

# Understanding the early impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people residing in South Asia: Main Findings of the Rapid Assessment Web Survey

Prepared by

Mywish K. Maredia <maredia@msu.edu>

*Based on the following published dataset:*

*Freed, R.; Galhena, H.; Ghimire, R.; Guenthner, J.; Irfan, F.; Joshi, N.; Madan, S.; Maredia, K.; Maredia, M.; Mbabazi, R.; Samaradivakara, S.; Weebadde, C., 2020, "Rapid Assessment Web (RAW) survey to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people residing in South Asia", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ACF4PK>, Harvard Dataverse, V1*

June 18, 2020

# About the survey

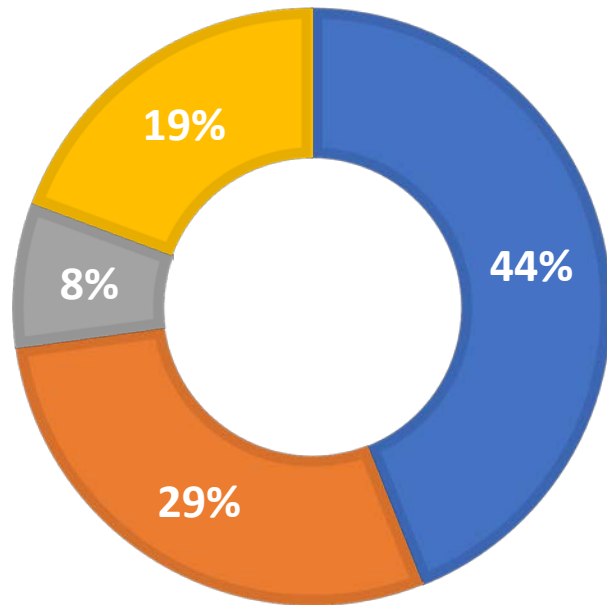
- Purpose:
  - To generate a quick overview of the effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on people's income, employment, food availability/affordability/security, coping strategies, and health related behavioral responses
- Survey focused on five countries in the South Asia region – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
- Survey was conducted from April 18-May 4, 2020
- Implemented as a web survey (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/worldtap/se-asia-survey>)
- Research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University prior to the start of the survey (Study ID: 4421)

# About the survey (cont'd)

- Sampling methodology:
  - Convenience sampling method was used (i.e., sample selection was based on a non-probability sampling method)
  - Sample consisted of people who can be contacted by email, web, or social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) through personal and professional networks of study authors
  - Respondents were encouraged to share the survey link with others within their networks using email or social media
  - Respondents were also encouraged to complete the survey by phone by calling someone they know who may not have access to Internet (i.e., computer or a smart phone) to complete the web survey
- More than 1400 responses were recorded at varying stages of completion when the survey was closed on May 4. About 6% of respondents were from countries other than the five focused countries.
- After dropping the responses from other countries and respondents that did not complete at least the employment section, the total sample size used for this analysis is 1,153. Out of these 1,028 had completed all the sections of the survey.

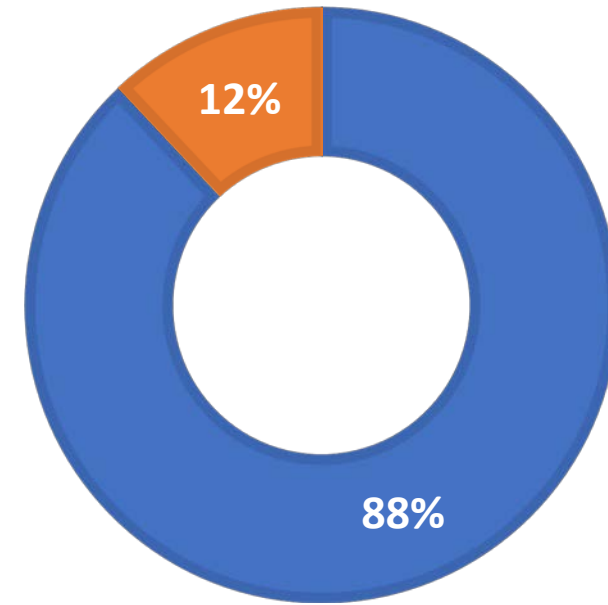
## HOW RESPONDENTS RECEIVED THE SURVEY LINK?

■ WhatsApp ■ Email ■ Facebook ■ Other



## SURVEY COMPLETED FOR...

■ Self ■ Someone else



# Caution/disclaimer

- Although an advantage of the web survey using the convenience sampling method (as used in this study) is that it can be done quickly and at a low cost, it suffers from several limitations such as selection bias and the lack of control on the sample size.
- The respondents of this survey are not representative of the population and the sample size varies drastically across countries.
- Thus, the figures should be read with due caution and should not be used to extrapolate for the whole population residing in South Asia

# Purpose and Content of this Document

Purpose: To provide descriptive results of the data collected and highlight emerging results on the following topics covered in the survey.

- Employment and livelihood effects
- Effects on food Security, consumption, and availability / affordability of food
- Coping strategies and safety net
- Awareness and behavioral responses

# Preview of main results and findings

- High awareness of coronavirus disease among all strata of society (rural, urban, type of occupation)
- High level of compliance with government lockdowns
- Wide variation in the use of recommended safety measures
- Government shutdowns have had differential effects on people's sources and level of income
- Daily wage earners, low-skilled self-employed workers, and business owners experienced more income loss than salaried employees and high-skilled self-employed people
- Average income loss was more pronounced in rural sample compared to urban sample, especially among daily wage earners
  - This may be a reflection of the return migration—i.e., daily wage earners may have returned back to rural areas due to lockdowns
- As a rough approximation, 75% of unemployment in March-April can be linked directly or indirectly to COVID-19

# Preview of results and findings (cont'd)

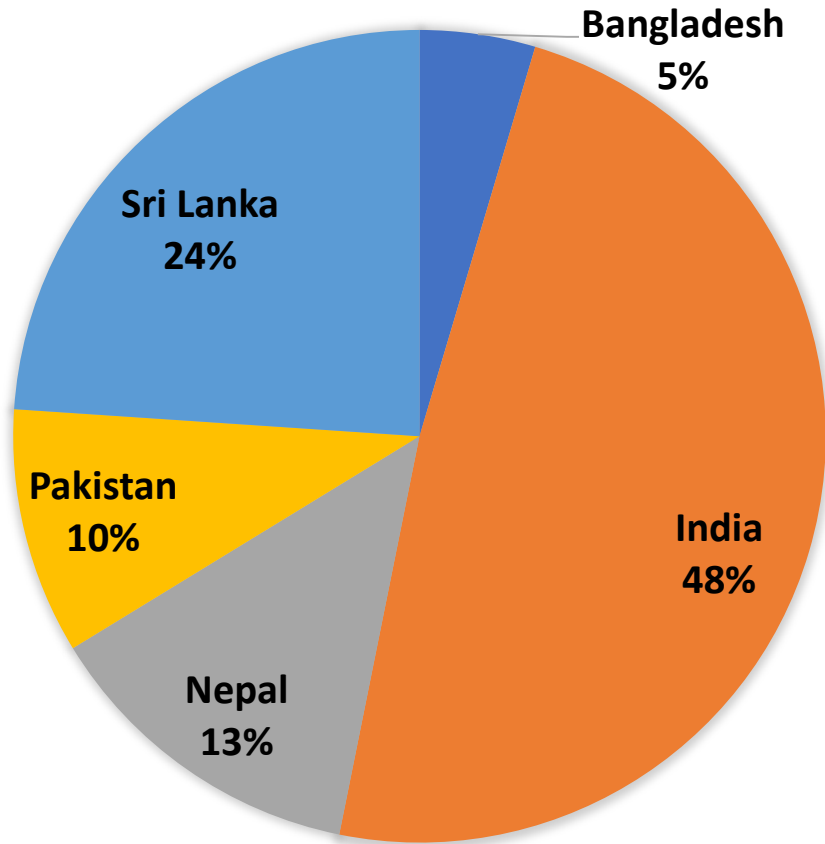
- Daily wage earners and people living in rural areas are more vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger. A majority of surveyed respondents from this vulnerable group had enough resources to meet their food needs for less than one month
- Non-availability of preferred foods was cited as a challenge more than food being expensive
- Reducing non-food expenses and using up most of the savings were two most reported coping strategies used by households
- There is some indication that cash and food transfer programs are reaching the needy more than the non-needy
- Findings from this survey indicate:
  - The need for continued efforts to increase awareness on safety measures, especially in rural areas
  - The need to continue cash and food transfers targeted to daily wagers and rural households
  - The need to continue efforts to keep the food supply chains functional to avoid worsening food insecurity and malnutrition in the region



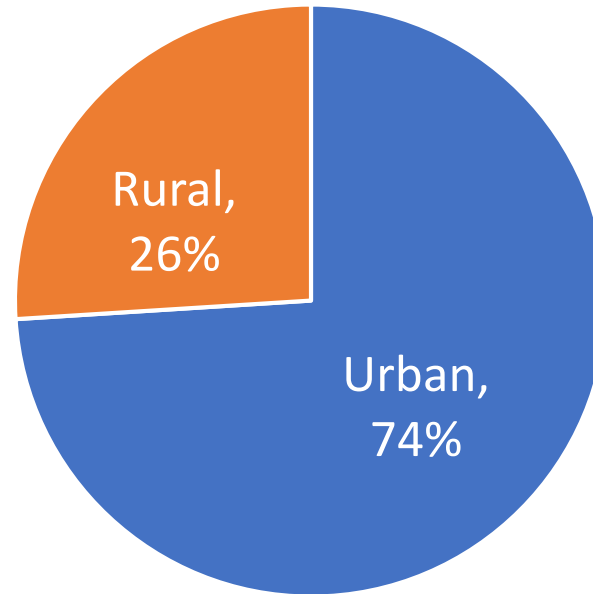
# Sample Description

(N=1153)

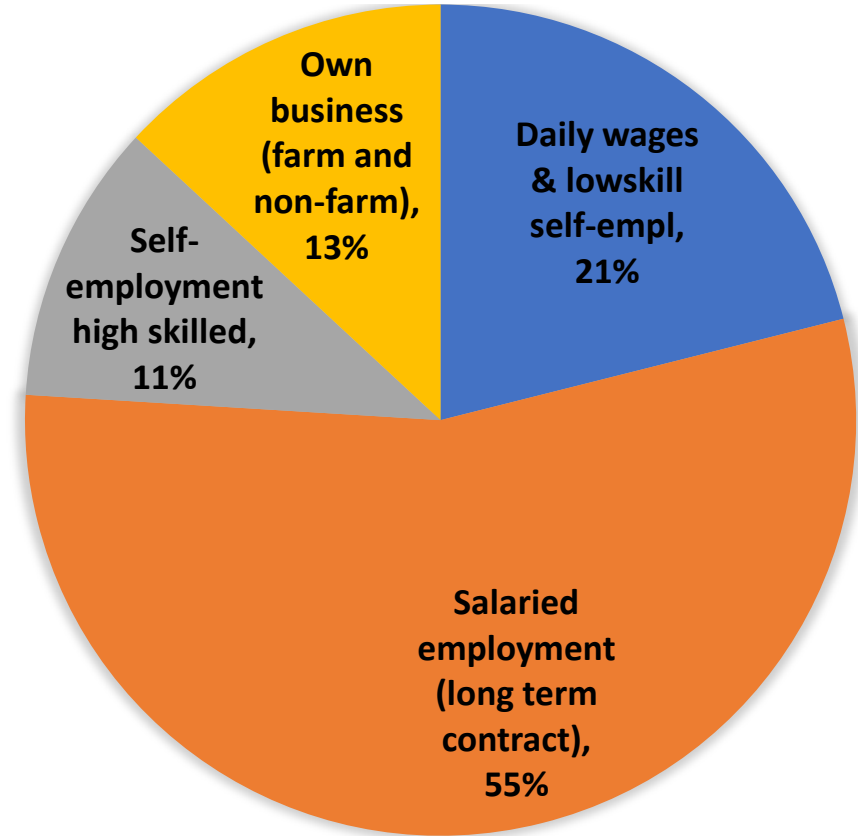
# Sample composition by country, location, & HH's main occupation



By Country

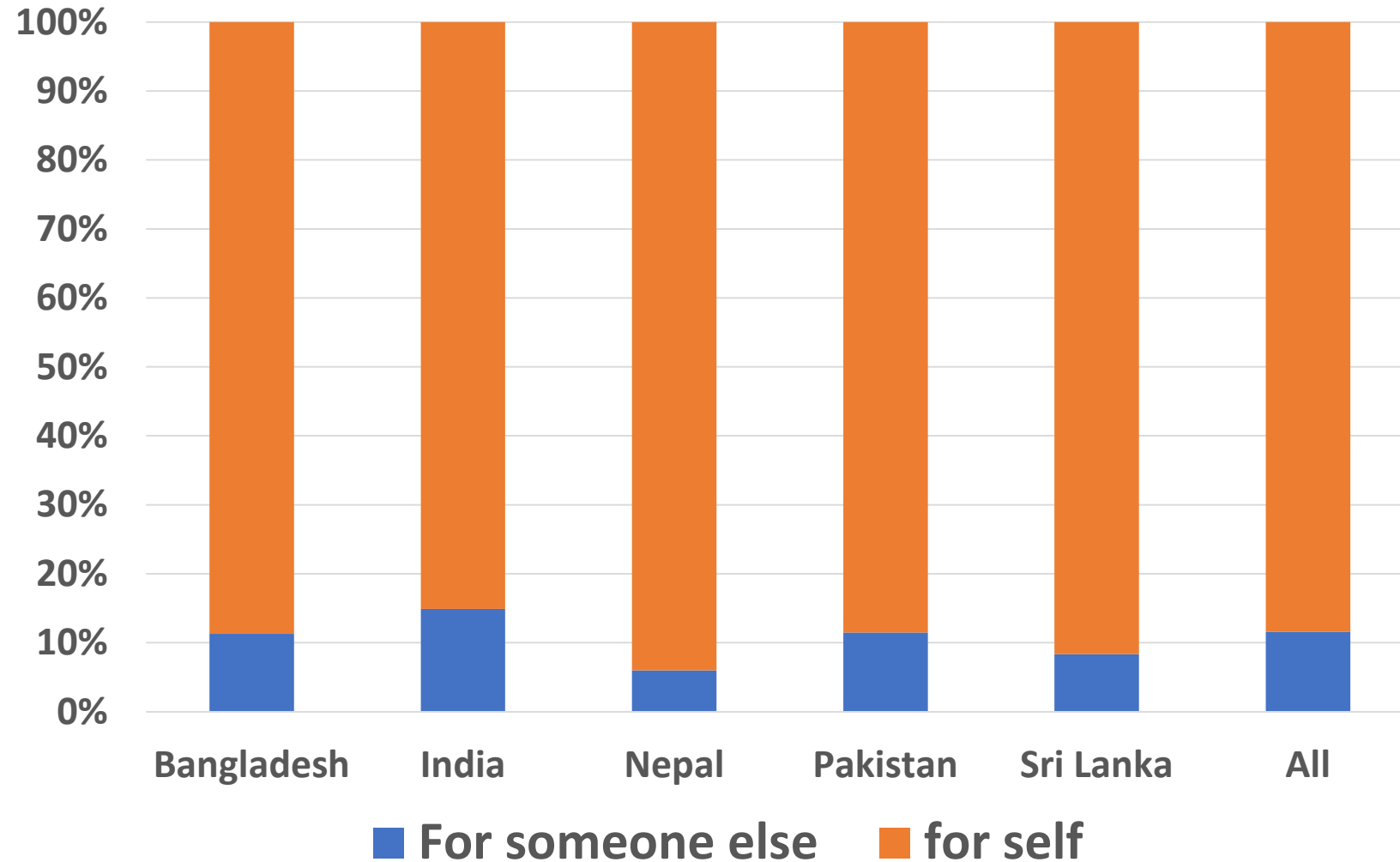


By Location



By HH's main source of Income

# Percentage of surveys completed for self vs. someone else



# Respondent and household (HH) characteristics

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	All
N	53	560	151	113	276	1153
<b>Respondent characteristics</b>						
% Male	72	70	86	66	36	64
Average age	34.6	36.7	40.0	38.1	33.6	36.4
<b>Household Demographics</b>						
Age of the HH Head	45.2	47.3	51.0	48.6	49.2	48.3
HH Head is Male (%)	85%	88%	95%	85%	85%	88%
HH size	4.21	4.64	5.17	6.34	4.22	4.76
<i>(population level statistic)</i>	<i>(4.5)</i>	<i>(4.9)</i>	<i>(5.0)</i>	<i>(6.5)</i>	<i>(3.9)</i>	
% of HHs with children less than 18 years	53%	48%	60%	66%	39%	49%
Average number of living standard amenities per HH (from 0-13)\a	9.56	9.53	10.60	10.60	10.50	10.00

## Level of education of HH Head (across all sampled households)

Less than 6th grade	10.9%
6-12 grade	13.4%
College education (incl Bachelors degree)	32.5%
Post-graduate education	43.1%

/a Living standard amenities include: 1) house has cement/brick/stone walls, 2) cement/concrete roof, 3) a designated place to wash hands, 4) electricity, 5) piped water, 6) television, 7) refrigerator/freezer, 8) motorcycle/scooter/rickshaw, 9) motor car or jeep, 10) smart phone, 11) house is not located near informal settlement, 12) house is not located in a slum area, and 13) not house is not located on a busy/crowded street

# Main points about the sample

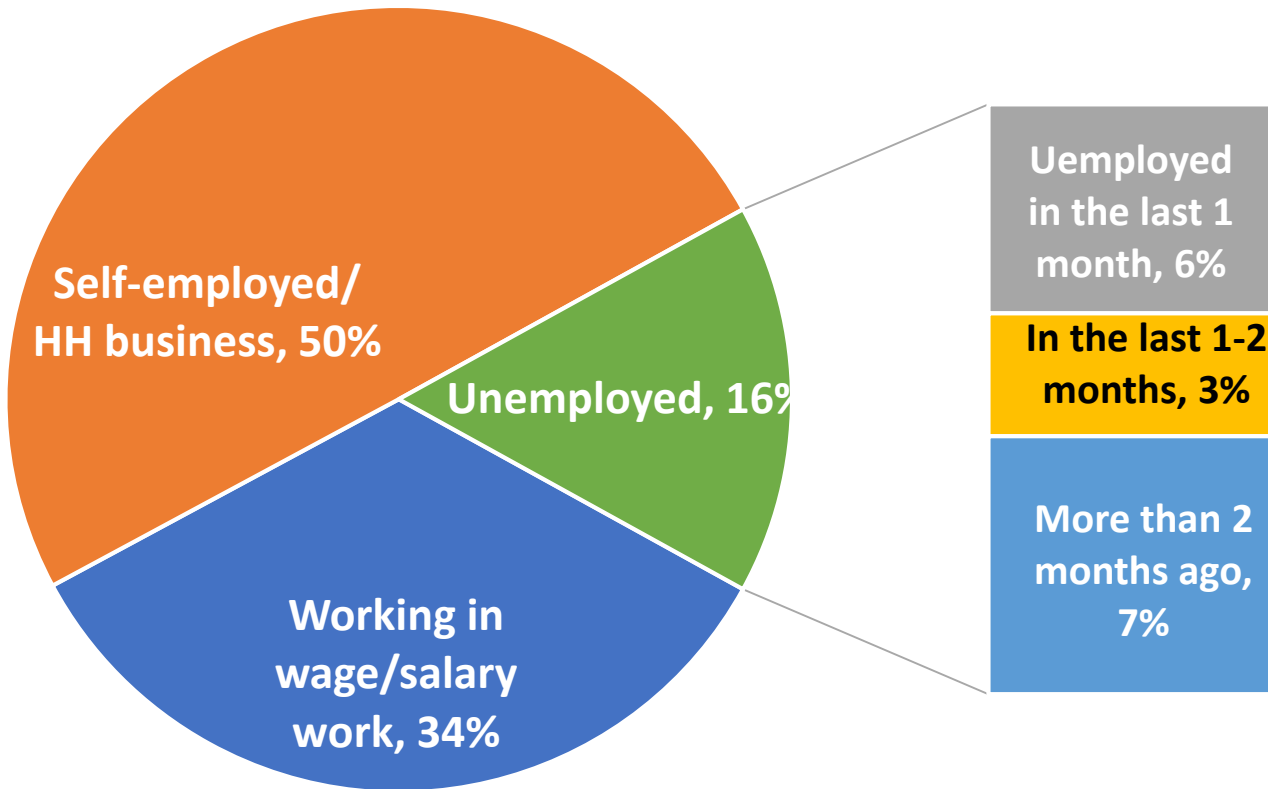
- Very few observations for some countries (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal)
- Sample is biased towards urban and educated households, and those with salaried employment with long-term contract or self-employed in high skill work
- Sample is biased towards more affluent segments of the society as evidenced by the high number of amenities enjoyed by the respondents
- Sample is not representative, thus a note of caution on extrapolating the findings presented here to the general population

# Outcomes/Effects

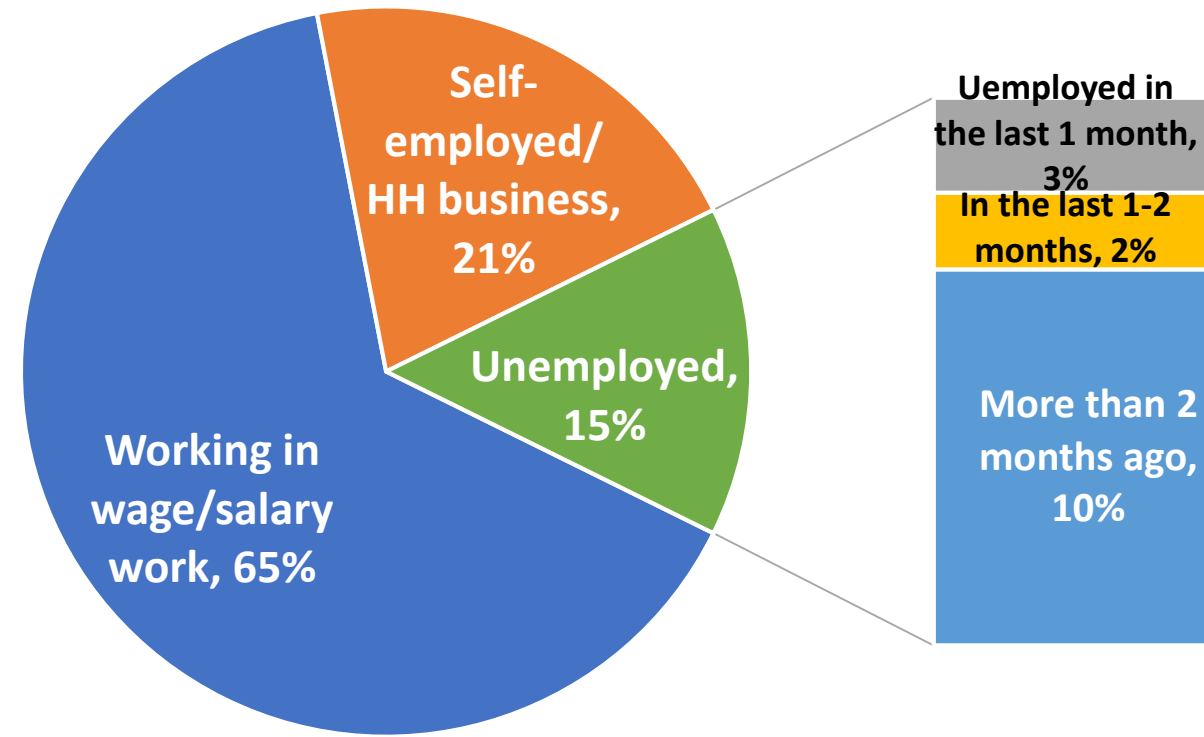
**Employment (N=1153)**

Employment status of the head of the household on the day the survey was conducted, by rural and urban households

### Rural



### Urban



# Employment status of the HH head on the day of the survey

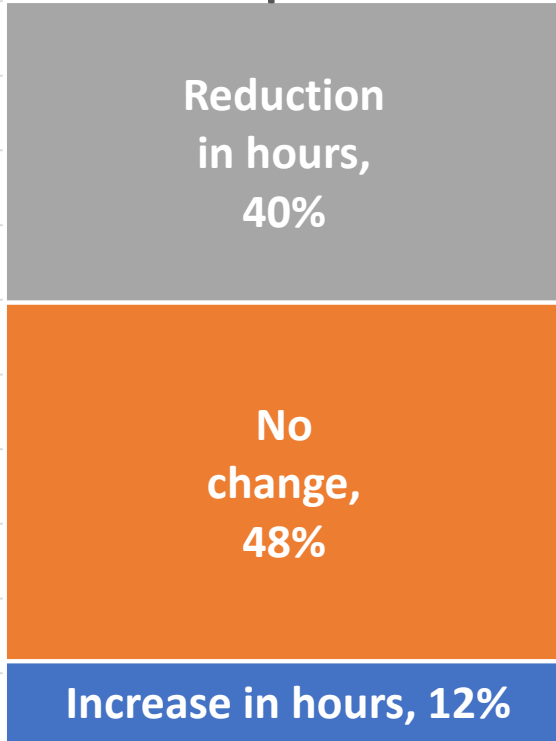
Working in wage/salary work, 57%

Self-employed/ HH business, 28%

Unemployed, 15%

## Change in employment in 1-2 months before survey and main reasons for the change

Change in the amount of work time in the past 1 month



For those that had experienced reduction in hours worked, main reasons...(N=260)

Government shutdown	77%
Business/Activity significantly reduced	17%
Other	6%

For those that lost job in the last 1-2 months, main reasons...(N=65)

Government shutdown	62%
Business/Activity significantly reduced or shut down	15%
Other	23%

When became unemployed?

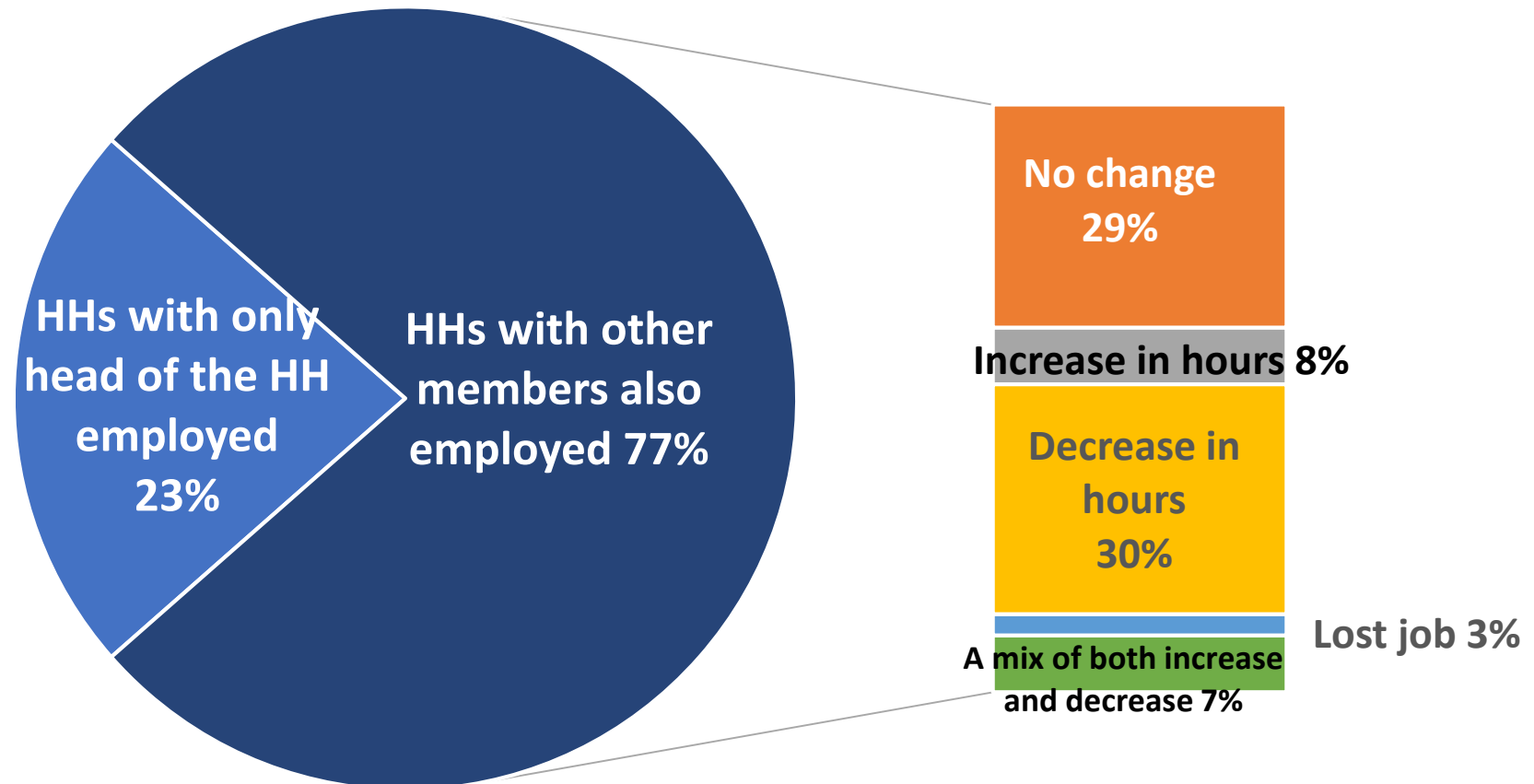




# Unusual challenges faced by Self-employed/Business owners in the last one month (% of HH heads) (N=311)



# Change in employment/work hours of members other than the head of the HH in those HHs where additional members are employed



# Main results on employment

- Overall, unemployment rate is similar in urban and rural areas
- But unemployment in rural areas has shown a slight increase in trend in the past 2 months
  - Perhaps indicating a reverse migration of unemployed workers (esp. seasonal, daily wage workers) from urban areas to rural areas (*but the survey did not include a question on recent migration of HH head to confirm this*)
- Government shutdowns/restriction of movement is cited as one of the major reasons for job loss (among those unemployed) and reduction in hours worked (among currently wage/salary earners)
  - It is also cited as one of the major challenges faced by self-employed / business owners
- More than 90% of reduction in work hours experienced in the past one month by wage/salary workers can be linked directly (i.e., lockdowns) or indirectly (i.e., significant reduction in business/activity) to COVID-19
- More than 75% of unemployment in the past 1-2 months can be linked directly or indirectly to COVID-19

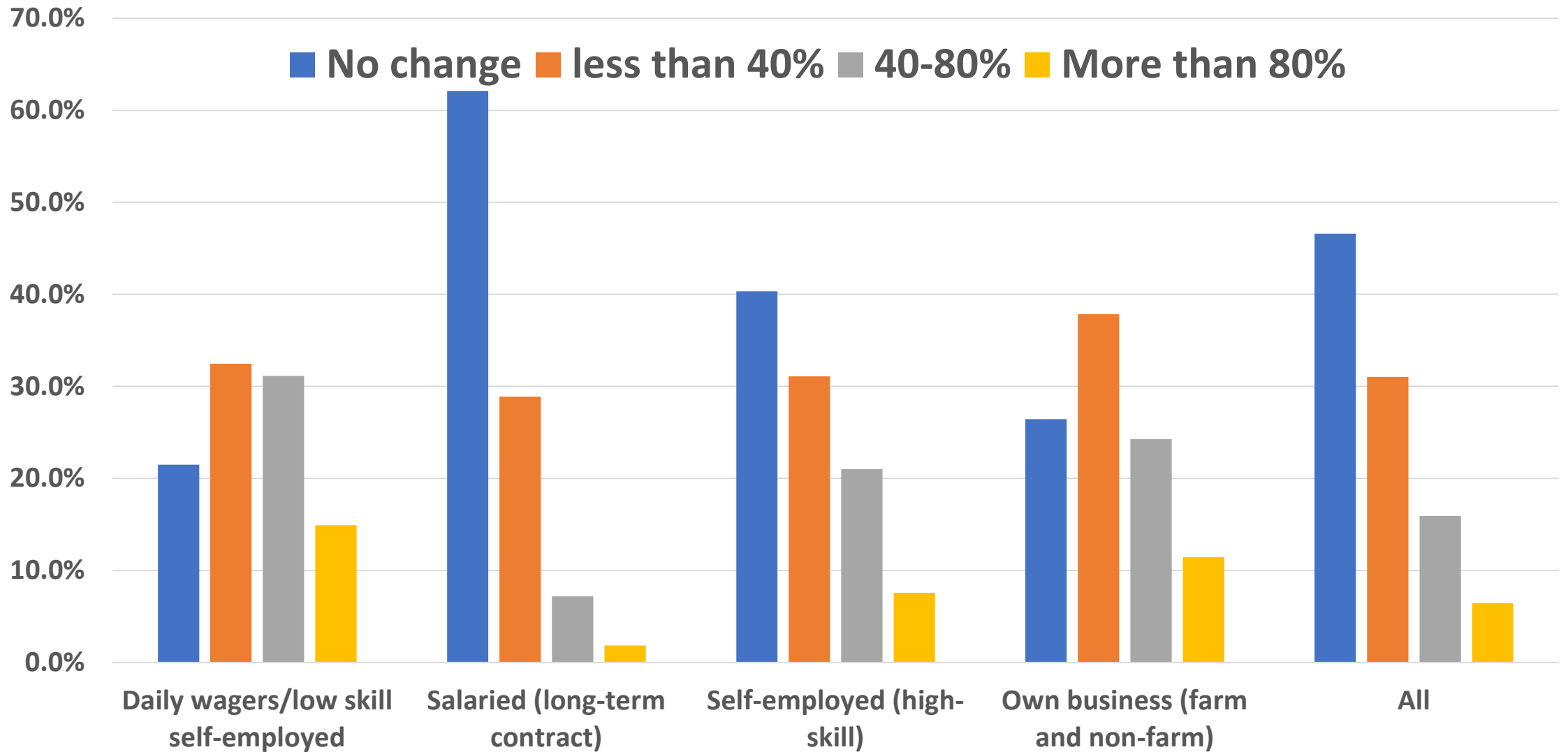
# Main results on employment (cont'd)

- From employer's perspective: About 30% of self employed/business owners reported laying off workers in the past one month
- But business owners also reported the inability to hire labor as a challenge in the past one month
- About 30% of households reported reduction in hours worked by a HH member other than the head
- About 37% of households reported at least one person in the HH had either lost a job or had experienced a significant reduction in work hours in the past one month

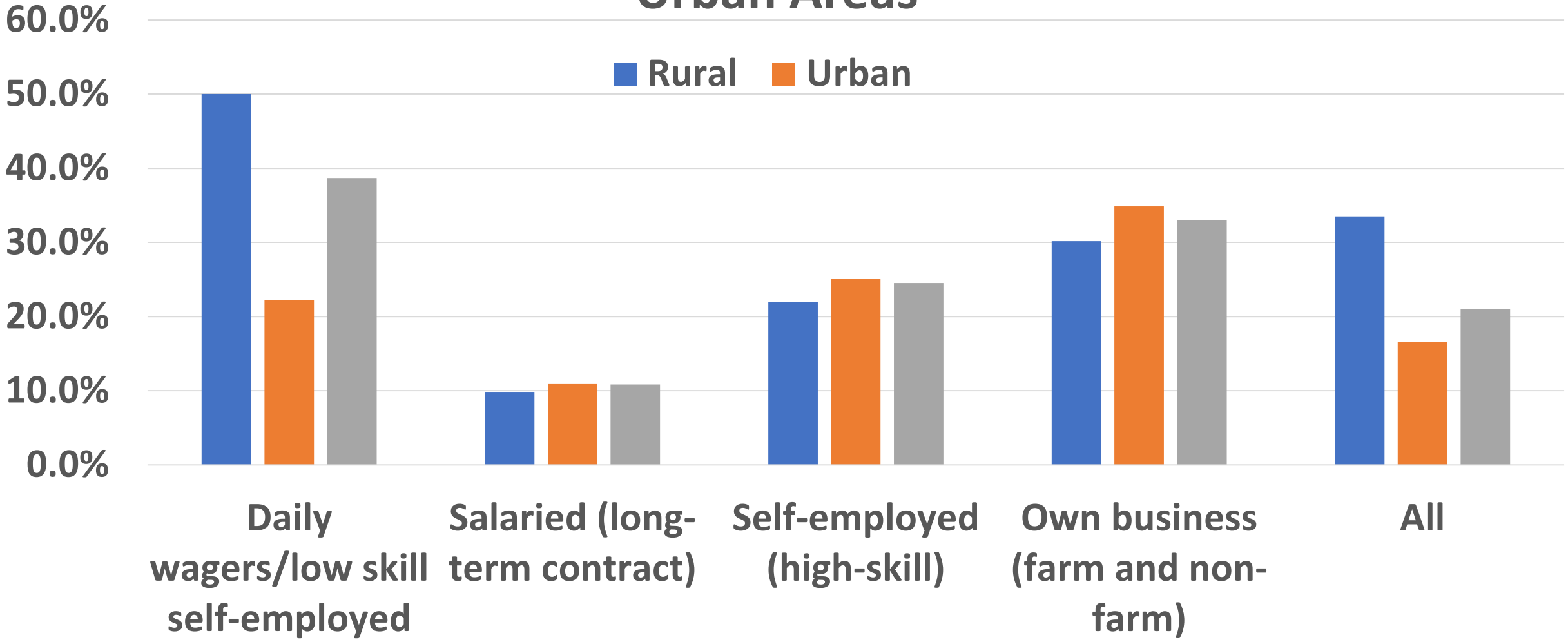
# Outcomes/Effects

**Livelihood (N=1107)**

# Change in HH income in the past one month by main source of income



# Average Percentage Reduction in Income in the Past One Month by Main Source of HH Income in Rural and Urban Areas



# Main results on livelihood effects

- Daily wage earners, low-skilled self-employed workers, and business owners (farm and non-farm) have experienced more income reduction effects in the past one month than salaried employees and high-skilled self-employed people
- Average income loss is more pronounced in rural sample compared to urban sample, especially among daily wage earners.
  - This may be a reflection of the return migration—i.e., daily wage earners may have returned back to rural areas due to lockdowns and may be inflating the figures for rural areas
- High-skilled self employed and business owners in urban areas have experienced a slightly more negative income effect than their rural counterparts



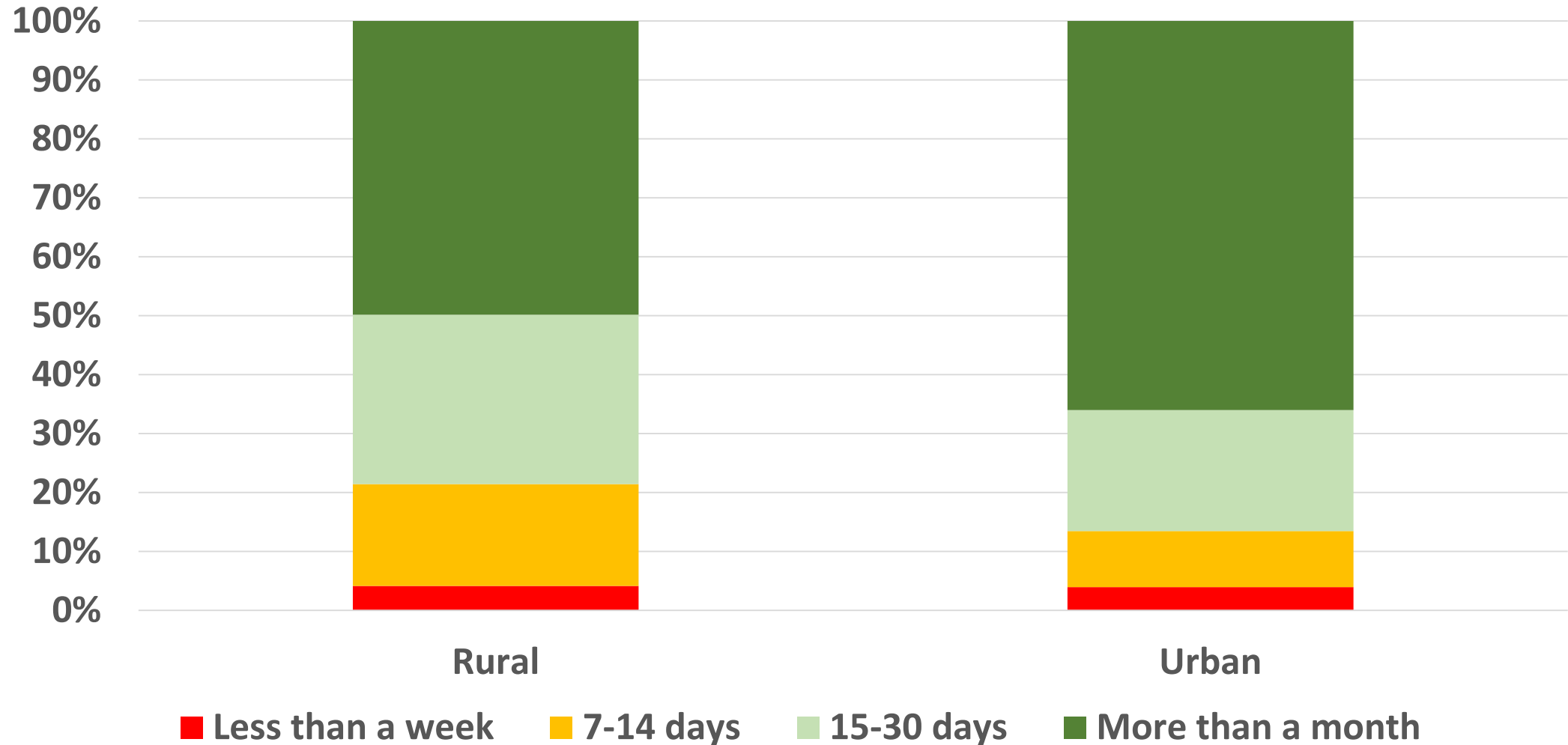
# Outcomes/Effects

**Food Security, Consumption, and Availability / Affordability (N=1050)**

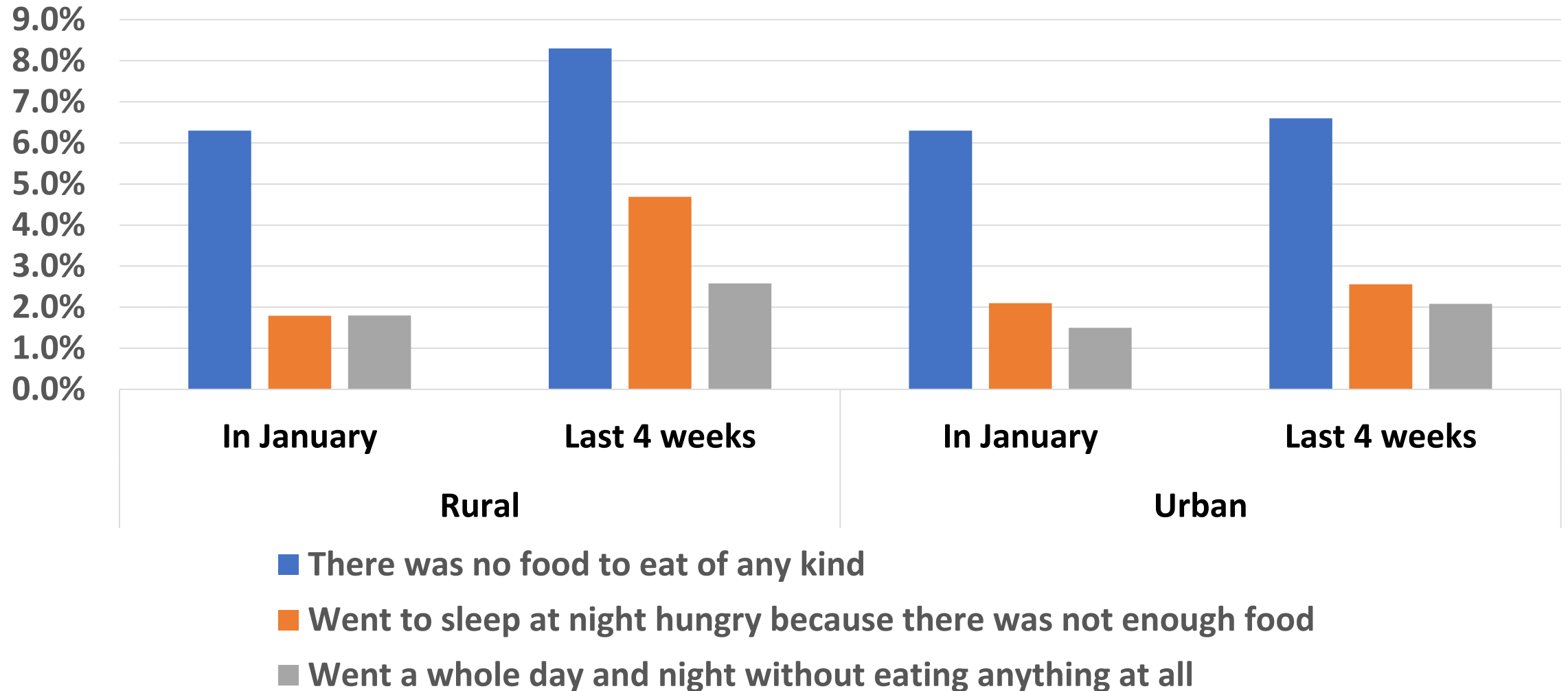
# How long can your HH meet food needs with available income / saving resources? **By HH's main source of income**



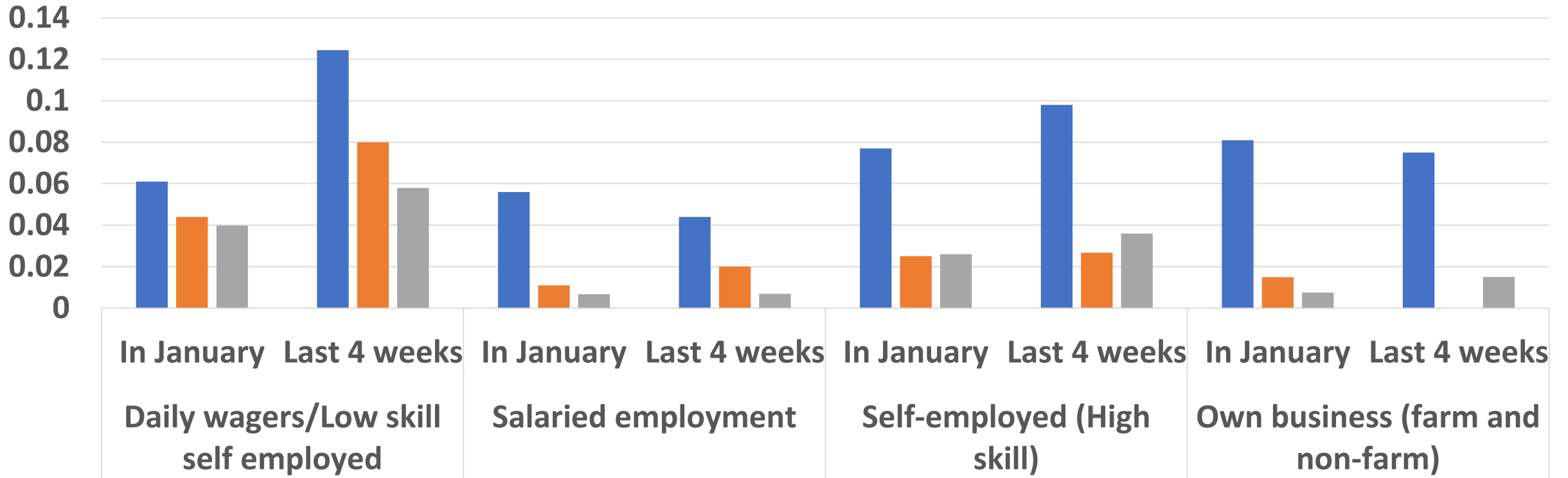
## How long can your HH meet food needs with available income / saving resources? **By Rural vs. Urban HHs**



## Indicators of Household Hunger in January 2020 vs. Last 4 Weeks Prior to the Survey, **By Rural and Urban HHs**

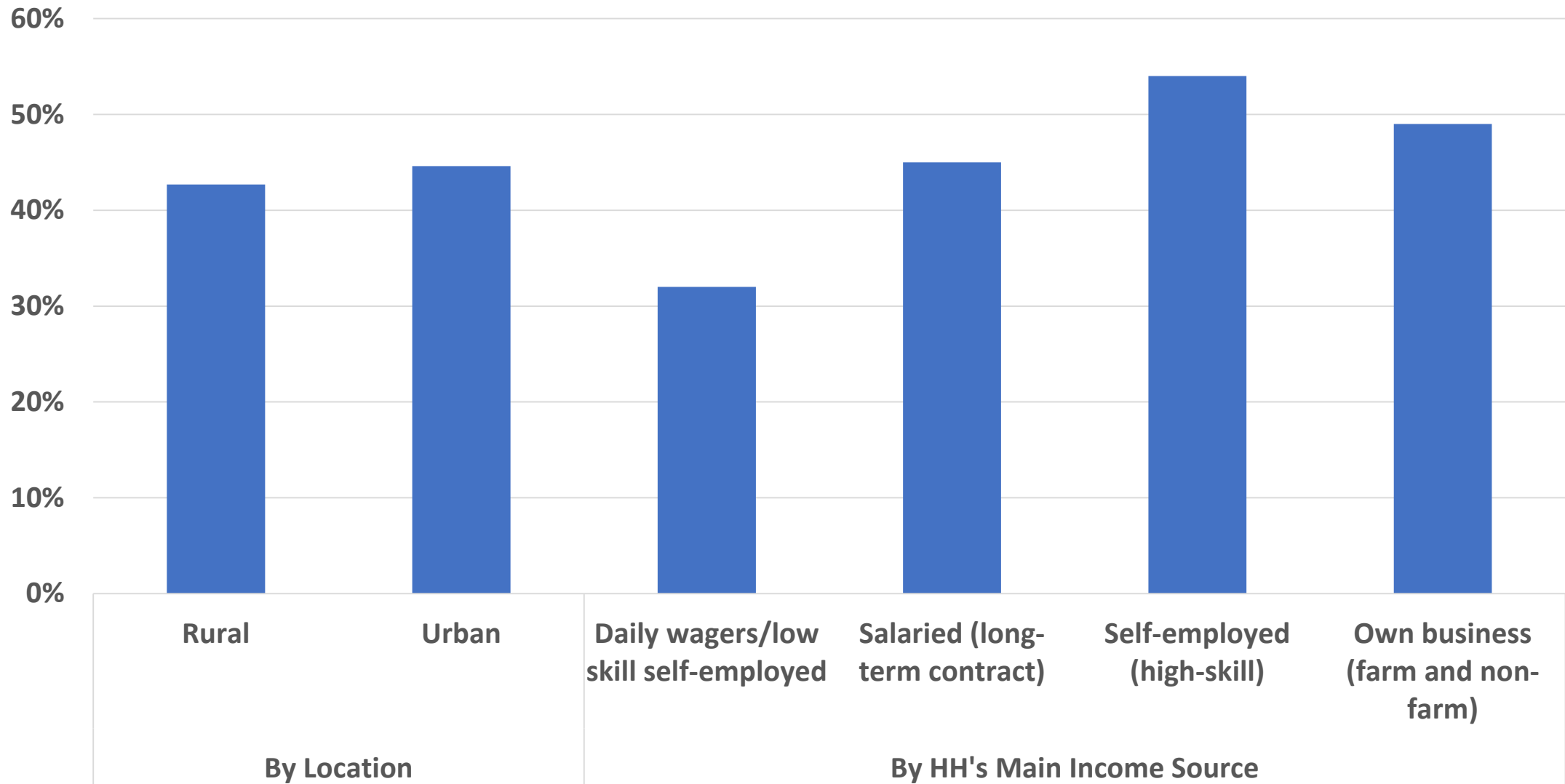


## Indicators of Household Hunger in January 2020 vs. Last 4 Weeks Prior to the Survey, **By HH's Main Source of Income**

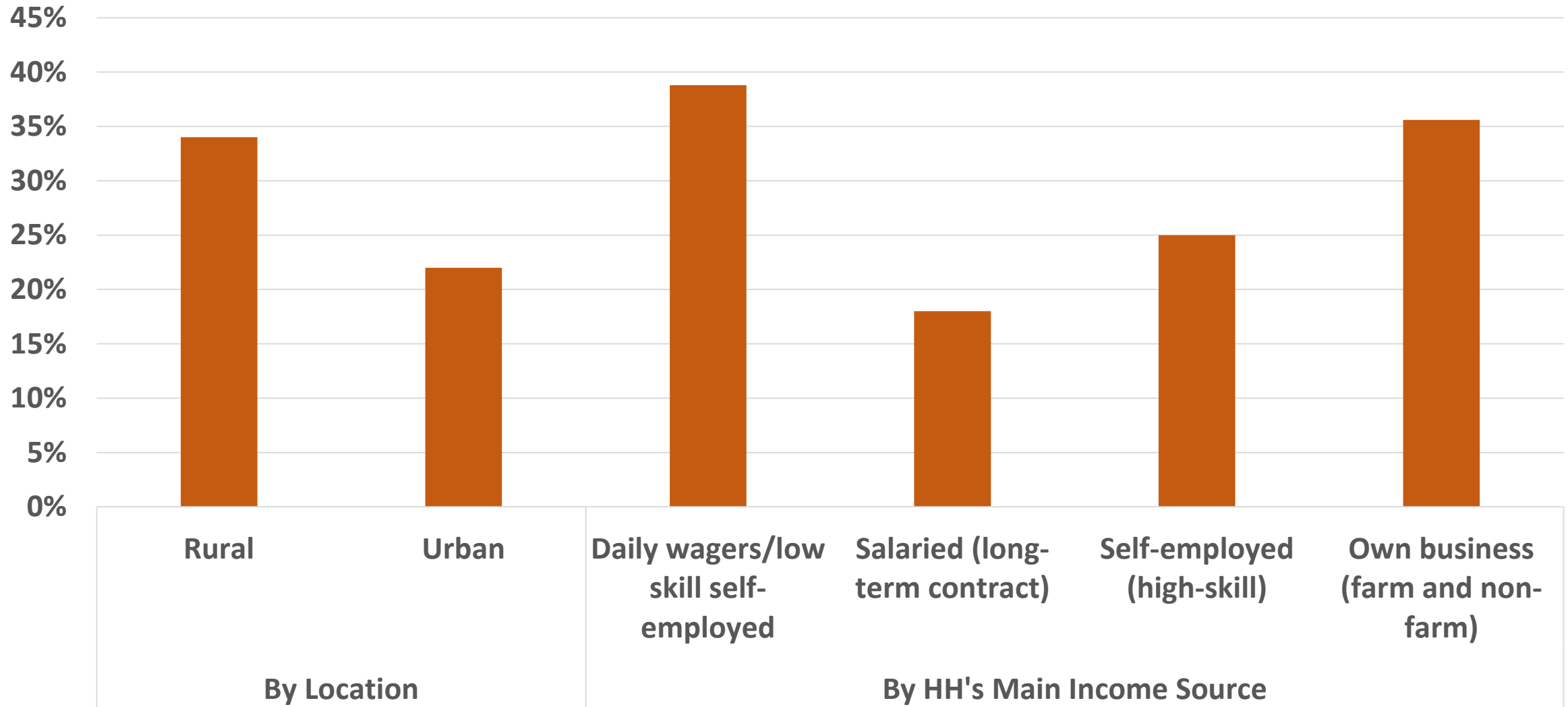


- There was no food to eat of any kind
- Went to sleep at night hungry because there was not enough food
- Went a whole day and night without eating anything at all

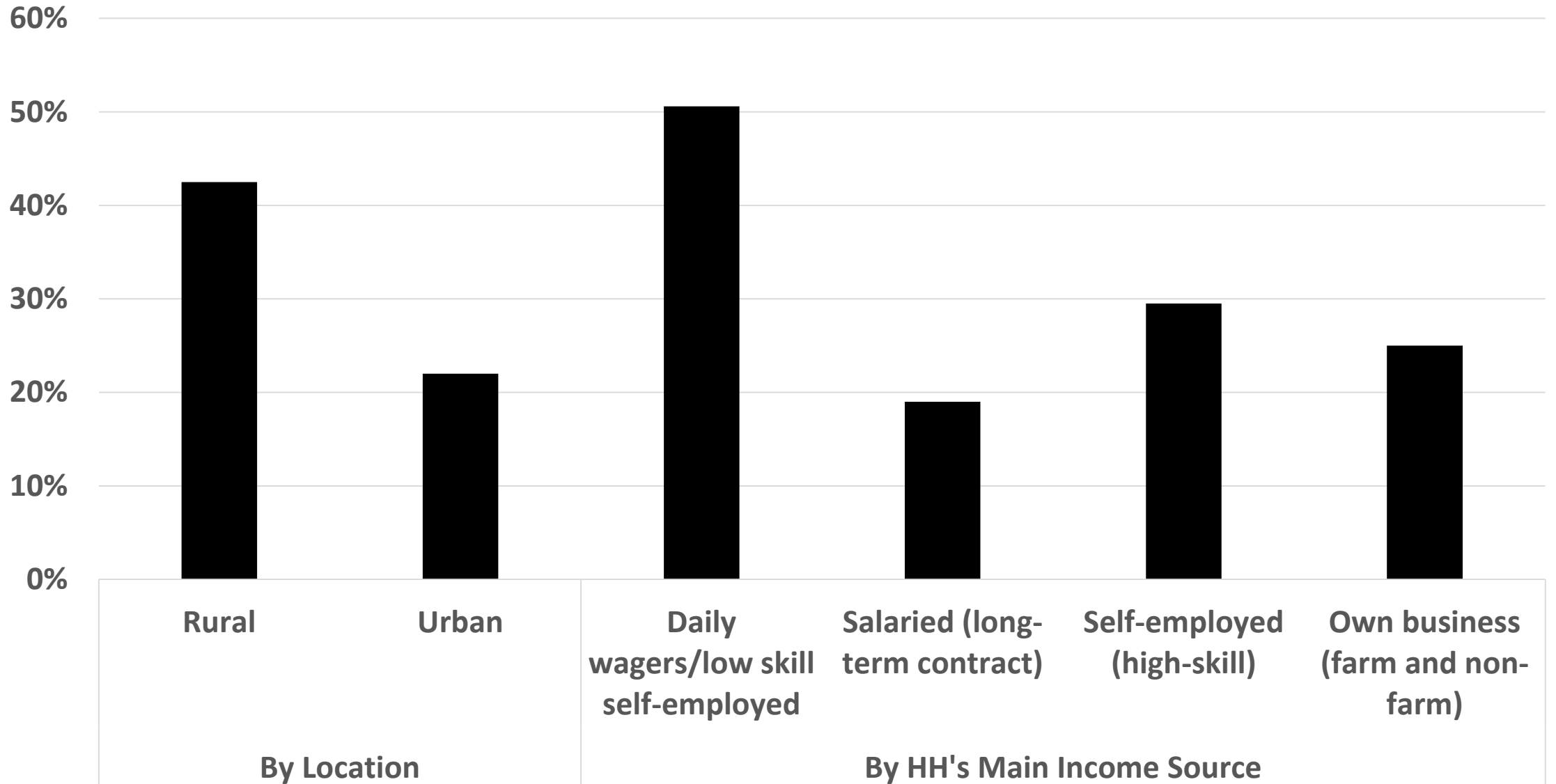
**% of HHs that could not eat preferred food in the past 4 weeks because it was  
NOT AVAILABLE, by location and HH's main source of income**



# Percentage of HHs that could not eat preferred food in the past 4 weeks because it was **EXPENSIVE**, by location and main source of HH income

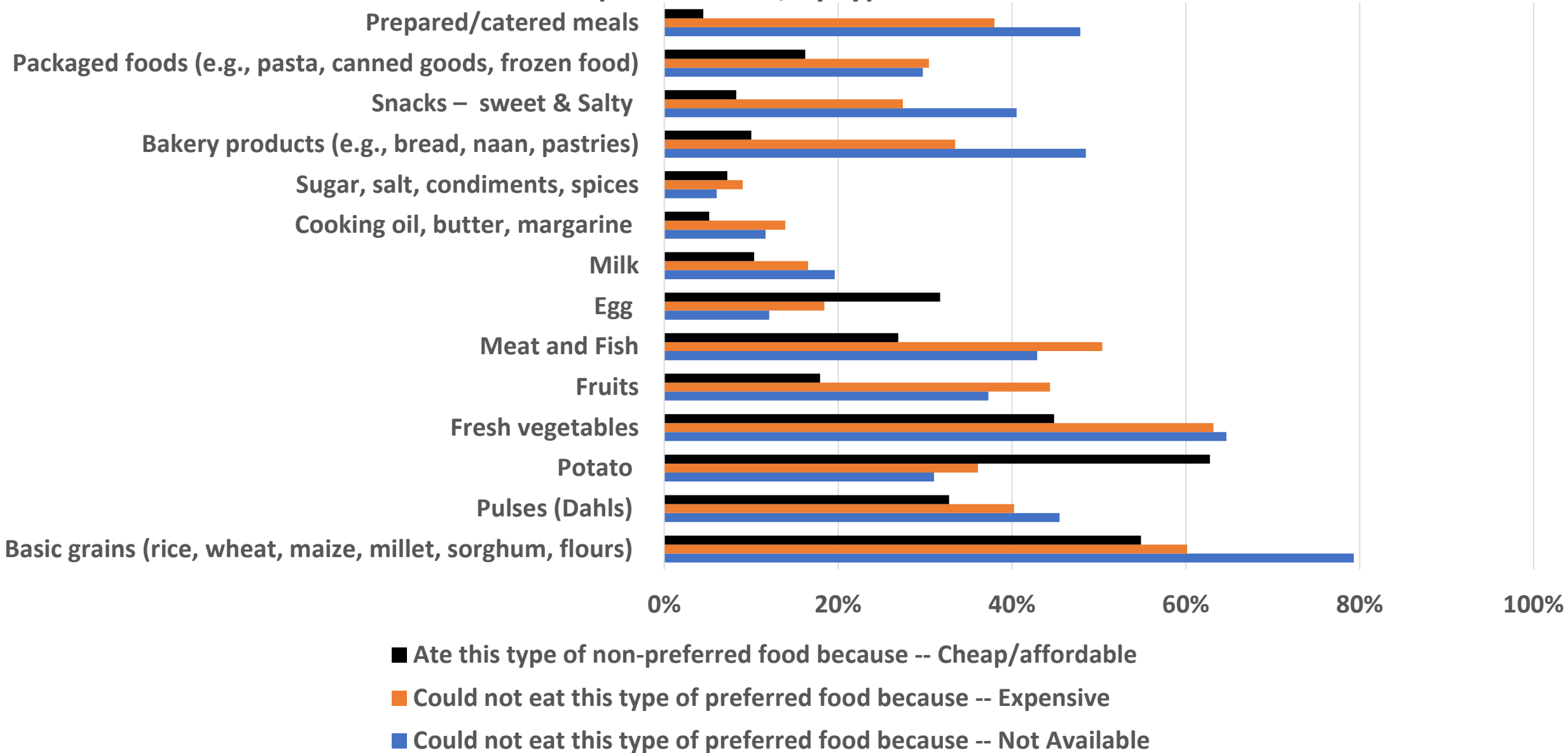


**% of HHs that had to eat non-preferred food in the past 4 weeks because it was CHEAPER/AFFORDABLE, by location and main source of HH income**





**% of respondents who could not eat preferred food because it was not available or expensive or who ate non-preferred food because it was cheaper/affordable in the past 4 weeks, by types of food**



# Main results on food related outcomes

- Daily wage earners and people living in rural areas are more vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger compared to HHs with other sources of income and living in urban areas
- Compared to January 2020 (i.e., pre-COVID), households with main source of income from daily wages/low-skilled self-employment experienced a significant increase in 'hunger' in the past 4 weeks prior to the survey (i.e., post-COVID); But overall the rate of hunger reporting is very low
- Non-availability of preferred foods in the past 4 weeks was cited as a challenge by more number of respondents than food being expensive or having to eat non-preferred foods
- Not able to eat preferred foods because they were expensive or having to eat non-preferred foods because they were cheaper/affordable was reported more by daily wage/low-skilled self-employed households and people in rural areas

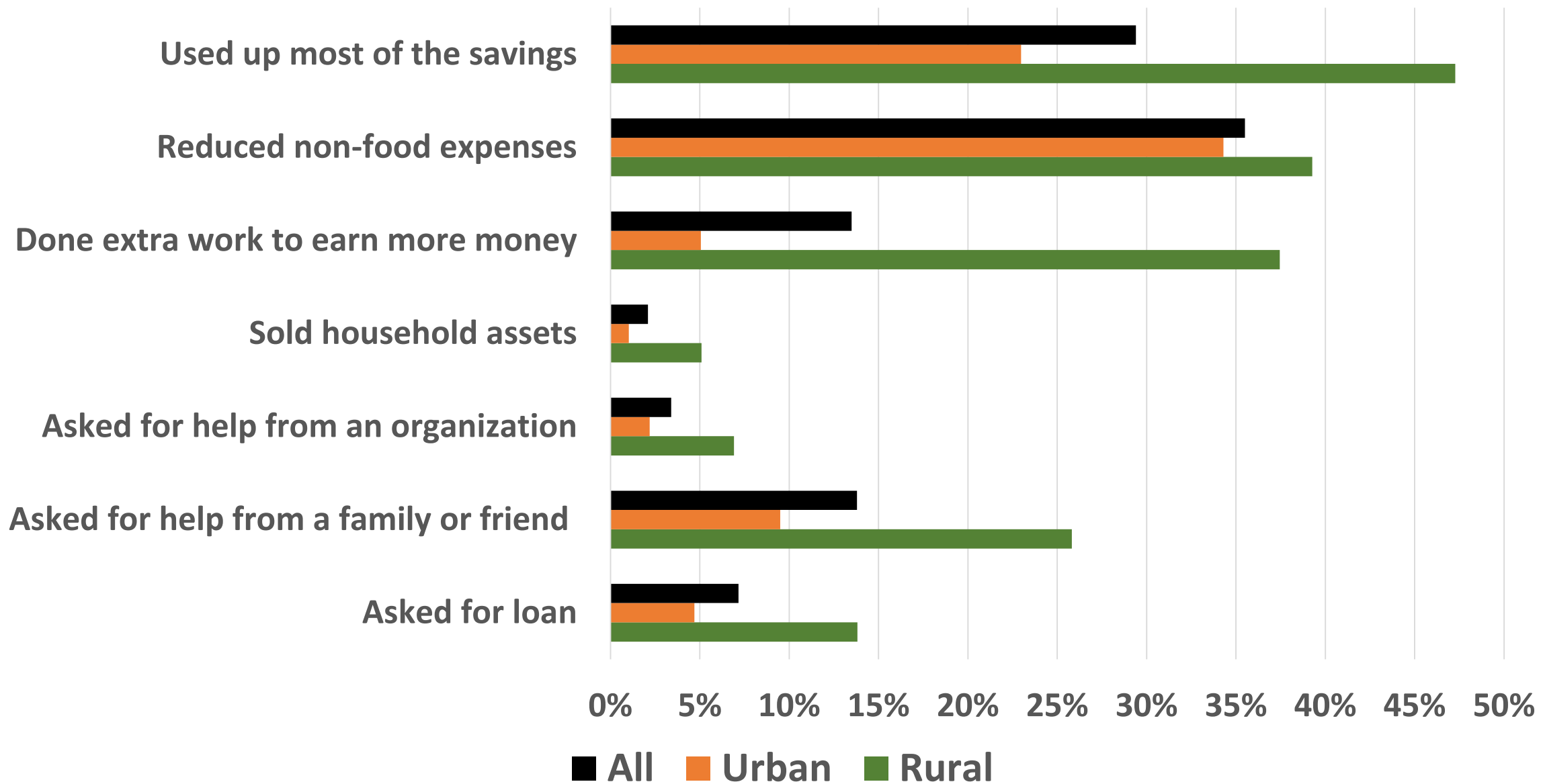
# Main results on food related outcomes (cont'd)

- Grains, vegetables, bakery products and prepared meals were most cited as preferred foods people ate less in the past 4 weeks because of **non-availability**
- Vegetables, grains, and meat/fish were top three preferred foods that people ate less because they were **expensive**
- Potatoes, grains and vegetables were also cited as the top three most non-preferred foods that people ate because they were **cheaper/affordable** in the past 4 weeks
- Grains and vegetables are in all three food consumption challenge categories (non-availability, expensive, cheap), indicating:
  - Heterogeneity in food preferences among respondents and across foods within this group
  - Substitutability of foods within the food group (people substituting one grain with another; one vegetable with another)

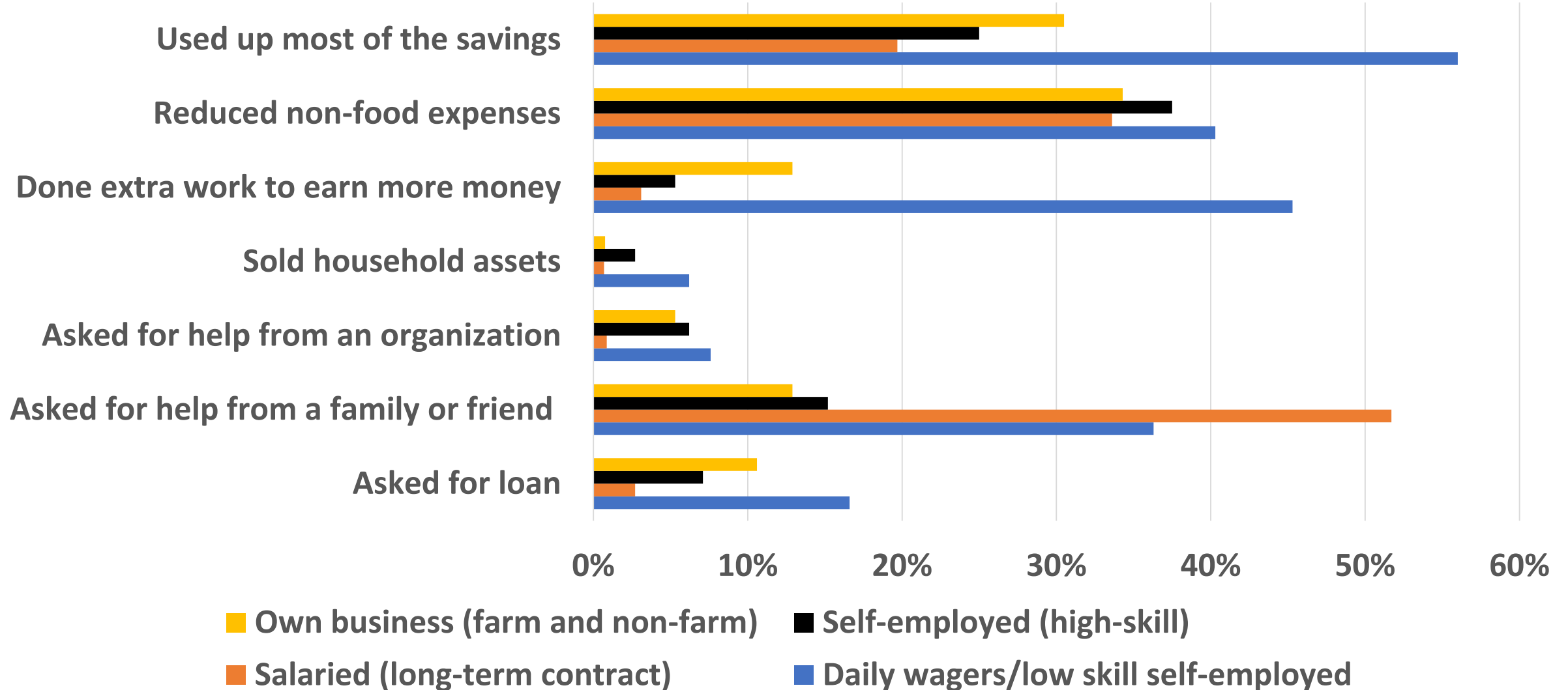
# Coping Strategies & Safety Net

(N=1047)

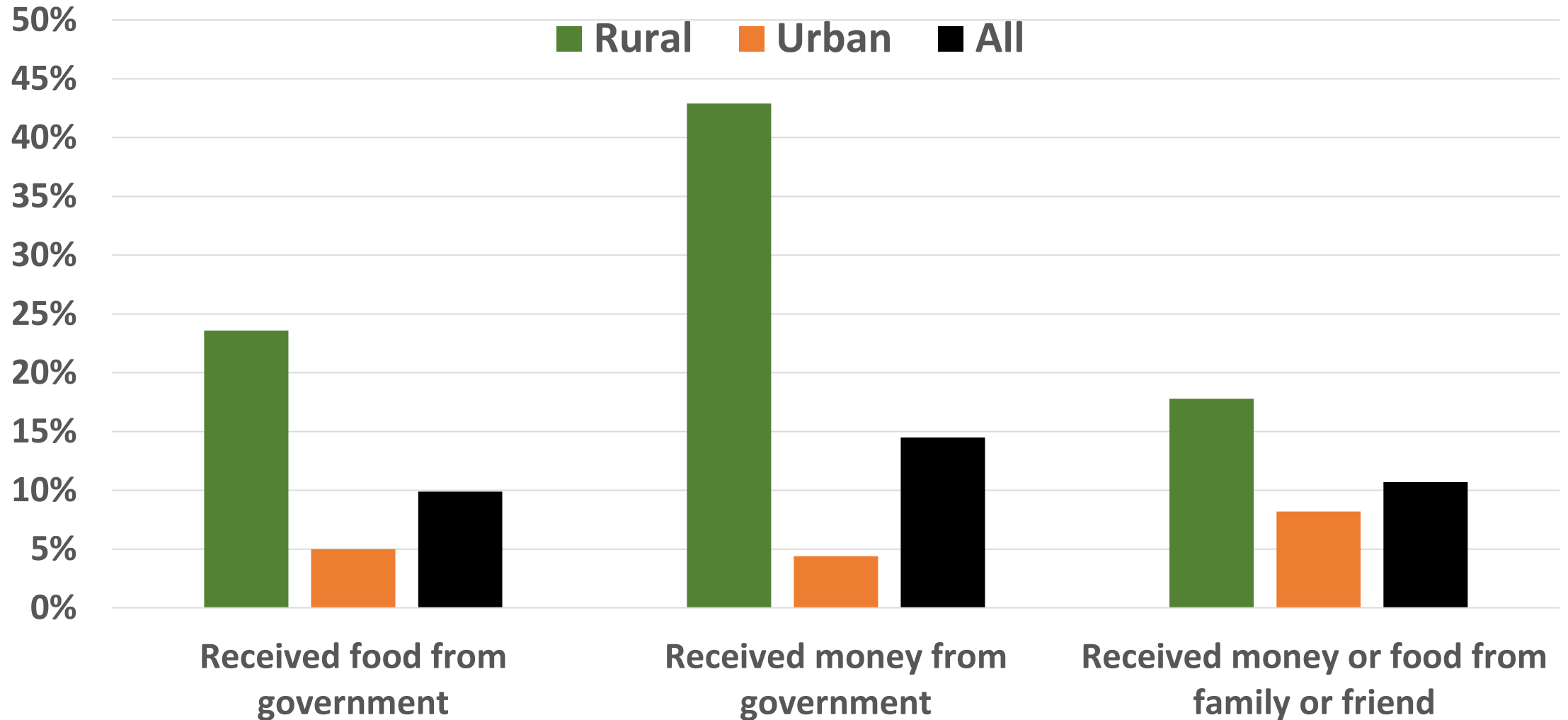
# In the past 4 weeks, HH or any HH member has done the following? (By rural vs. urban HHs)



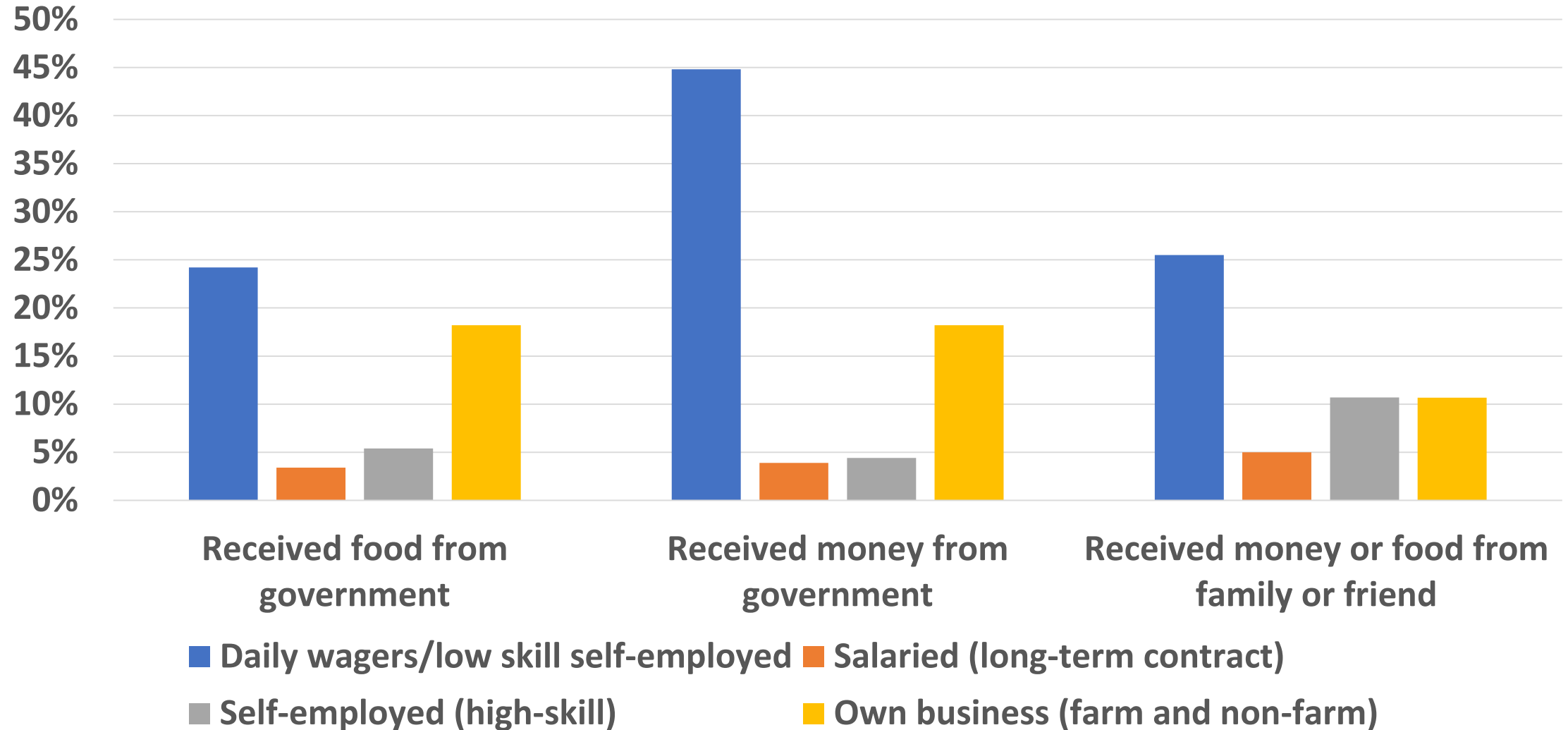
# In the past 4 weeks, HH or any HH member has done the following? Differences between HHs by main source of income



## In the past 4 weeks, a HH has received following benefits, by rural and urban households



## In the past 4 weeks, a HH has received following benefits, by main source of HH income





# Main results on coping strategies and safety net

- Reducing non-food expenses and using up most of the savings are the two most reported coping strategies used by HHs in the past one month
- Households more distressed by the COVID crisis (i.e., daily wagers and rural HHs) reported having used all the coping strategies more than less distressed households
- Also more distressed households (daily wage earners and rural HHs) reported having received food or money assistance from the government than the better-off households
  - There is some indication that cash and food transfer programs are reaching the needy more than the non-needy

# Awareness and behavioral responses to COVID-19

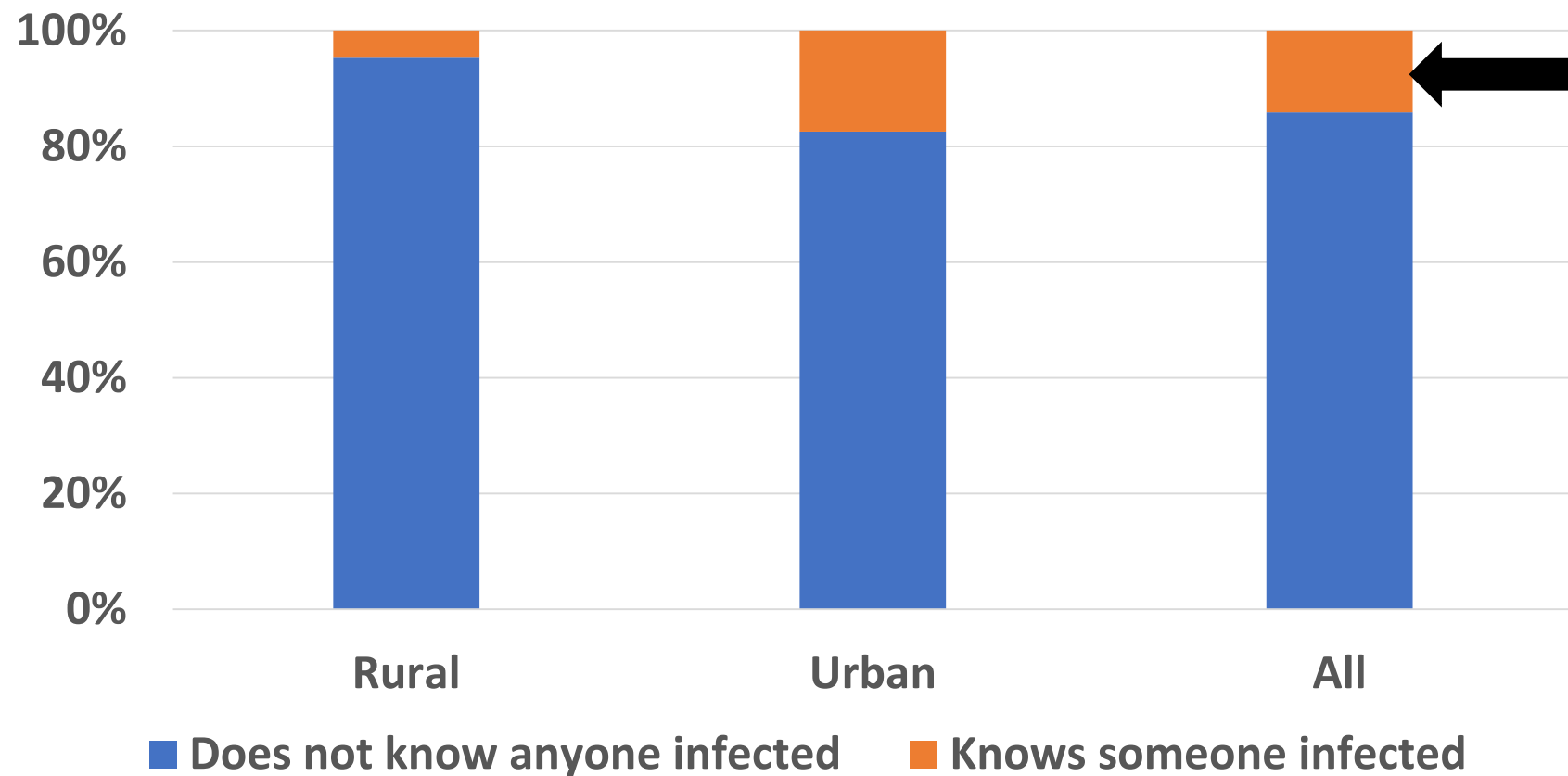
(N=1035)

**High awareness:** 99% of people surveyed had heard of COVID-19 or coronavirus (100% of rural respondents were aware)

**Availability of Testing:** 50% of respondents reported that testing for coronavirus was available in their area (26% among rural respondents and 59% among urban respondents)

**Effect on other healthcare services:** 25% of respondents reported that they know someone who could not get treatment for other diseases like cancer, heart disease, trauma/ injuries because hospitals and health services were busy and operating at full capacity (no difference between urban and rural respondents)

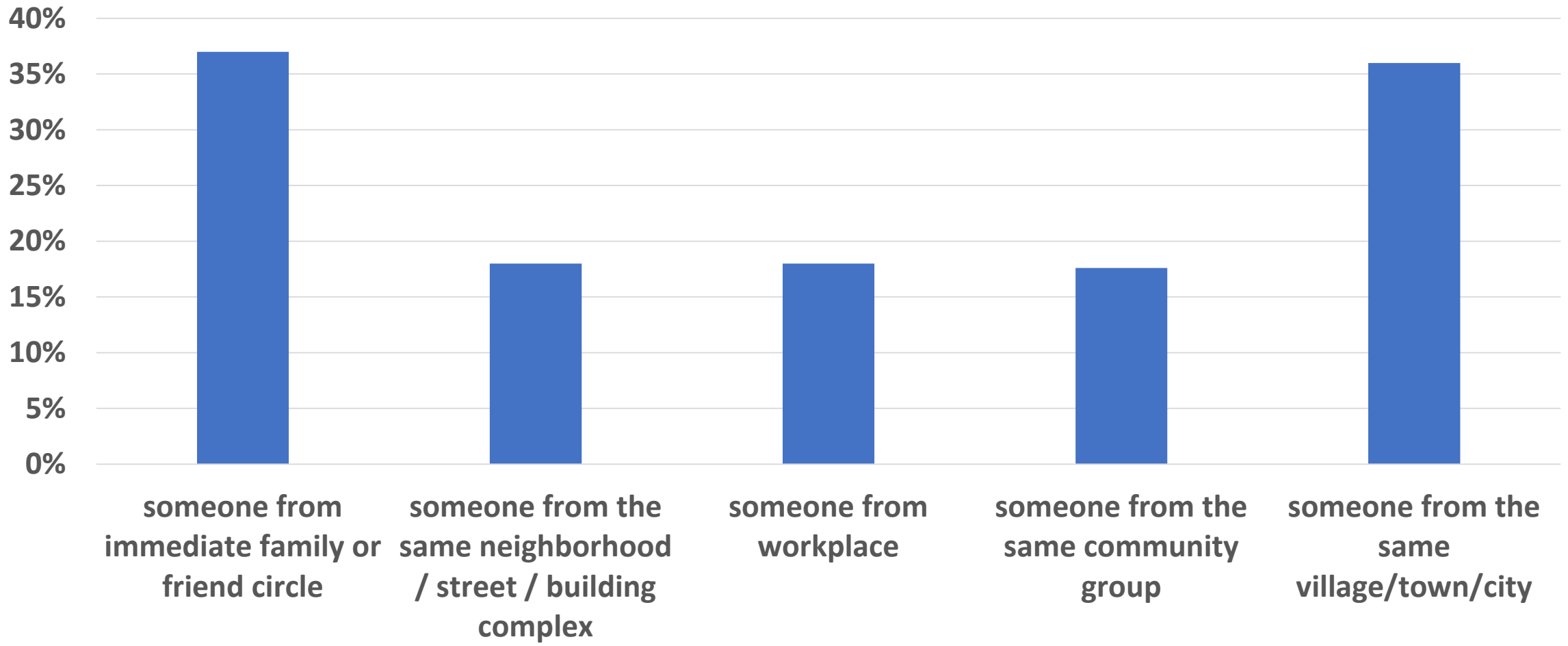
### Among those aware, how many knew someone who was infected with coronavirus?



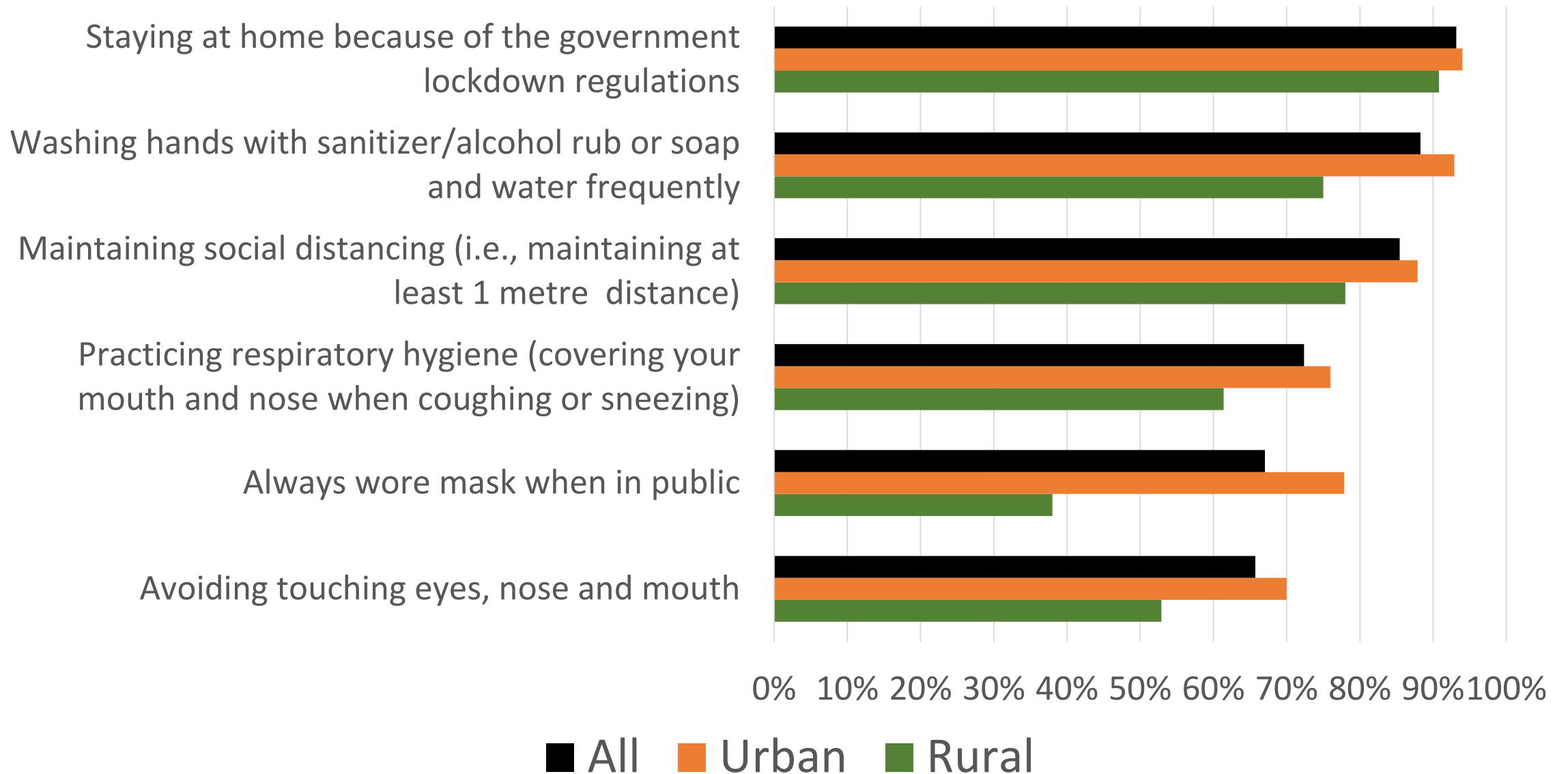
24% of this sub-category reported that the person they knew had died from this disease

56% of this sub-category said the person infected by coronavirus received proper treatment (36% didn't know)

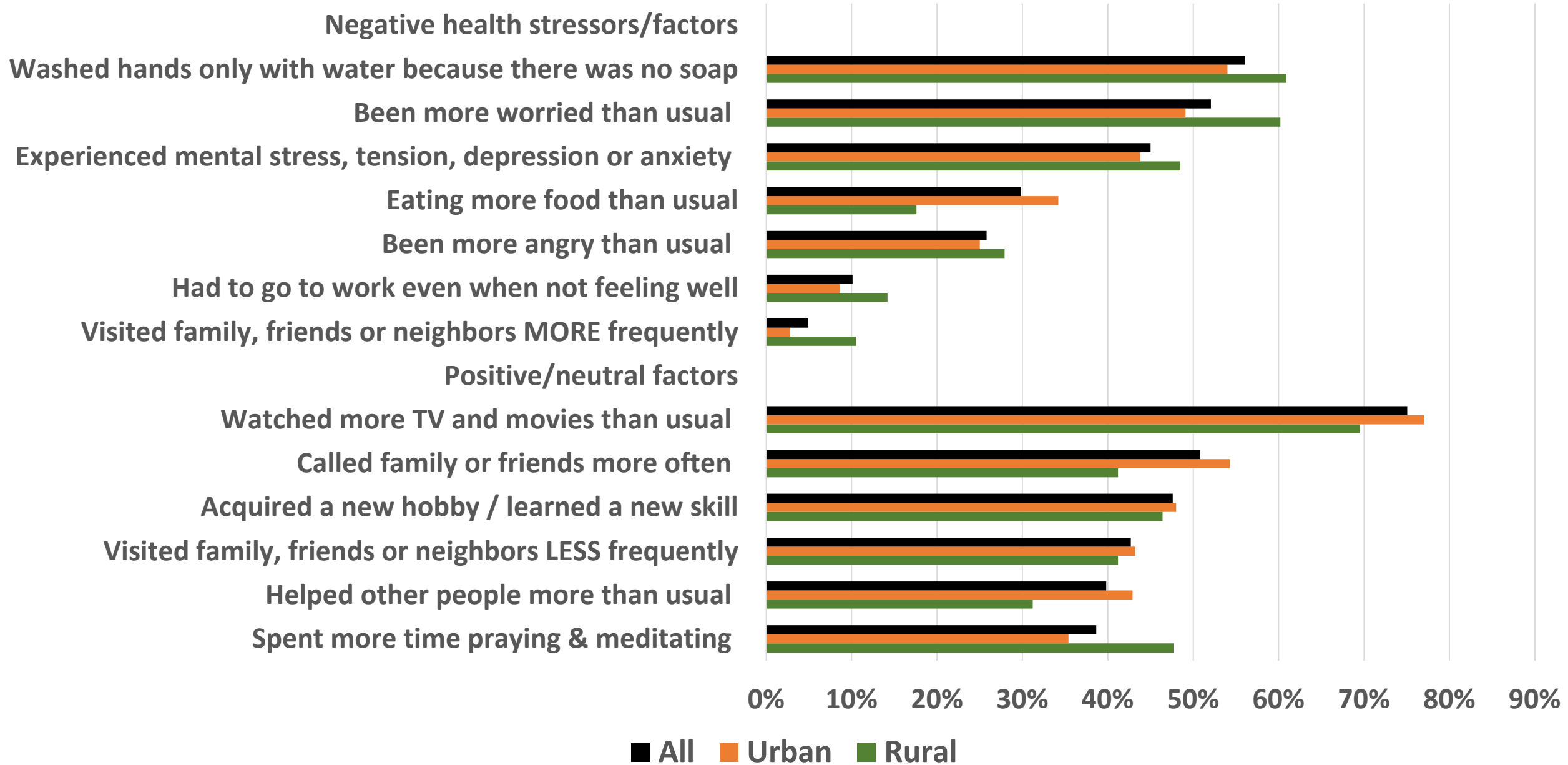
**Which categories of people respondent knows are infected by coronavirus  
(% of respondents who reported knowing someone infected, N=147)**



## During the coronavirus pandemic, which of the following safety measures the respondent has personally observed?



# Positive, neutral, and negative behavioral responses experienced /adopted by the respondents in two weeks prior to the survey



# Main results on awareness and behavioral responses

- There is high awareness about the disease
- People in urban areas know more people infected with coronavirus than in rural areas
- There is a wide variation in the use of recommended safety measures. Staying home due to government lockdown was reported by more than 90% of respondents
- Washing hands more frequently and maintaining social distance were practiced more than wearing a mask in public and avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth



# Implications and recommendations

- There is a need for continued efforts to increase awareness on safety measures to contain the spread of coronavirus, especially in rural areas where people have reported low adoption of personal safety measures and are experiencing more negative health stressors
- There is some indication that cash and food transfer programs are reaching the needy; but these efforts need to be continued and targeted to more distressed households – i.e., daily wagers and rural households
- At least, in the early stages of lock-down, non-availability of food and non-affordability due to income shock appear to be bigger challenges than food being expensive relative to pre-COVID
- There is need to continue efforts to keep the food supply chains functional so that diverse foods are reaching consumers amidst lockdowns. This is necessary to avoid exacerbating food insecurity and negative nutritional effects on people

# Acknowledgment

We thank all the respondents for participating in the survey and sharing the link with friends, family and colleagues. We are especially grateful to respondents who interviewed someone else and completed the survey on their behalf.