



National Maternity Experience Survey 2020

Report on maternity care
provided in the community by
general practitioners, practice
nurses and midwives



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About the National Maternity Experience Survey

The National Maternity Experience Survey offers women the opportunity to share their experiences of Ireland's maternity services. The survey is part of the National Care Experience Programme, a joint initiative by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health. The National Care Experience Programme seeks to improve the quality of health and social care services in Ireland by asking people about their experiences of care and acting on their feedback. The survey reflects a commitment made in the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026 to evaluate maternity care services from the perspectives of the women who use them.⁽¹⁾

The survey questionnaire contains 68 questions which capture the whole maternity pathway from antenatal care, through labour and birth, to postnatal care in the community. The National Maternity Experience Survey includes questions taken or adapted from a library of questions developed by the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) in collaboration with the National Care Experience Programme. More information on the survey design can be found at www.yourexperience.ie/maternity/about-the-survey.

The survey aims to learn from the experiences of women to improve the safety and quality of the care that they and their baby receive. HIQA, the HSE and the Department of Health have committed to acting on the findings of the National Maternity Experience Survey to improve the quality of maternity care services in Ireland. Quality improvement plans have been developed by the HSE at national and local levels to address the issues highlighted in the survey.

About this report

This report focuses on women's experiences of maternity care provided outside of hospital by general practitioners (GPs), practice nurses and midwives in the 2020 National Maternity Experience Survey. The relevant questions from the survey explore experiences of antenatal care and aspects of postnatal care in the community. This report does not contain the results of questions relating to maternity care provided by maternity hospitals or units, or by the National Home Birth Services.

The majority of GPs in Ireland provide maternity care, in combination with a hospital-based obstetrician, under the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme. This scheme entitles women to check-ups from a GP before and after giving birth. Depending on the type of maternity care they have chosen, some women receive these check-ups from a midwife.

What were the main findings relating to maternity care provided in the community by GPs, practice nurses and midwives?

Most women who responded to the survey had positive experiences of the maternity care provided by GPs, practice nurses and midwives. However, there was variation in the care provided across the country and some areas for improvement were identified.

For just over 87% of the women who responded, their GP was the first healthcare professional they saw when they thought they were pregnant. While women were generally positive about the care they received while they were pregnant, it was clear that some felt that more information was needed on changes they would experience to their mental health.

Several questions explored the postnatal care provided by GPs, practice nurses and midwives. These postnatal check-ups are important as the health and progress of women and their baby are checked, and women have an opportunity to ask questions and receive information and support. Nationally, 84.7% of women attended their 2-week postnatal check-up with their GP; however, the numbers were significantly lower for women living in Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo.

Most women said that their GP, practice nurse or midwife answered their postnatal questions in a way they could understand. However, it was evident that a significant number of women felt that insufficient time was spent discussing their physical and mental health at the 6-week postnatal check-up.

The responses to the three free-text questions provided very detailed information on women's experiences with their GPs, practice nurses and midwives during their maternity care. These comments identified the caring and helpful attitudes of GPs, but also highlighted the requirement for more personalised care, particularly in the postnatal period.

Interpreting the results presented in this report

In this report, scores out of 10 are given for relevant questions belonging to a stage of maternity care or to a stage as whole. A score of 0 indicates a very negative experience and a score of 10 indicates a very positive experience. Some questions simply provide descriptive information and these questions are not given a score out of 10.

There were three free-text questions in the survey, which asked women about the positive aspects of their experiences and where improvements were required. Quotations from women are presented in a dedicated chapter. These quotations have been redacted to remove any information that could identify an individual.

Care while pregnant (antenatal care)

The questions for this stage of care relate to the maternity care women received while they were pregnant. The questions do not solely relate to GPs, practice nurses or midwives, but instead explore women's experiences of antenatal care as a whole.

Women were asked to specify the first healthcare professional they saw when they thought they were pregnant. As shown in Table 1, nationally 87.4% of women saw a GP or family doctor first.

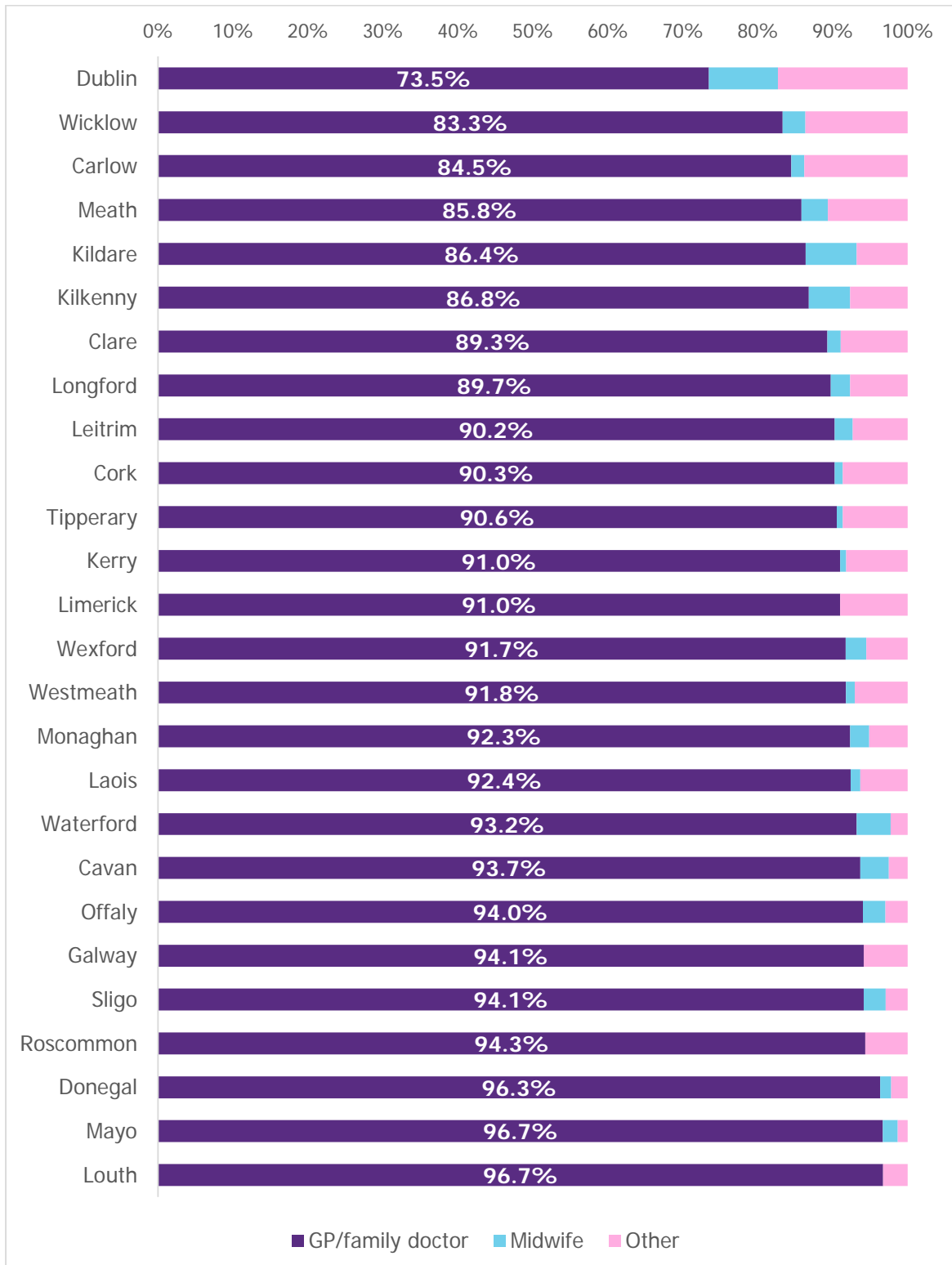
Table 1. First healthcare professional seen

	No.	%
GP/family doctor	2,797	87.4
Midwife	120	3.7
Other	285	8.9

There was some geographic variation in response to this question. Dublin had the lowest proportion of women who saw a GP first at 73.5%. In Dublin, 9.2% saw a midwife first, with the remaining 17.3% answering 'other'. Mayo and Louth had the joint-highest proportion of women who saw a GP first at 96.7%. A breakdown of the first healthcare professional women saw by county is provided in Figure 1.

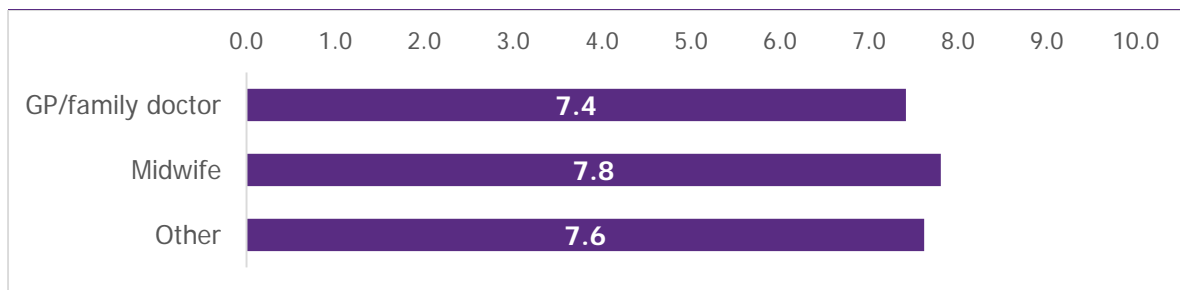
Question 3 in the survey asked women if they were offered a choice of the type of maternity care they would receive. Those who saw a midwife first were slightly more likely to say they were offered a choice of care (63.3%) than those who saw GP first (59.6%) or 'Other' (59.7%).

Figure 1. The first healthcare professional women saw when they thought they were pregnant, broken down by county.



For the 'care while pregnant (antenatal care)' stage of care as a whole, those who saw a GP first gave somewhat lower ratings for the antenatal care scale, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Antenatal care compared by first healthcare professional seen



In relation to the individual questions for this stage of care, those who saw a midwife first generally gave more positive ratings than those who saw a GP first, particularly on the information they received on nutrition, mental health and physical health. The results for the individual questions for this scale, broken down by which healthcare professional a woman saw first are shown in Figure 3.

While the scores for most questions were relatively similar, regardless of which healthcare professional a women saw first, there were notable differences for some questions. Specifically, those who saw a GP first were less likely to say they received sufficient information about physical changes in their body during pregnancy, mental health changes and nutrition, than those who saw a midwife first.

For women who saw a GP first, the highest-scoring question for this stage related to being treated with respect and dignity, with 2,242 women (80.3%) saying that they were always treated with respect and dignity while they were pregnant. 495 women (17.7%) said that they were 'sometimes' treated with respect and dignity, while 55 women (2%) said that they were not treated with respect and dignity.

On the other hand, the lowest-scoring question related to mental health, with 866 women (32.2%) saying that they did not receive sufficient information about changes to their mental health. A further 974 women (36.2%) said they 'to some extent' received sufficient information, while 852 (31.6%) said they 'definitely' received sufficient information about changes to their mental health.

Figure 3. Comparison of antenatal care questions by first healthcare professional seen.



Care at home after the birth:

The questions for this stage of care related to women's experiences of care provided at home after the birth. Four questions specifically refer to experiences with a GP, practice nurse or midwife. These questions asked about attendance and experiences at the 2-week and 6-week check-ups, which are provided as part of the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme.

When asked if their baby had received a 2-week check-up with their GP, 2,712 women (84.7%) said that they had. As shown in Table 2, there were several reasons why this check-up was not received, with 206 women (6.4%) saying that they did not know about it.

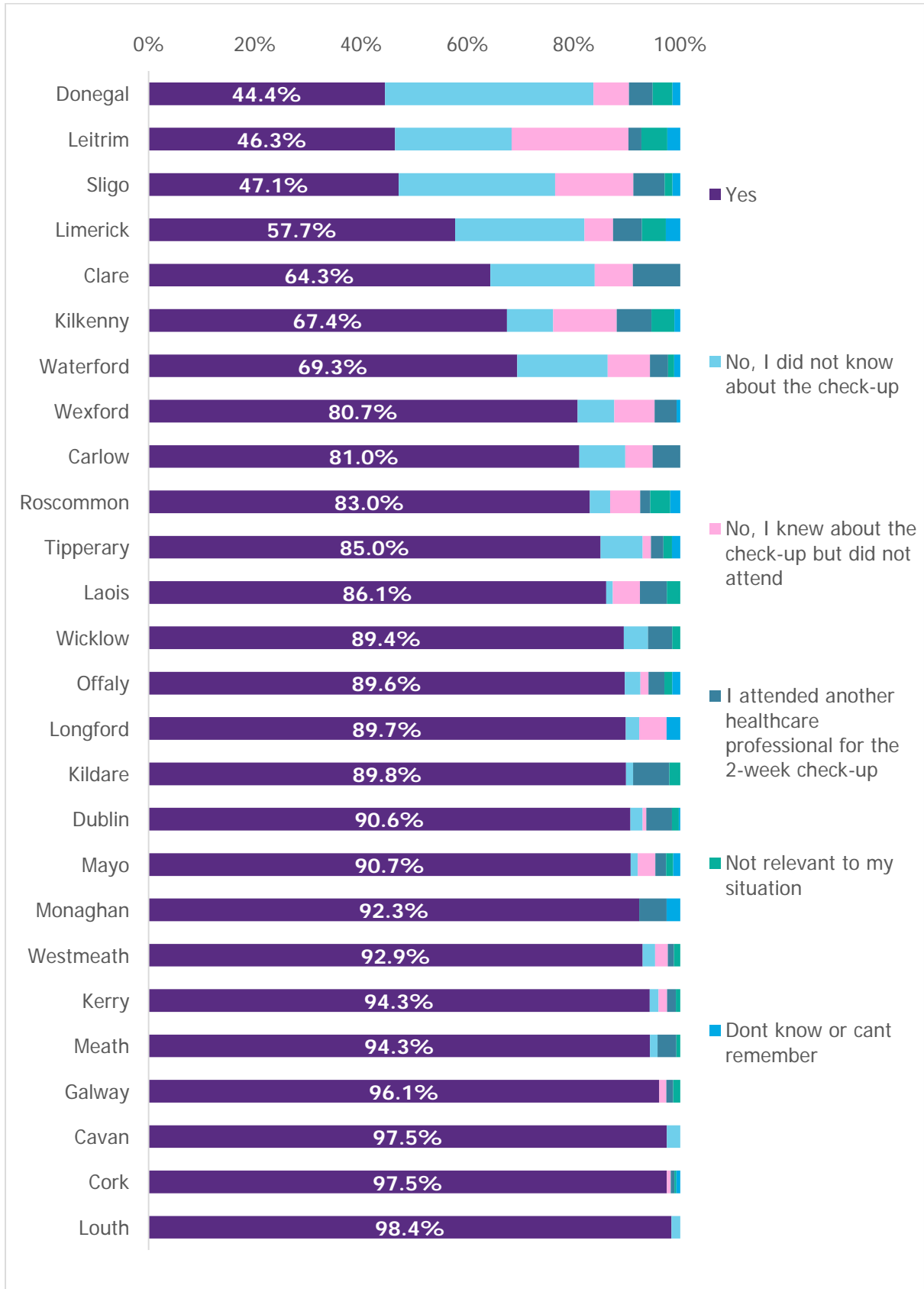
Table 2. Attendance at the 2-week check-up with a GP

	No.	%
Yes	2712	84.7
No, I did not know about the check-up	206	6.4
No, I knew about the check-up but did not attend	100	3.1
I attended another healthcare professional for the 2-week check-up	115	3.6
Not relevant to my situation	46	1.4
Don't know or can't remember	22	0.7

There was significant variation in attendance at the 2-week check-up across counties, with particularly low attendance in the north-west. Nationally, 84.7% said they attended a 2-week check-up, whereas in Donegal 44.4% attended, in Leitrim 46.3% attended, and in Sligo 47.1% attended. Of those who did not attend, most said it was because they did not know about it. Figure 4 shows attendance at 2-week check-ups broken down by participants' county of residence.

No notable difference in receiving the 2-week check-up was observed based on whether women had previously given birth. In addition, there was no clear difference in receipt of the check-up observed by the mother's age group.

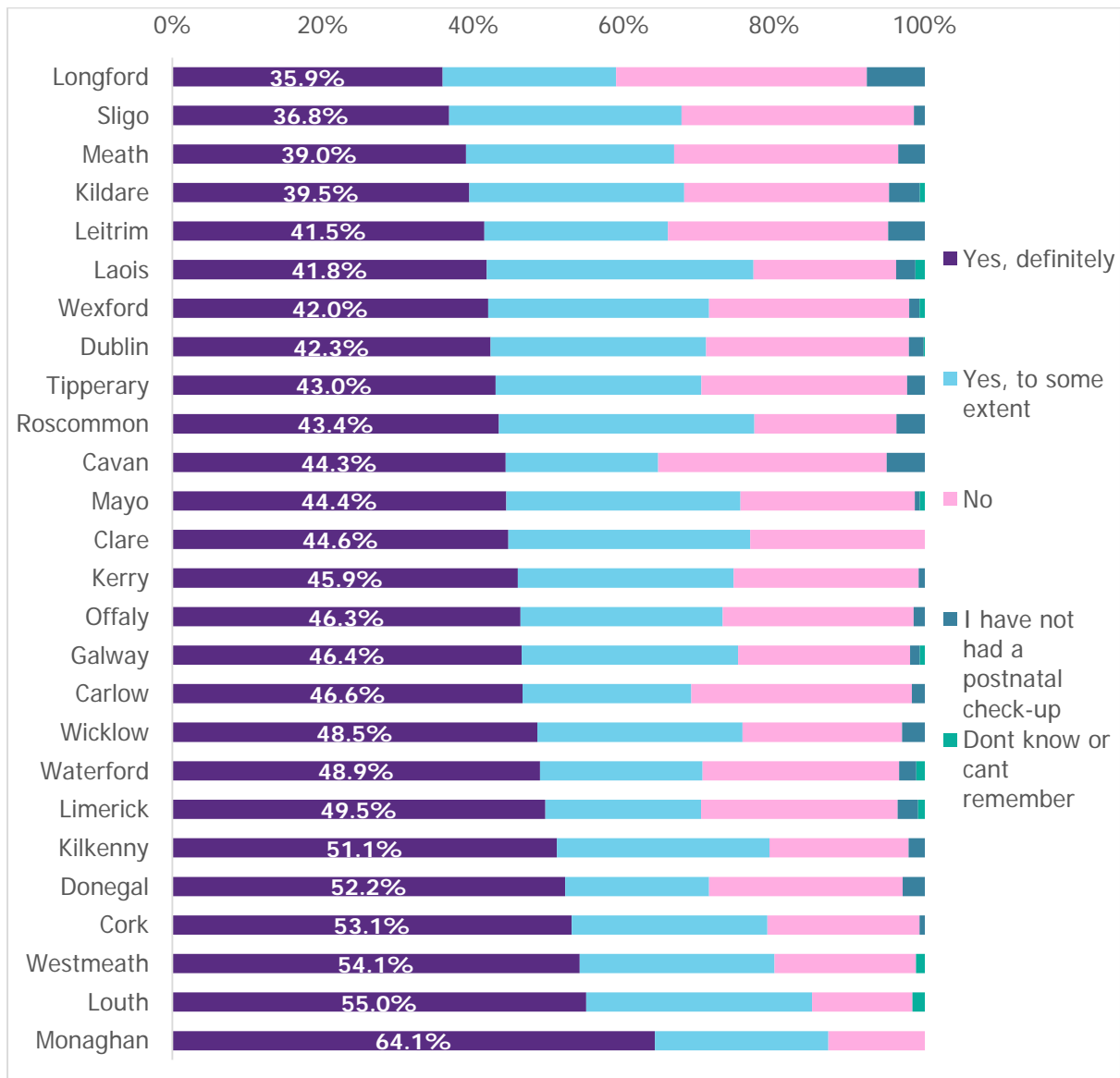
Figure 4. Attendance at 2-week check-up by participants' county of residence



In relation to the 6-week check-up, two questions explored whether a GP, practice nurse or midwife had spent enough time discussing physical and mental health with participants. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of responses to the physical health question by county, while Figure 6 shows a breakdown of responses to the mental health question.

When asked if sufficient time was spent discussing their physical health at the 6-week check-up, Monaghan had the highest proportion of women who answered 'yes, definitely' with 64.1%, while Longford had the lowest with 35.9%. Nationally, 1,458 women (45.5%) answered 'yes, definitely'.

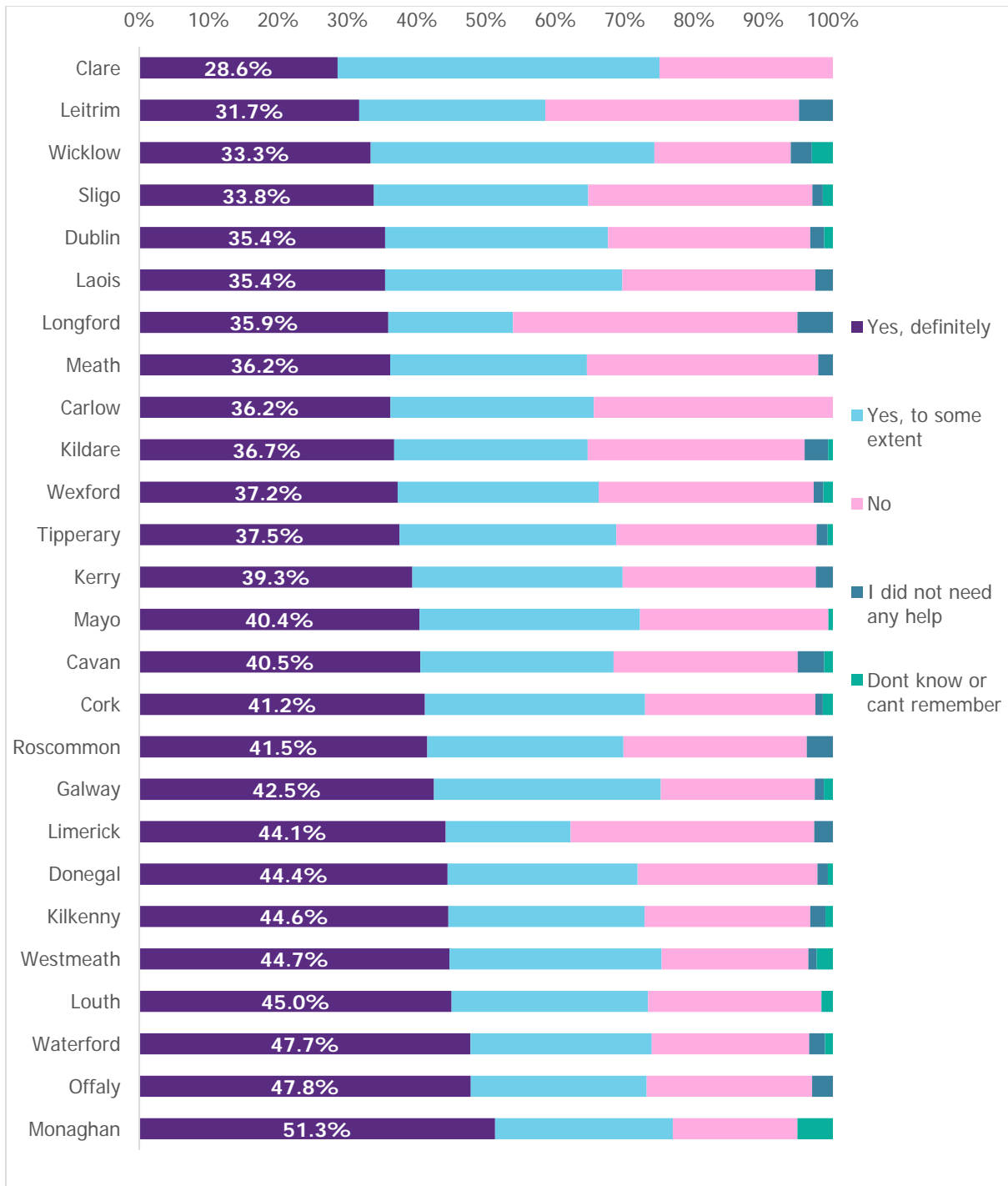
Figure 5. Responses to question on time spent discussing physical health at 6-week check-up by county



When asked whether sufficient time was spent discussing mental health at the 6-week check-up, Monaghan again had the highest proportion of women who

answered 'yes definitely' with 51.3%, Clare had the lowest with 28.6%. Nationally, 1,251 women (39.1%) answered 'yes, definitely'.

Figure 6. Responses to question on time spent discussing mental health at 6-week check-up by county



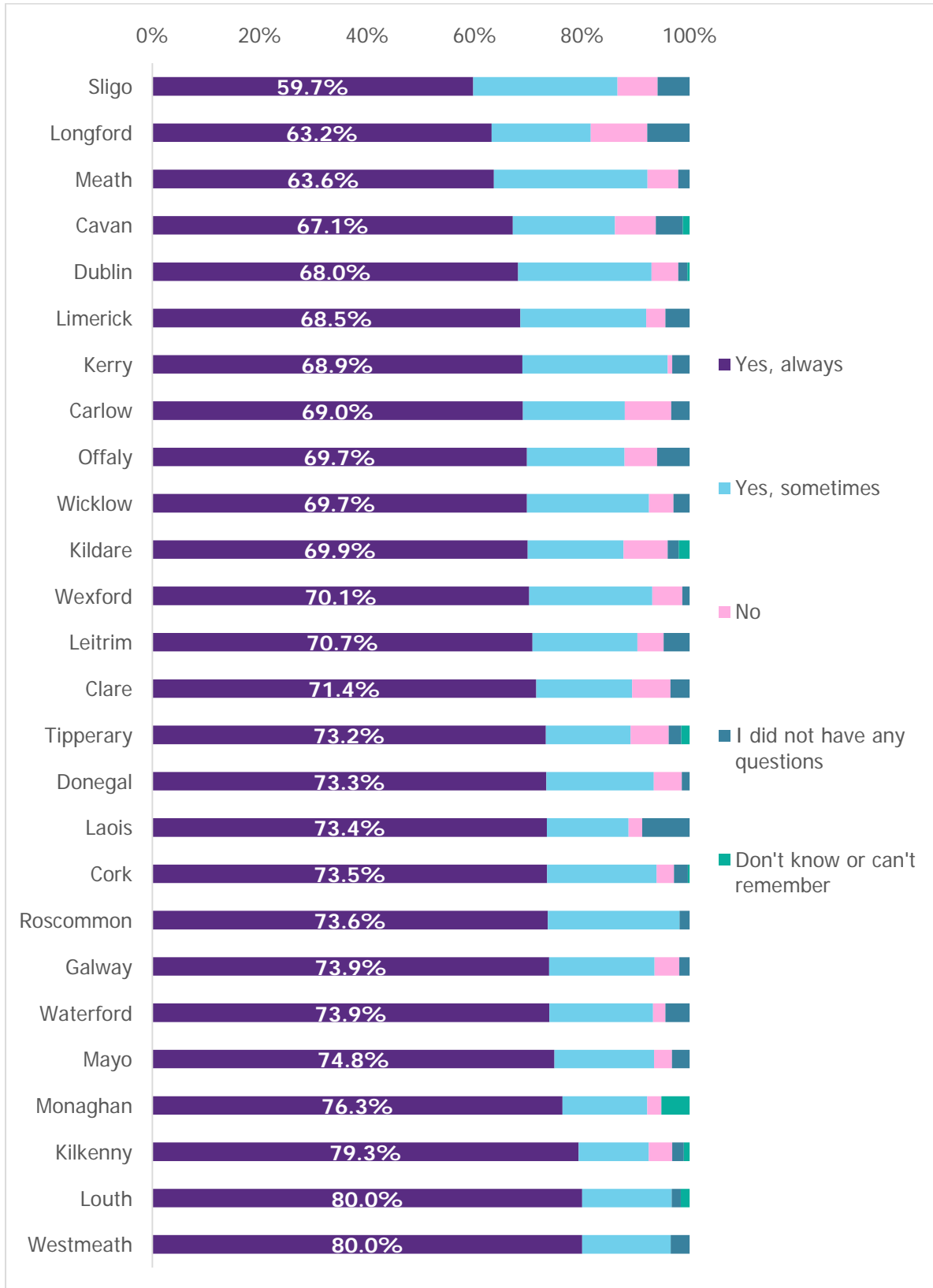
Question 53 asked women if their GP, practice nurse or midwife had answered their questions in a way that they could understand. Table 3 shows how participants responded to this question at a national level, while Figure 7 shows a breakdown by

county. In total, 2,262 women (70.6%) said their GP, practice nurse or midwife 'always' answered their questions in a way they could understand. By county, the proportion of women who said their questions were 'always' answered in a way they could understand varied from 59.7% in Sligo to 80% in Louth and Westmeath.

Table 3. Clear answers to questions by a GP, practice nurse or midwife

	No.	%
Yes, always	2262	70.6
Yes, sometimes	676	21.1
No	149	4.6
I did not have any questions	90	2.8
Don't know or can't remember	14	0.4

Figure 7. Clear answers to questions by a GP, practice nurse or midwife, broken down by county



In their own words: analysis of women's comments

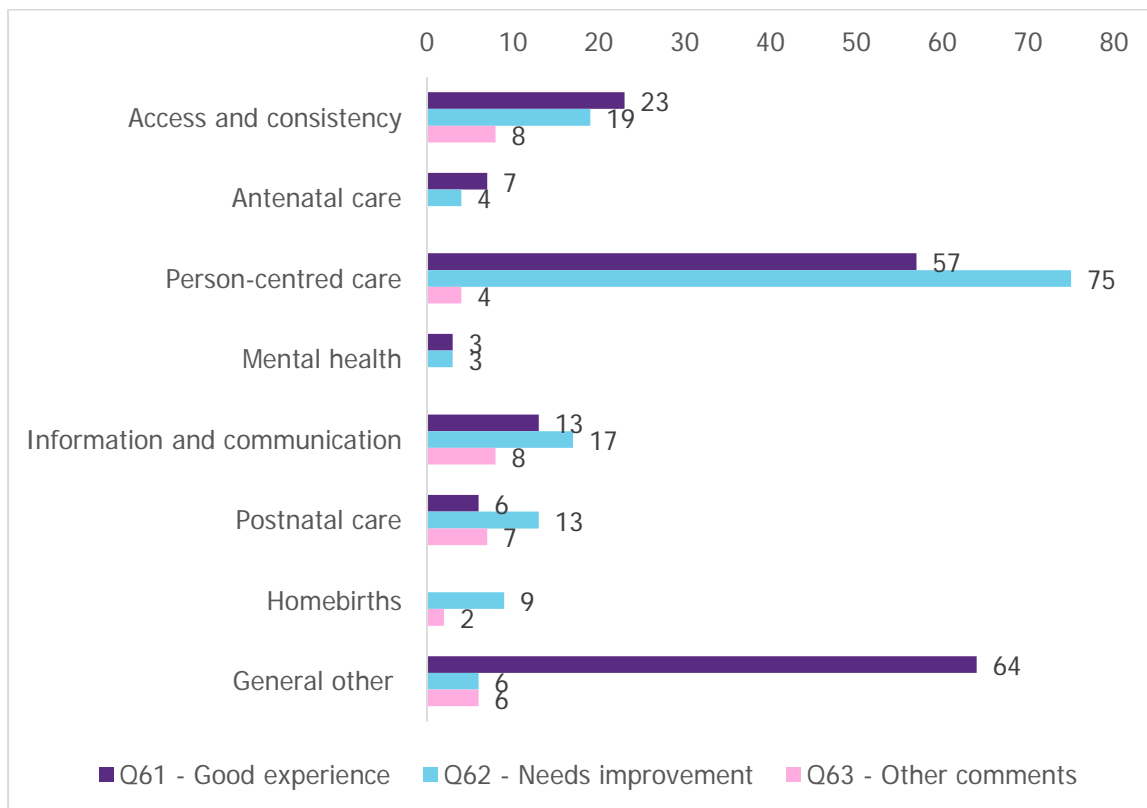
Three survey questions (questions 61-63) asked women to provide additional information, in their own words, on their maternity experiences. These free-text questions allowed women to give a more in-depth description of specific aspects of their maternity care.

In total, 289 of the 6,075 responses to the three free-text questions related to care provided by GPs, practice nurses and midwives. A thematic analysis of these comments identified eight themes. The number of comments received per theme for each question is presented in Figure 8.

Q61 asked women what was particularly good about their maternity care, Q62 asked women what could be improved, and Q63 asked women if there were any other aspects of their maternity care experience that they would like to describe.

For Q61, most of the comments related to the 'general/other', 'person-centred care' and 'access and consistency' themes. For Q62, most comments related to the 'person-centred care', 'access and consistency', and 'information and communication' themes. Finally, most responses to Q63 related to the 'access and consistency', and 'information and communication' themes.

Figure 8. Thematic breakdown of comments relating to a GP, practice nurse or midwife



The 'person-centred care' theme received the most comments, both positive and negative. It was evident among the comments that while many GPs provided the type of care women needed, others did not sufficiently explore the mother's health, particularly at the postnatal check-ups.

"The GP was thorough at the 6 week check-up and made time for me, not just baby."

"The 6 week check up with the GP. There should be separate appointments. One for baby and one for mother. It is not possible to have enough time during one short appointment to deal with both. Having your baby with you also means you are not able to fully concentrate on yourself"

A significant number of comments, both positive and negative also related to the 'access and consistency' theme. The comments relating to this theme identified significant variation in how accessible women found their GP care to be, and how well integrated it was with the maternity care they received in other settings.

"The combined midwife/GP service was very efficient in my experience. It was well run and easy to use, particularly if you did not have a complicated pregnancy. It worked very well for me and I would use it again."

"I found it a very frightening and daunting experience taking my 2 week old baby into the GP for her 2 week checkup. I was sitting waiting for the nurse for 20mins in a crowded waiting room filled with sick people. After seeing the nurse, I then had to return to the waiting room for another 20mins to see the doctor. During this time, as a tired first time mother I found it a very stressful time. My baby cried after being stripped in the nurse's room and I could not get her to stop. My anxiety levels were high. I was close to tears."

A mixture of positive and negative comments was also received for the 'information and communication' theme. It was evident from the comments relating to this theme that some GPs were better communicators than others.

"My GP always made me feel informed and was generous with her time in making me feel as prepared as possible. Received very competent care."

"The post natal care with GP was not up to standard, I felt like it was rushed and very few questions were asked, I was expected to ask all the questions and disclose problems which I didn't necessarily know were problems."

Conclusion

What were women's experiences of maternity care provided by GPs, practice nurses and midwives in October and November 2019?

While the majority of women who responded to the survey had positive experiences of the maternity care provided by GPs, practice nurses and midwives, there was some variation in the care provided across the country, and areas for improvement were identified.

It was found that a GP was the first healthcare professional most women saw when they thought they were pregnant. While women were generally positive about the care they received while they were pregnant, it was clear that some felt that more information was needed on changes they would experience to their mental health.

The survey identified variation in attendance at the 2-week postnatal check-up. Most women attend this check-up but the numbers were significantly lower for women living in counties in the north-west of Ireland. Most women said that their GP, practice nurse or midwife answered their postnatal questions in a way they could understand. However, it was evident that a significant number of women felt that insufficient time was spent discussing their physical and mental health at the 6-week postnatal check-up.

The responses to the three free-text questions provided very detailed information on women's experiences with their GPs, practice nurses and midwives during their maternity care. These comments identified the caring and helpful attitudes of GPs, but also highlighted the requirement for more personalised care, particularly in the postnatal period.



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