

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ASSOCIATED RESTRICTIONS ON DEPRESSION AMONG PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



The Intellectual Disability Supplement to
The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing
(IDS-TILDA)

BACKGROUND



- 13th March 2020 – COVID-19 a Global Pandemic
- Unprecedented public health measures implemented.
- Both a physical health crisis and a mental health emergency (Kelly 2020)
- For those with pre-existing mental health conditions, a greater risk of more adverse mental health outcomes (Asmundson et al. 2020)



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DIAGNOSED DEPRESSION
AMONG PEOPLE WITH
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY
(>40YEARS) **13%**

DIAGNOSED DEPRESSION
AMONG THE GENERAL
POPULATION >50
YEARS) **5%**

**PREVALENCE OF DIAGNOSED MENTAL
HEALTH DISORDERS AS HIGH AS 50%
AMONG PEOPLE WITH AN INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITY**

METHODOLOGY

The research question: What impact had personal and social resources on older adults with intellectual disabilities experience of depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research objectives: To measure how resources which were lost, and to measure how resources that were gained during the pandemic impacted on depressive symptomatology.

A quantitative research design, which analysed cross-sectional data from Wave 4 of the IDS TILDA study and a supplementary COVID-19 survey.

Demographic profile of participants of Wave 4 of IDS TILDA

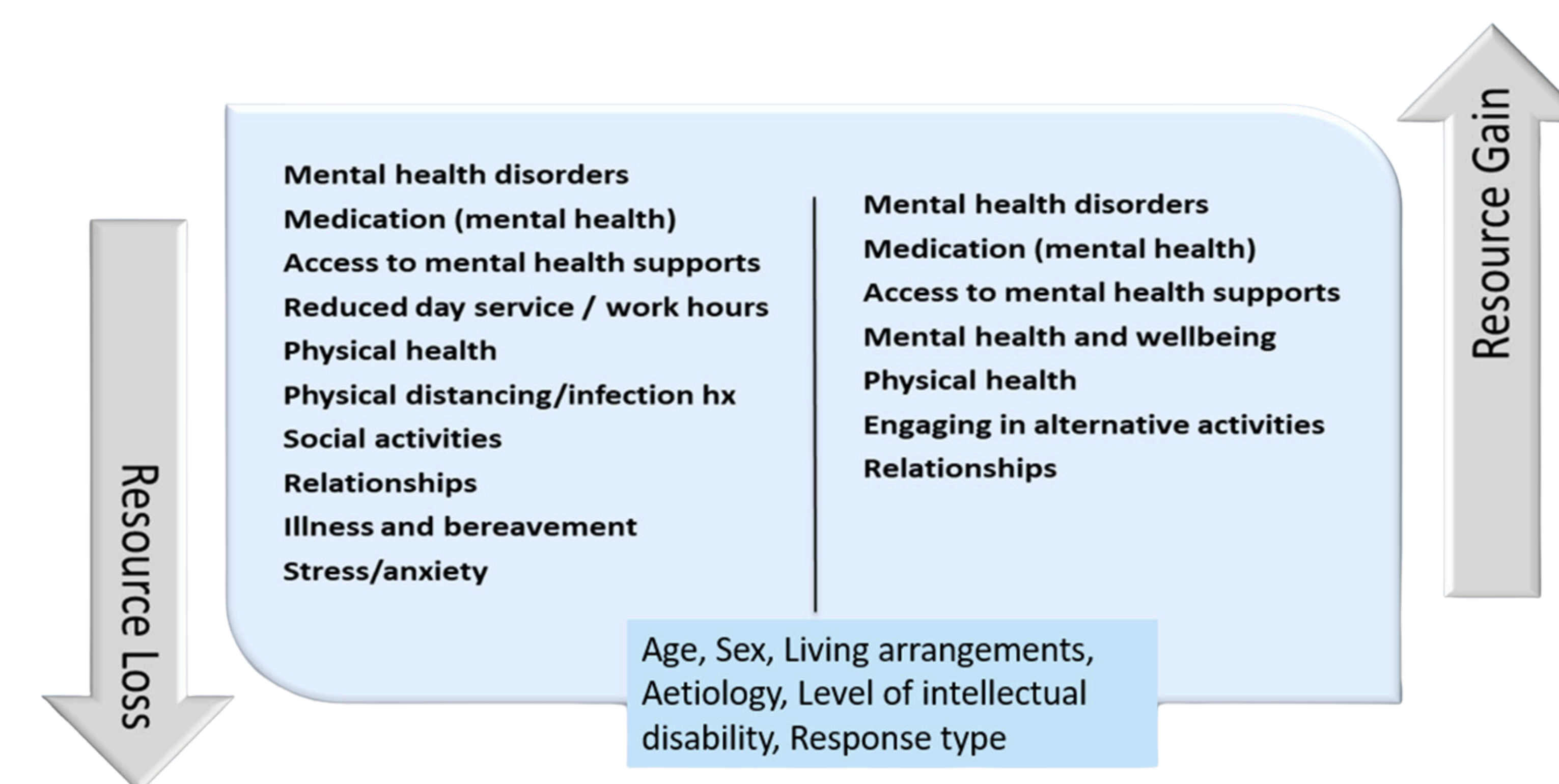
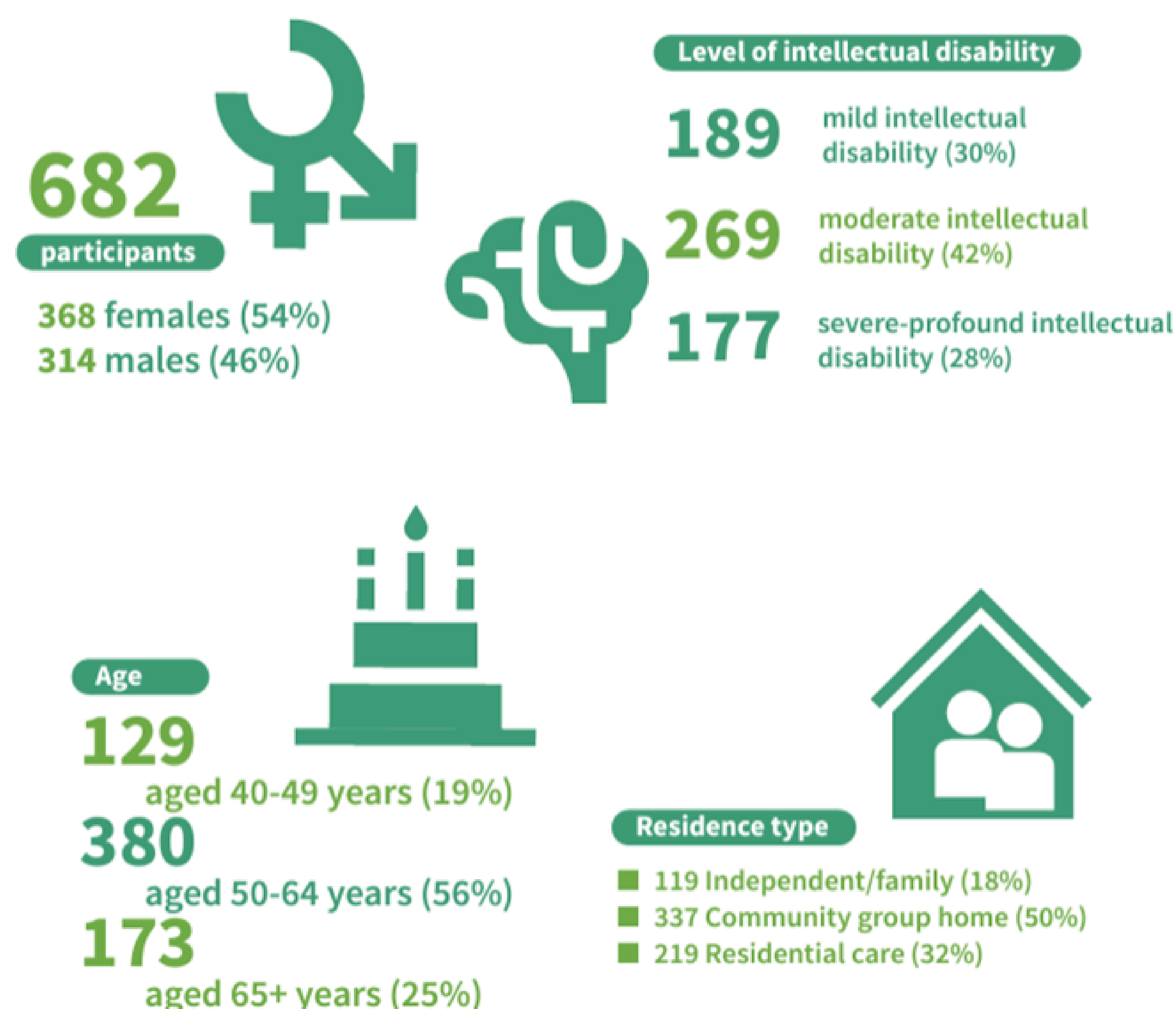


FIGURE 1: RESOURCES WHICH WERE USED AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES WITHIN THE STUDY.

Ethics: Ethical approval was received from the Trinity College Dublin Health Sciences Ethics Committee

Dependent Variable: The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) was used to screen for depressive symptoms. Results categorised into a binary response.

Independent Variables: Using a literature-based framework, Resources which had been both lost and gained. (See figure 1 for resources)

Theoretical Framework: The Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989)

Data Collection: May – September 2021

Data Analysis: SPSS was used to perform statistical analysis. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis conducted. Responses categorised as binary responses, a binary logistic regression model completed.

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RESULTS

Key Findings on Depression in Participants (N=545)

Prevalence: 13.6% reported depressive symptoms (PHQ-9).

Significant Variables

(Multivariate Analysis):

- **Aetiology:** Participants with Down syndrome had 2.5x greater odds of depression.
- **Response Type:** Independent responses negatively associated with depression.
- **Mental Health Supports:** Access during the pandemic positively associated with depression.
- **Resilience Resource Gains:** Linked to higher odds of depression.
- **Physical Health Resource Loss:** 2.8x greater odds of depression.

Mental Health Supports Identified by Participants	n=
Staff Only	69
Friends and Family Only	8
Combination of Family, Friends, and staff	19
*Psychiatry only	76
*Psychology only	40
*GP only	18
*Behaviour specialist only	11
*MHID, MDT, combination mental health professionals	76
*Bereavement support	1
*Counsellor	3
*Memory clinic	1
Referred and awaiting appointment	5
Total	327



DISCUSSION

Participants with **Down syndrome** had odds almost **two and a half times greater** than those with other/unknown aetiologies of experiencing symptoms of depression within the study. However, **prior research indicated that people with Down syndrome experience better mental health outcomes** than those with other causes of intellectual disability (McCarron et al., 2011). A number of other studies also found **increased mental health burdens** for this population related to COVID-19 (Villani et al., 2020, Hartley et al., 2022, Vaccarino et al., 2023).

Finding suggests that there is a **need to consider training and education for staff, family and friends who provide these (informal/day-to-day) mental health supports to people with intellectual disabilities**. There is also a need for future research to **understand the effectiveness of mental health promotion and interventions** for both those who have a mental health diagnosis, and for those who experience sub-clinical symptoms of depression.

Loss of physical health resources were a major contributor towards poorer mental health outcomes during the pandemic. Considering the well reported disparities in physical health among those with intellectual disabilities, this study has provided evidence to highlight the interconnectedness of both physical and mental health. The importance of **high-quality accessible health promotional information** for individuals, families and staff to **increase awareness and understanding** to address this significant area of concern is required.

STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

- **This study aimed to:**
 - Provide data to inform planning for mental health support in future pandemics.
 - Explore how mental health services can be effectively organised beyond emergencies.
- **Relevance to the Irish COVID-19 Public Inquiry:**
 - Highlights how existing disparities in physical and mental health for people with intellectual disabilities were exacerbated during the pandemic.
- **Future Research Plans:**
 - Investigate interventions to support mental health promotion.
 - Develop effective strategies for addressing depression and other mental health challenges.
 - Emphasise the interconnectedness of mental and physical health.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Engage stakeholders to ensure interventions are practical, realistic, and sustainable.