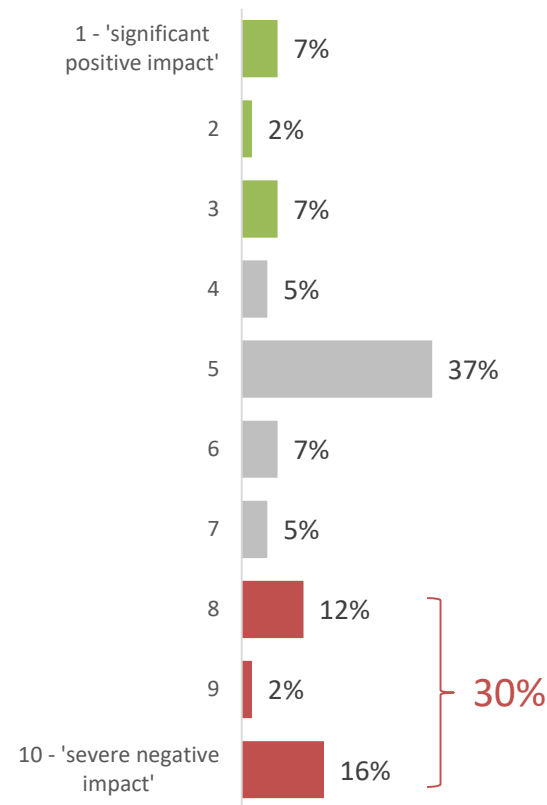
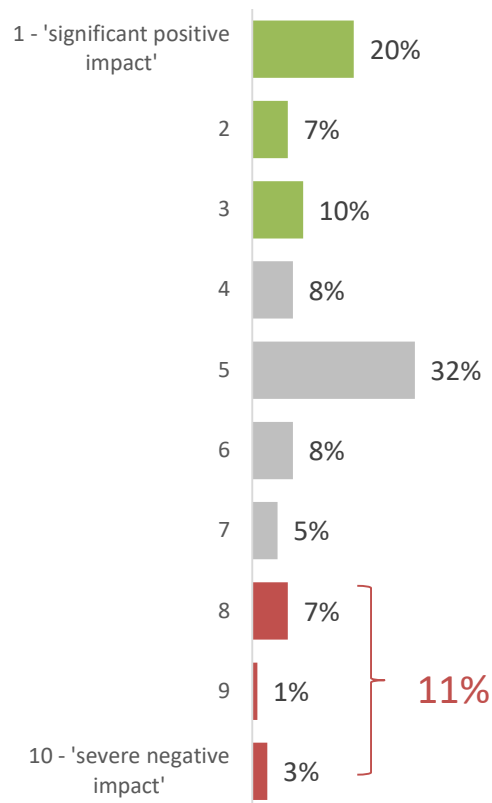
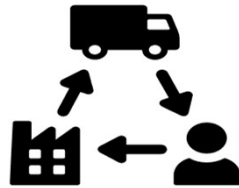
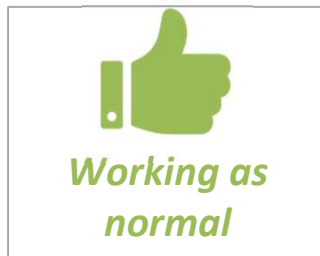
75,000 businesses impacted by a potential mental health issue



(based on our official estimate of half a million sole traders and micro businesses in this sector currently operating in the UK)

What is the impact on mental health of the past 18 months?

There are larger impacts on those struggling with productivity due to shortages in materials and staff

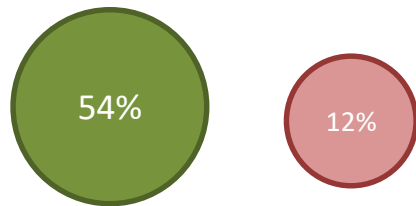


The data certainly suggest that those who are currently struggling with operational frictions are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health

Attitudes around mental health

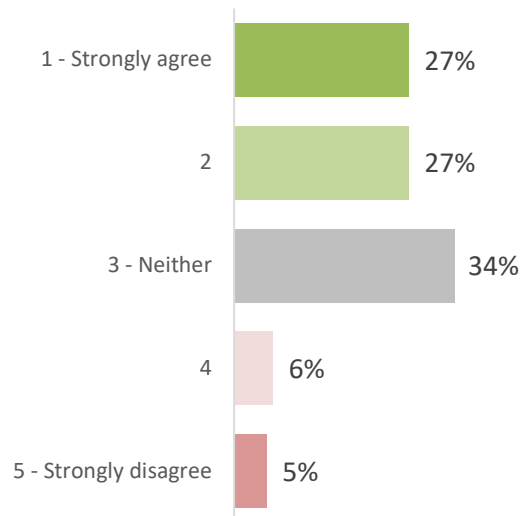
Strong agreement levels across these statements enforces the seriousness of this issue in this sector (over 4 in 5 agree with at least one of these statements)

Mental health is a big issue for trades professionals in general

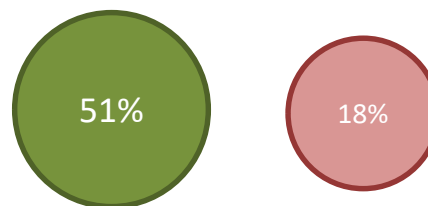


Agree

Disagree

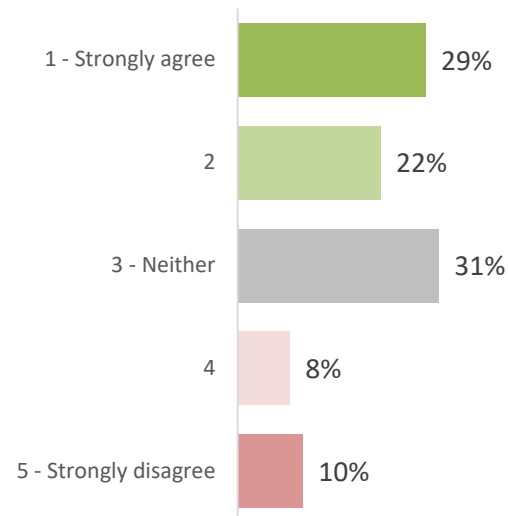


I know someone in the trade who has been impacted by mental health challenges

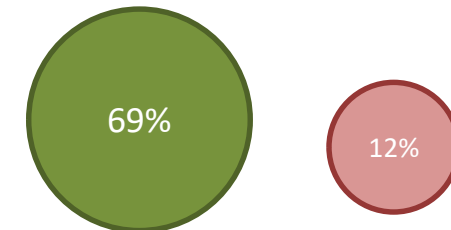


Agree

Disagree

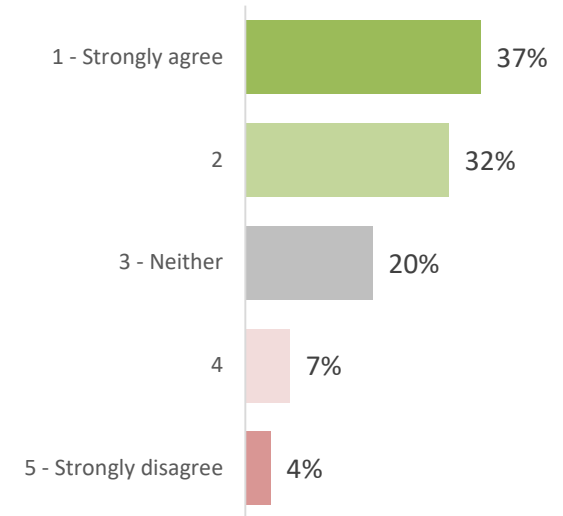


I think there is a stigma attached to seeking support for a mental health condition, especially in my profession



Agree

Disagree



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Key reflections



Mental health and work realities for tradespeople

Some reflections

Unprecedented consumer demand – what is the cost?

- The surge in consumer demand has been clear to those in the home improvement and construction sector during the past 18 months. Our research shows that homeowners have been particularly interested in spending their disposable income on the garden, living spaces and kitchens/ bathrooms.
- During the past year, 4 in 5 homeowners have confirmed to us that they have spent money on improving their home in some way.
- Tradespeople operating in the domestic improvement space are struggling to keep up with these unprecedented levels of demand.
- Current frictions and structural changes in the system mean that tradespeople report only being able to operate at a 58% level of efficiency on average.
- Not only does this mean that the home improvement sector is not fully benefitting from the levels of sales that it could be, but for those tradespeople who are still ‘chasing the buck’ our results also highlight the relatively high impact on the mental health of those working at the coal face.

What should stakeholders do?

- Large employers in the economy are starting to become more sophisticated to identifying and supporting employees on the mental health front. But who looks after the sole trader or the small business owner? Especially, as our results indicate, those working in a “traditionally-minded” sector where there is still a high degree of stigma attached to even discussing the issue.
- Brands and representative bodies could work further together to enable more peer-to-peer networks for trades. These should be carefully designed in a way that are appropriate and authentic for the target demographic.
- Efforts to address labour and skills shortages in the sector need to be further heightened, particularly in light of the ever-important strategic role of the construction sector in meeting carbon-neutral policy goals going forwards.
- Continuing to collect evidence that highlights the scale and particular nature of issues in the sector should also be continued* to further raise awareness and provoke policy innovation and action.

Signposting support

Source: Market Research Society (MRS)

List of confidential helplines/advice that might be useful if you or someone you know is struggling:

SHOUT: TEXT 85258 Shout is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need help. <https://www.giveusashout.org/>

Supportline: 01708 765 200, email info@supportline.org.uk – Supportline provides a confidential telephone helpline offering emotional support to any individual on any issue. <https://www.supportline.org.uk/>

Calm: 0800 58 58 58 Offers support to men in the UK, of any age, who are feeling down or in crisis via helpline, webchat and website. <https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

Samaritans: 116 123, 24/7 helpline across the UK, with trained volunteers to help people who are having a difficult time, and to support those who are worried about someone they know. <https://www.samaritans.org/>

A market research agency specialising in the P&H sector

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Eureka! is a full-service Market Research agency that specialises in the Plumbing, Heating and Bathroom Sector. We have decades worth of experience in helping businesses understand their target market and customers

We help brands understand the changing dynamic between consumers and tradespeople when undertaking home improvement projects

We also work with retailers, merchants and showrooms to shine a light on the purchasing experience and how expectations are evolving in this rapidly changing category

Around two-thirds of all our research activity is in the P&H Sector



Product testing with installers and engineers



Usage and attitude studies with installers



Understand channel shift and other purchasing behaviour



Understanding specifier needs



Test brochures and collateral with trade or consumers



Track how tastes evolve amongst home owners and route to market



Measure satisfaction, loyalty or NPS in merchants



Mystery shopping (in merchant or showroom)



Enquiries:
hello@eurekaresearch.co.uk

Contact Eureka!

Our website also holds a number of free-to-access **Eureka! reports** in this category, which include:



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You may have seen our earlier research into the impact of COVID on the P&H sector – this work has accelerated our understanding of how installer behaviour has changed since the pandemic

We achieved an incredible 2,000 surveys with business owners, allowing us to develop our own quantitative research reports and focus group output that truly captured the status of the sector at the height of the pandemic

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