



Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance

International students and the impacts of precarity: Highly and extremely precarious international students in Sydney and Melbourne prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic

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A few introductory comments

- An Australian Research Council project on students in PRS in Sydney and Melbourne
- 2 Surveys and 48 in-depth interviews with students.
- First survey closed end of 2019 – 7,084 valid responses.
- Second survey closed early July 2020. Main focus looking at impact of the lockdowns.
- Presentation focuses on 2019 survey.
- <https://internationalstudentsandhousing.com>



Levels of precarity

- Report divided students into 4 groups based on how many financial stress indicators they experienced over the last 12 months.
- <https://internationalstudentsandhousing.com/2022/11/29/international-students-and-the-impacts-of-precarity-highly-and-extremely-precarious-students-in-sydney-and-melbourne-prior-to-and-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

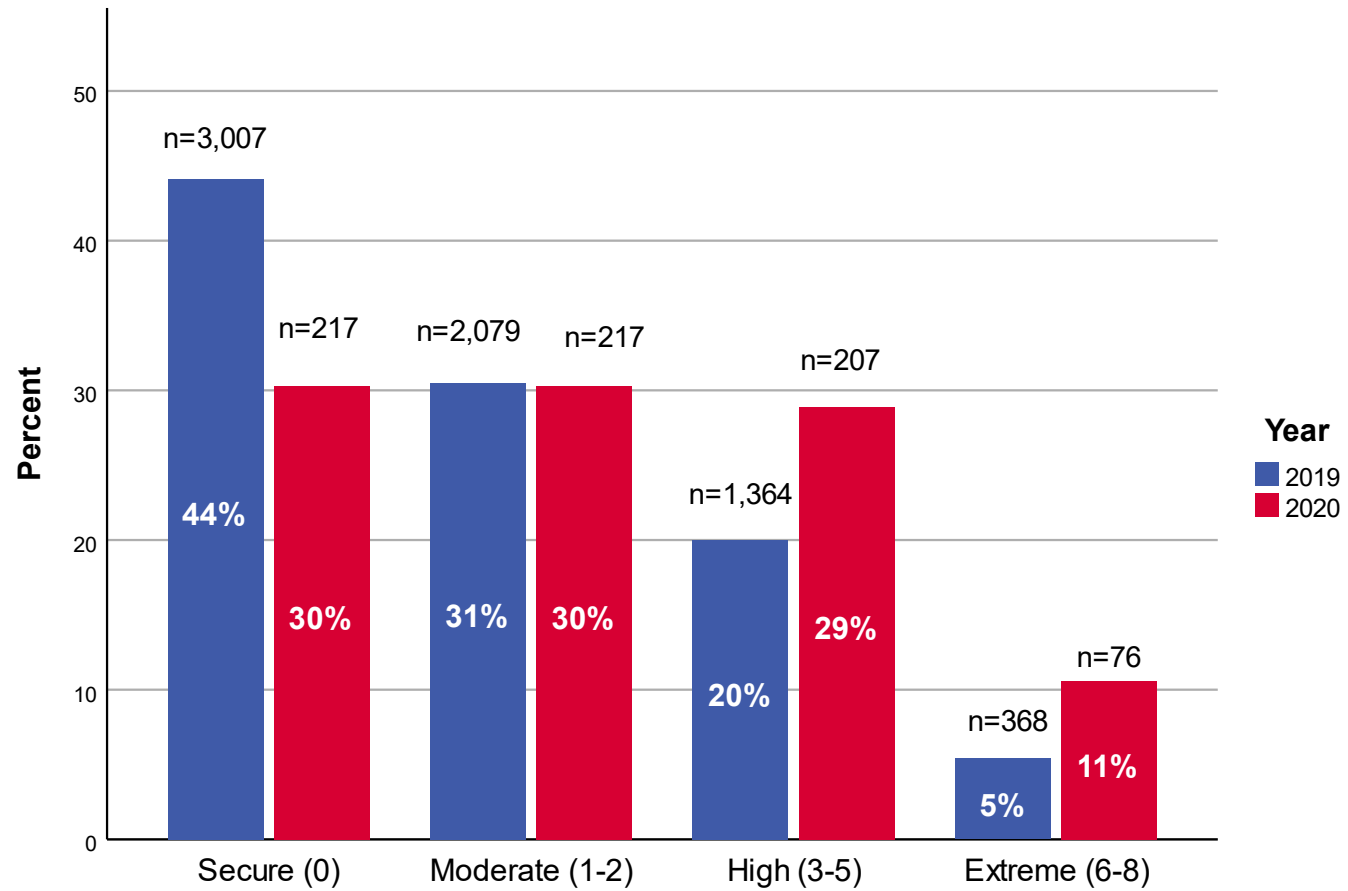


Over the past year, since you started renting, have any of the following happened to you because of a shortage of money?

Items	2019	2020
Had to borrow money from friends or family?	41%	45%
Unable to heat your home adequately?	22%	35%
Unable to cool your home adequately?	22%	21%
Could not afford to buy prescribed textbook/s?	22%	28%
Went without meals?	21%	29%
Pawned or sold something to get money?	12%	26%
Had trouble paying your electricity on time?	11%	23%
Asked welfare/community organisations for help?	4%	23%
N	6,818	717

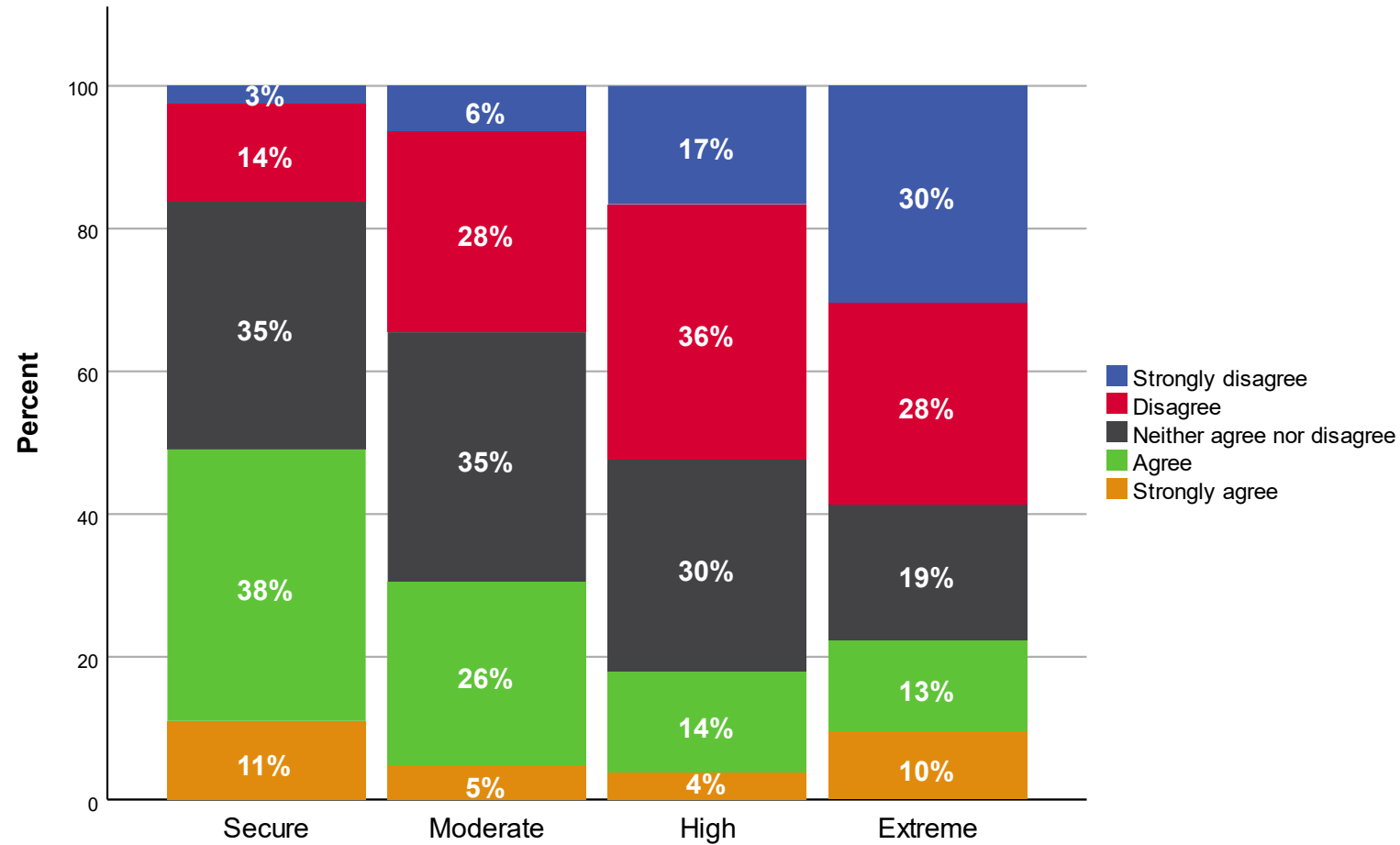


Four levels of precarity measured by financial stress in 2019 & 2020 – n=6,818/717



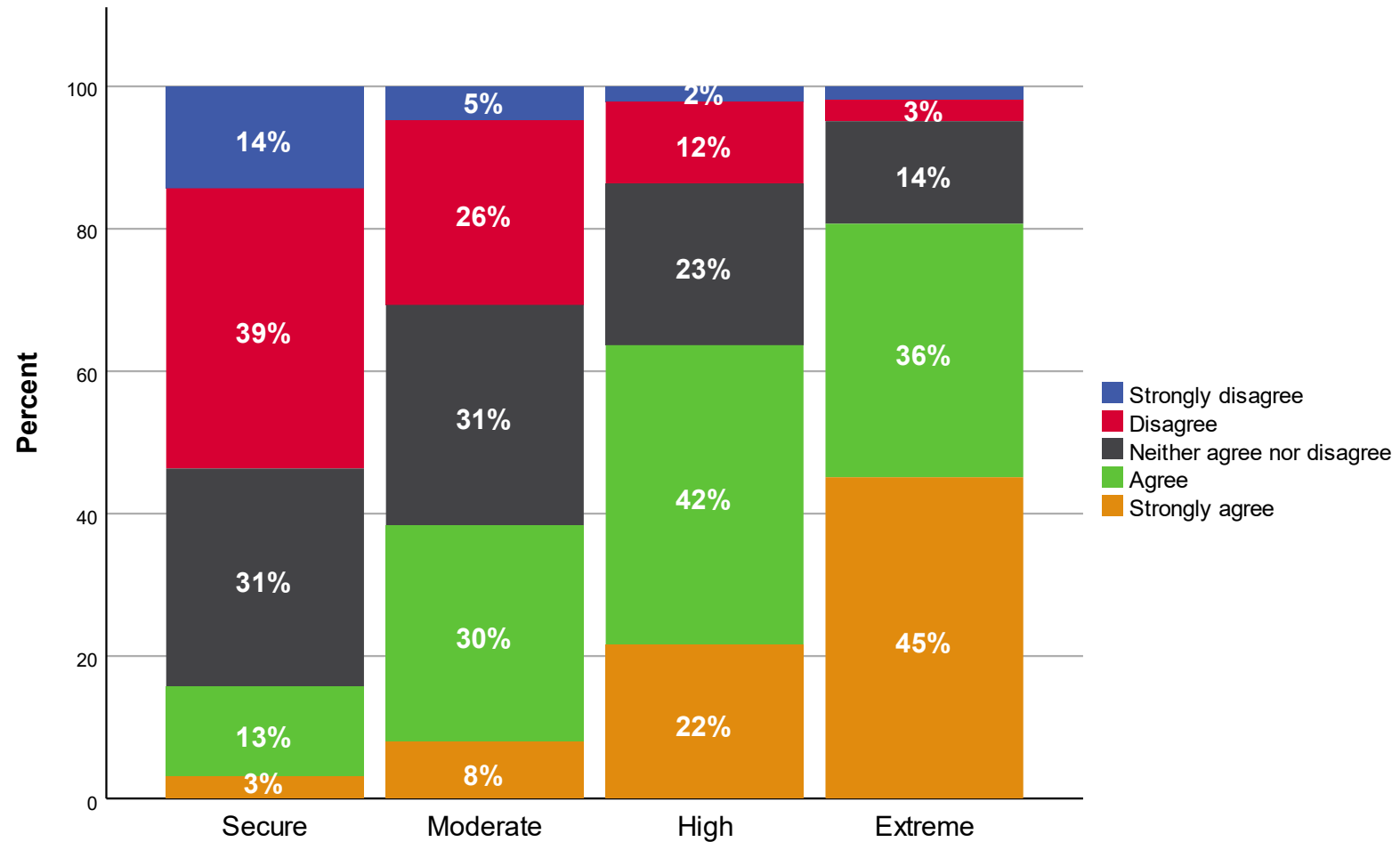


I can easily afford housing costs (by financial stress level) – n=6,811





I find myself often worrying about paying the rent each week – n=6,810



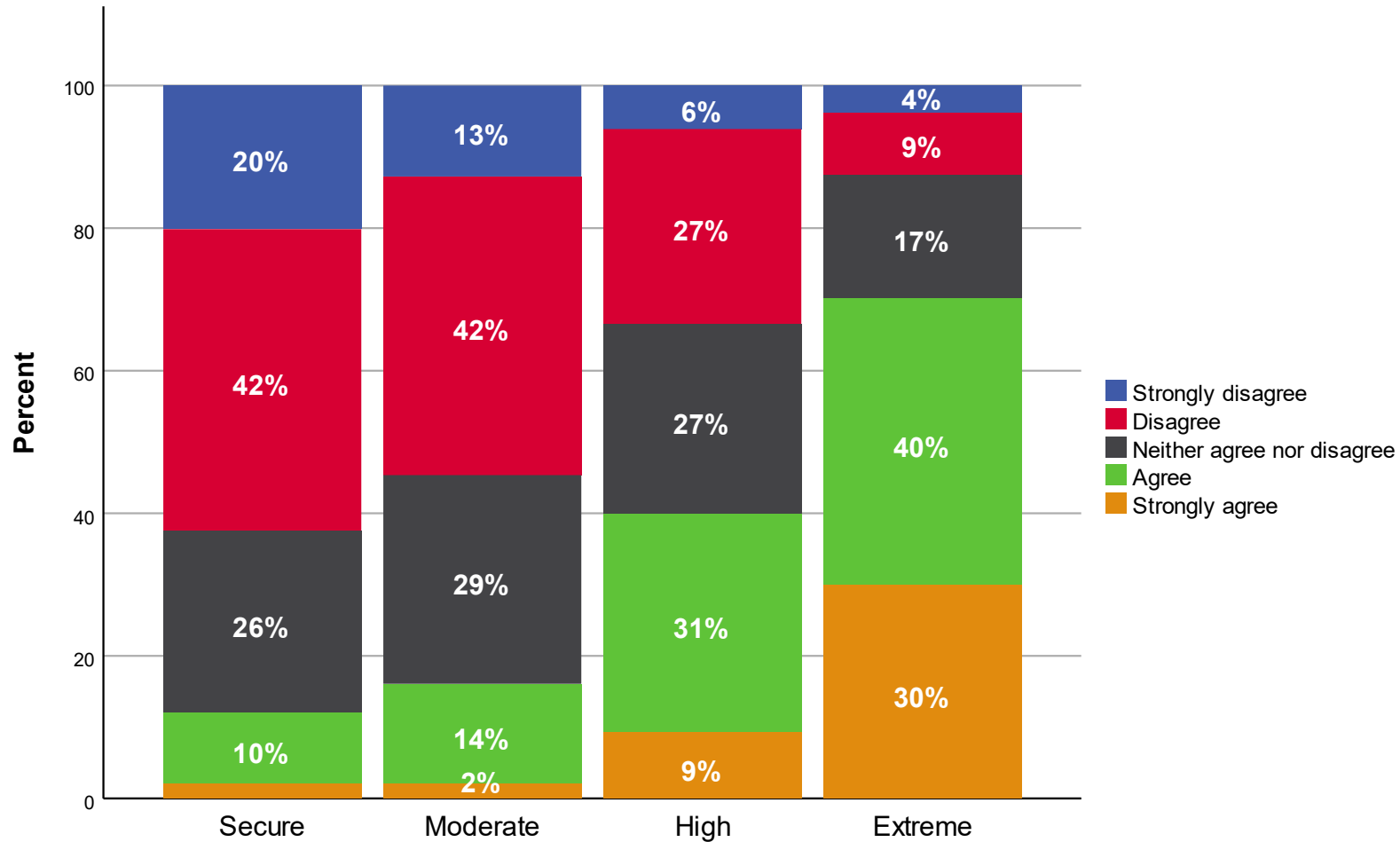


Worrying about paying the rent and its impact

- *When you don't know where your rent is coming from? How are you going to eat, you cannot study. I failed two subjects ... while this was happening. (VET student from India)*



Quite often I go without necessities like food so I can pay for my accommodation – n=6,809



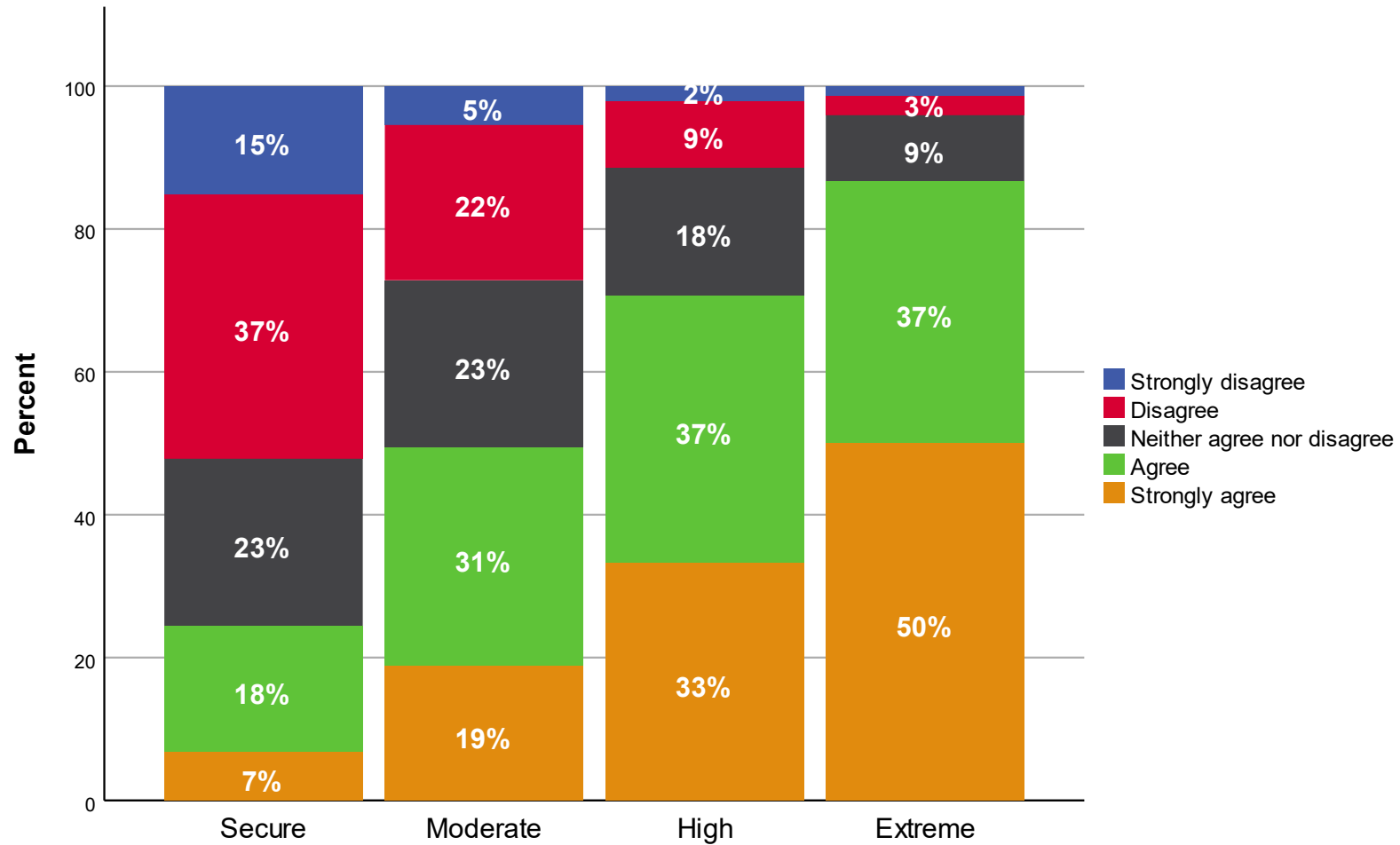


Struggling to pay the rent

- *At that time I used to survive on one meal per day ... Actually I have seen some days where having nothing at all wouldn't actually bother you much because it's just like you have this thing in your mind that you have to pay somebody back. You have to save up for your rent and your fees ... So we have seen the days where we wouldn't eat all day and that actually also affected me physically. Not eating the whole day and relying on one meal just water and water. (University student in Sydney from India recounting her struggle prior to finding employment)*



To pay the rent, I have to get a paid job – n=6,806



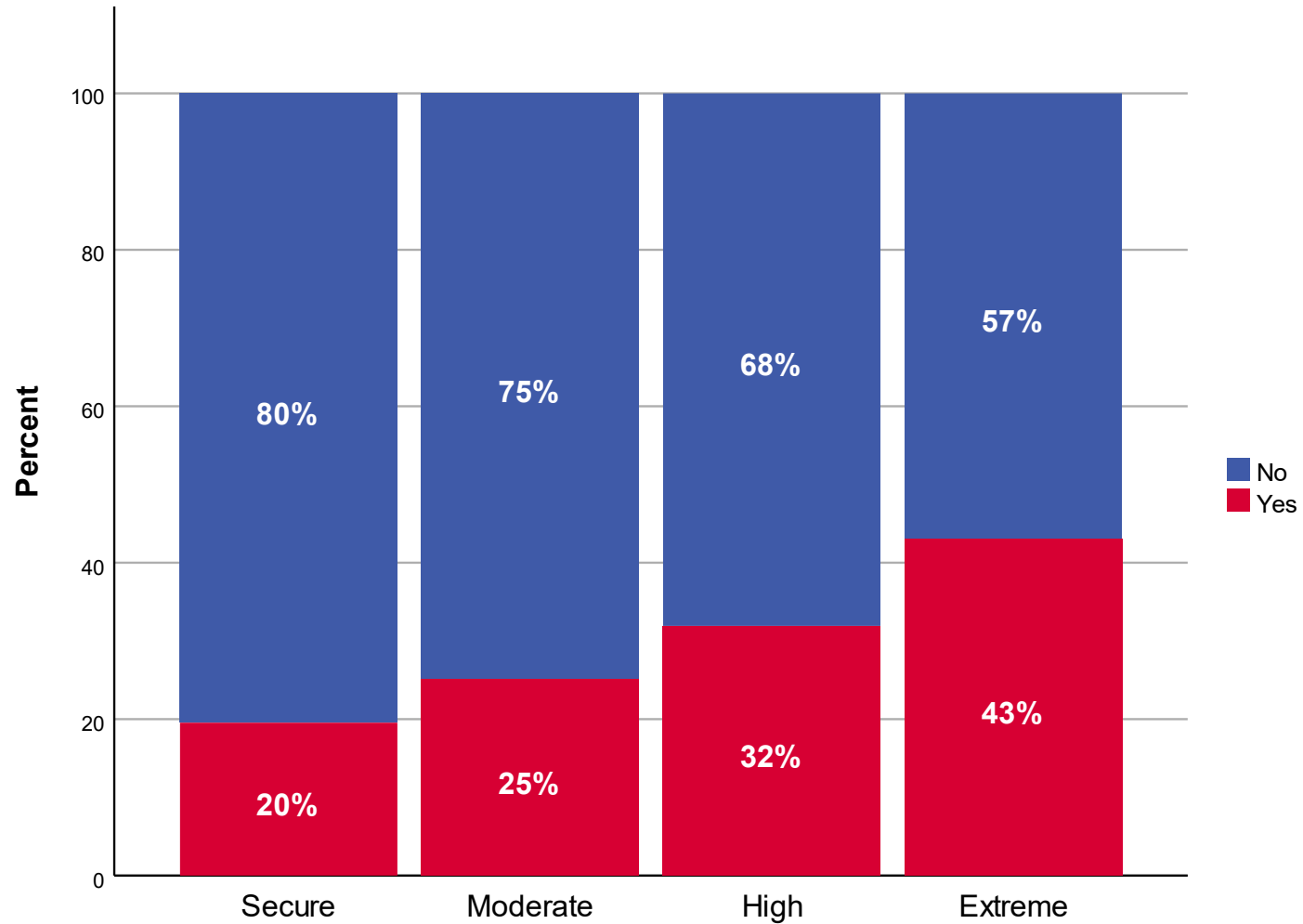


Needing paid work in order to pay the rent

- *I didn't like my job ... it was a terrible job but I still had to stick to it because of the rent I needed to pay ... I had to consistently worry about my rent, had to worry about the next week I had to pay for. And you know I knew that I'm feeling terrible ... [but I need] to go to work and ... have that passive aggressive voices of my boss or manager and I need to be with him all day because you know I need to pay the rent. (University student from Bangladesh)*

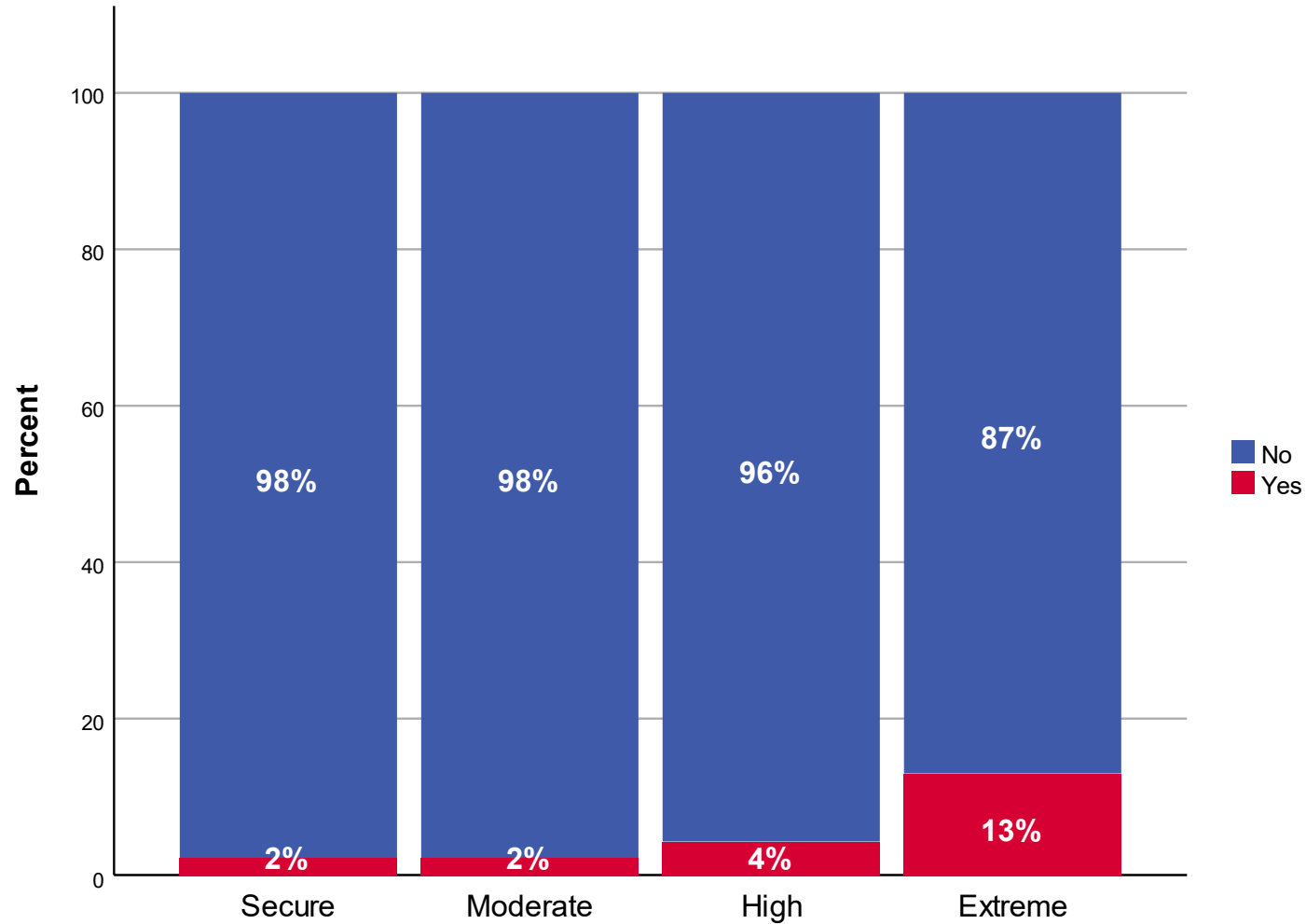


To save on rent, do you share your bedroom with someone who isn't your partner? – n=6,779



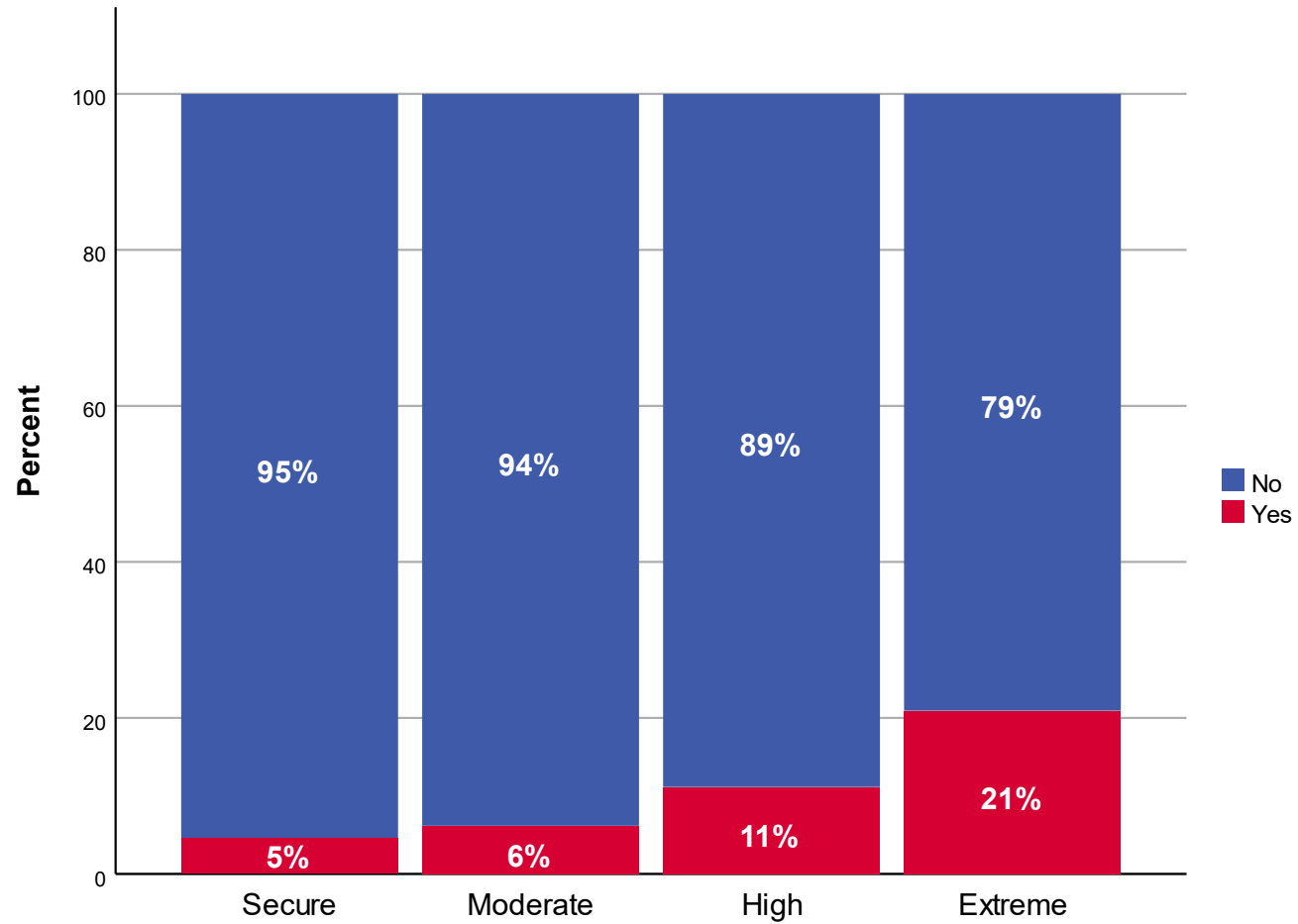


Do you have to hotbed (i.e., your bed is only available for a few hours of the day/night)? – n=6,762



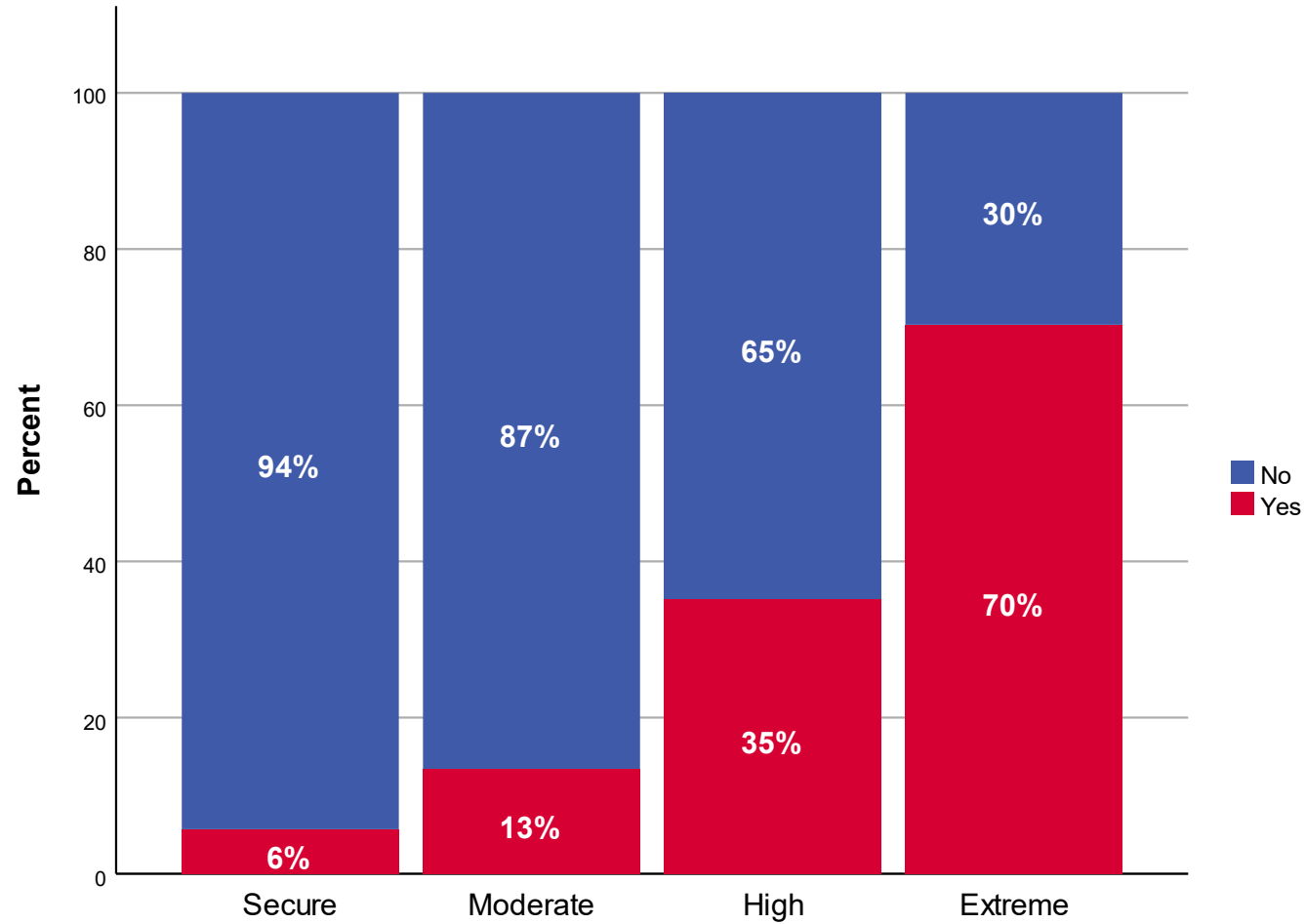


Have you ever been evicted by the landlord – n=6,811





In the last year, have you ever felt that you could become homeless? – n=6,810



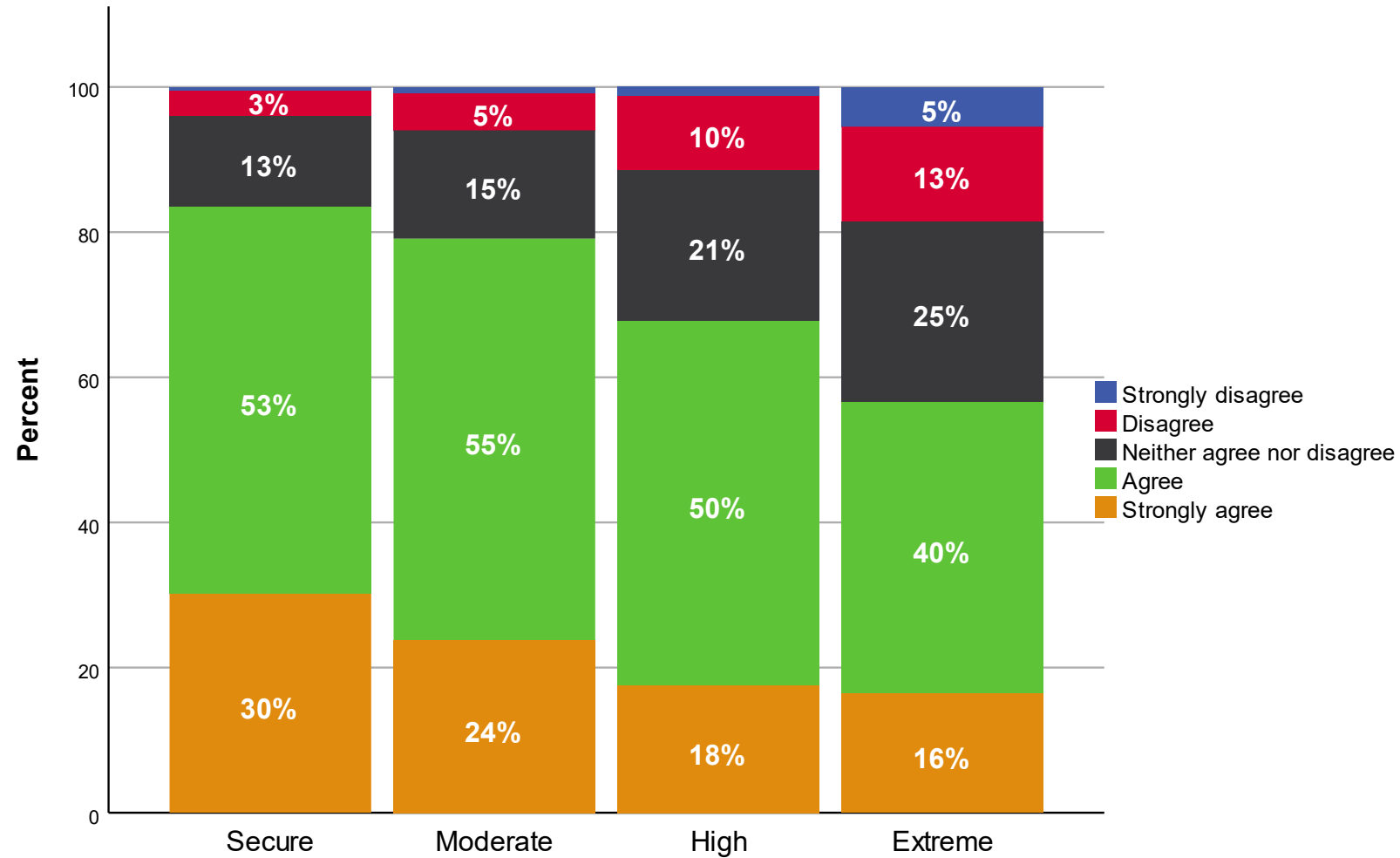


Intense insecurity

- *There was a time, like that time when I was still looking for a housemate, it was still something that kept me awake for days especially after seeing his [the landlord's] attitude towards me. I mean he [the landlord] wasn't really cutting me any slack and I was like, 'I've been here for a whole year, I've never faulted on rent', and we still had a month before our lease elapsed but then I felt like he wasn't giving me any chance at all. So at that time I was really, really worried ... (University student from Kenya, based in Melbourne)*



The property I rent is in good condition – n=6,810



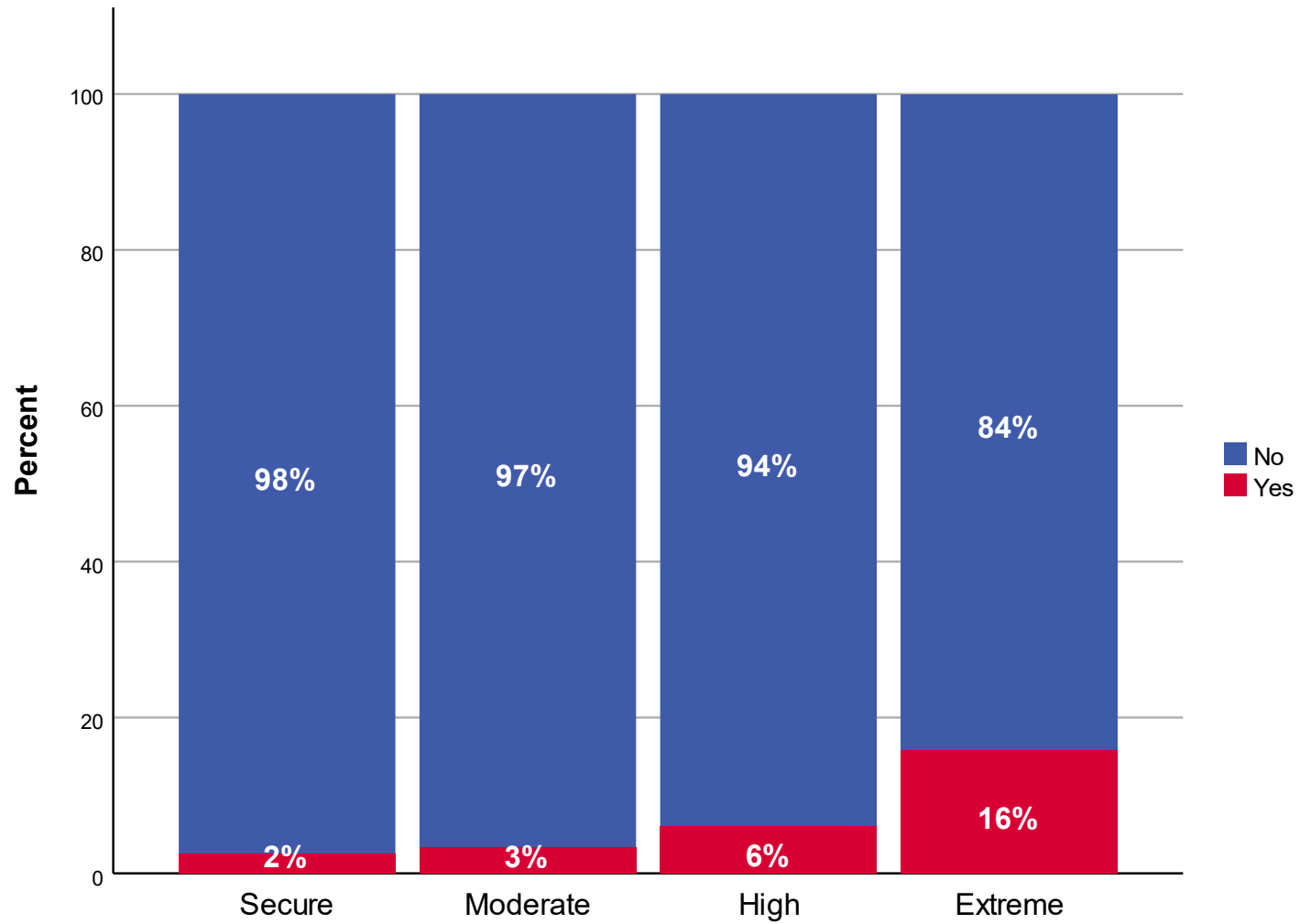


Condition of the accommodation

- *The condition was quite bad ... There was no heating and it's like very dirty. The walls are really dirty and the ceiling is not very good. Outside the appearance is very bad and after we went inside we realised that there are some kind of small animals going through the ceilings every night ... The rangehood it was not working and there was some kind of small insects, not insects they're worms, they just fall through onto our dishes. It was hell. (University student in Sydney, originally from Sri Lanka)*

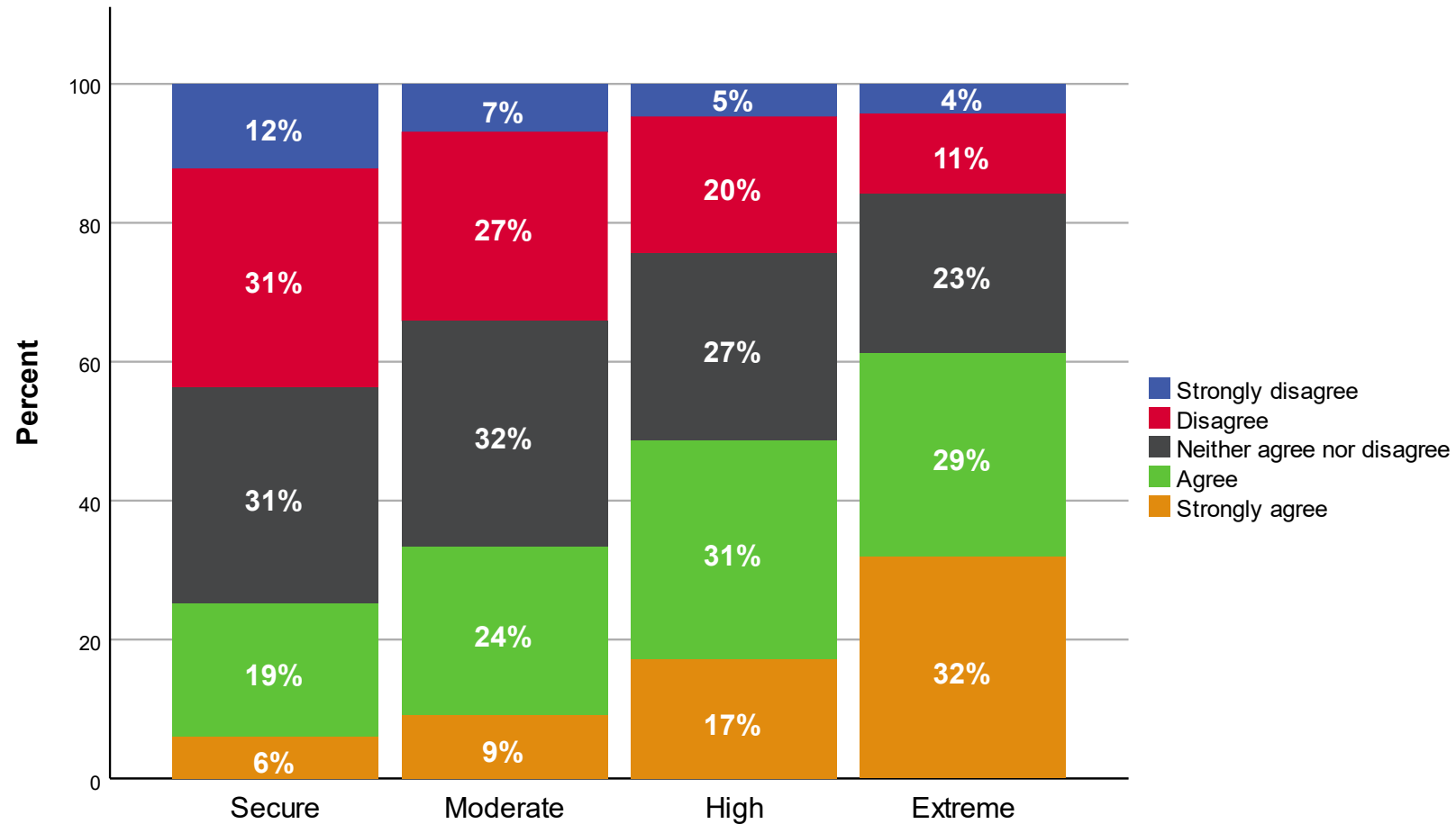


Has your landlord / real estate agent ever threatened you with visa cancellation? – n=6,814





I feel lonely in Australia – n=7,077





Loneliness

- *I think no one would even know if I had died in my room if it wasn't for a month when my landlady would come and ask for rent. Other than that no one would even know that I had died in that room, so yeah (University student, Sydney).*