

# Is the rise in sickness on the UK Labour Force Survey due to proxy responses or survey mode?

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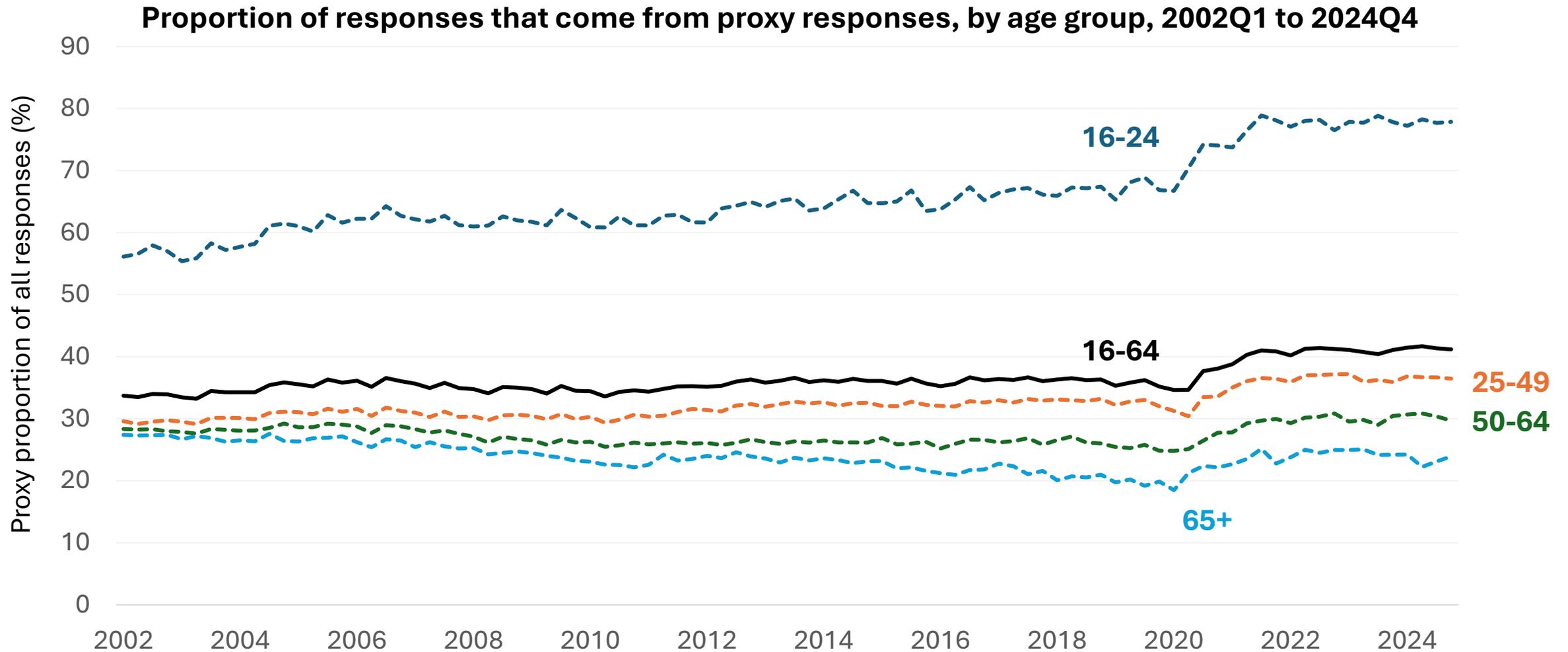
# Proxy responses on the LFS

- Proxy response = response by one person about another
- This might affect data quality, especially for subjective questions
- The amount of proxy responses might vary over time, vary by personal characteristics, and vary by survey mode

## **IOUTCOME - Individual outcome**

- (1) Personal response
- (2) Proxy response
- (3) Non-response
- (4) Child
- (6) Data brought forward from previous quarter
- (7) Economically inactive 70+

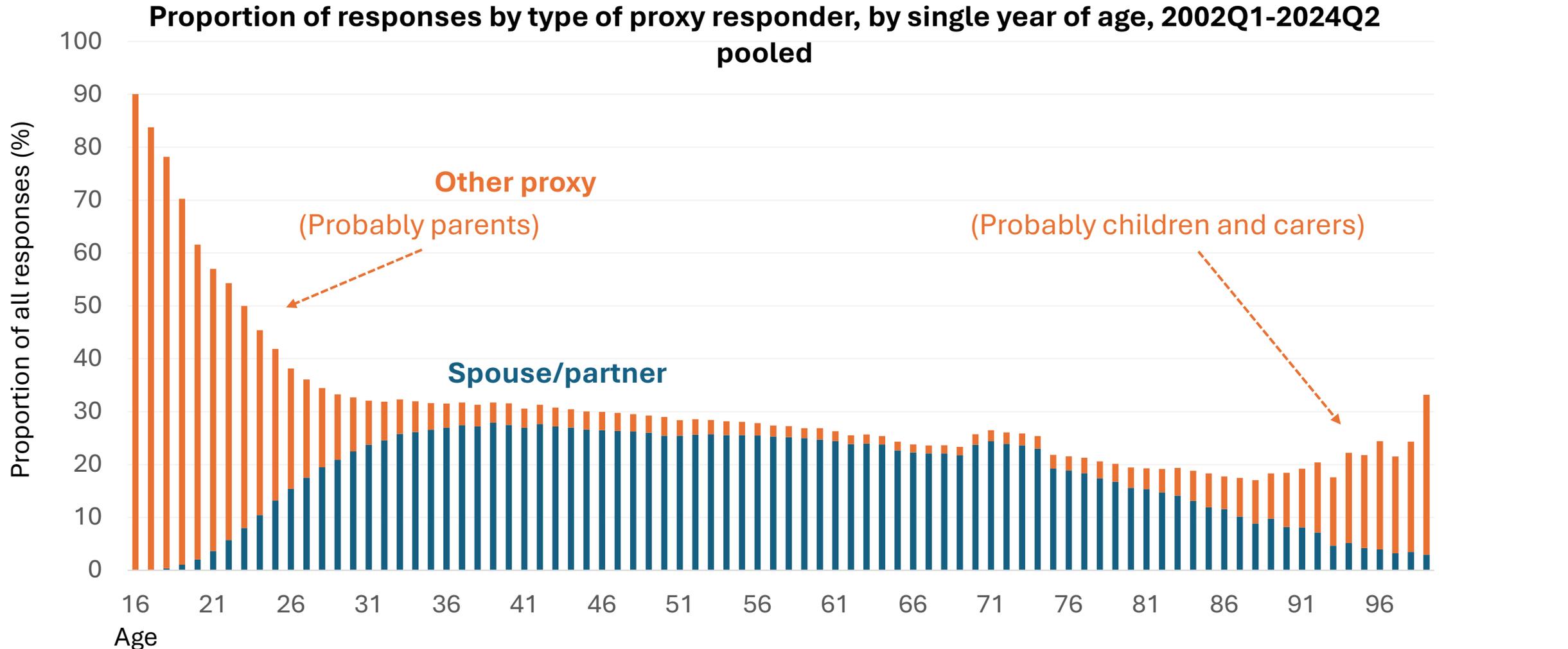
# Proxy responses account for ~1/3 of LFS data, and ~2/3 of data for 16-24 year olds



# Who proxy responds?

- Partner/spouse
- Parent
  - Students in halls of residence reported at their home address (parents/guardians) -> proxy responses
- Interpreter/translator
- Any nominated person in household
  - Child nominated by head of household, or as translator
  - Carer

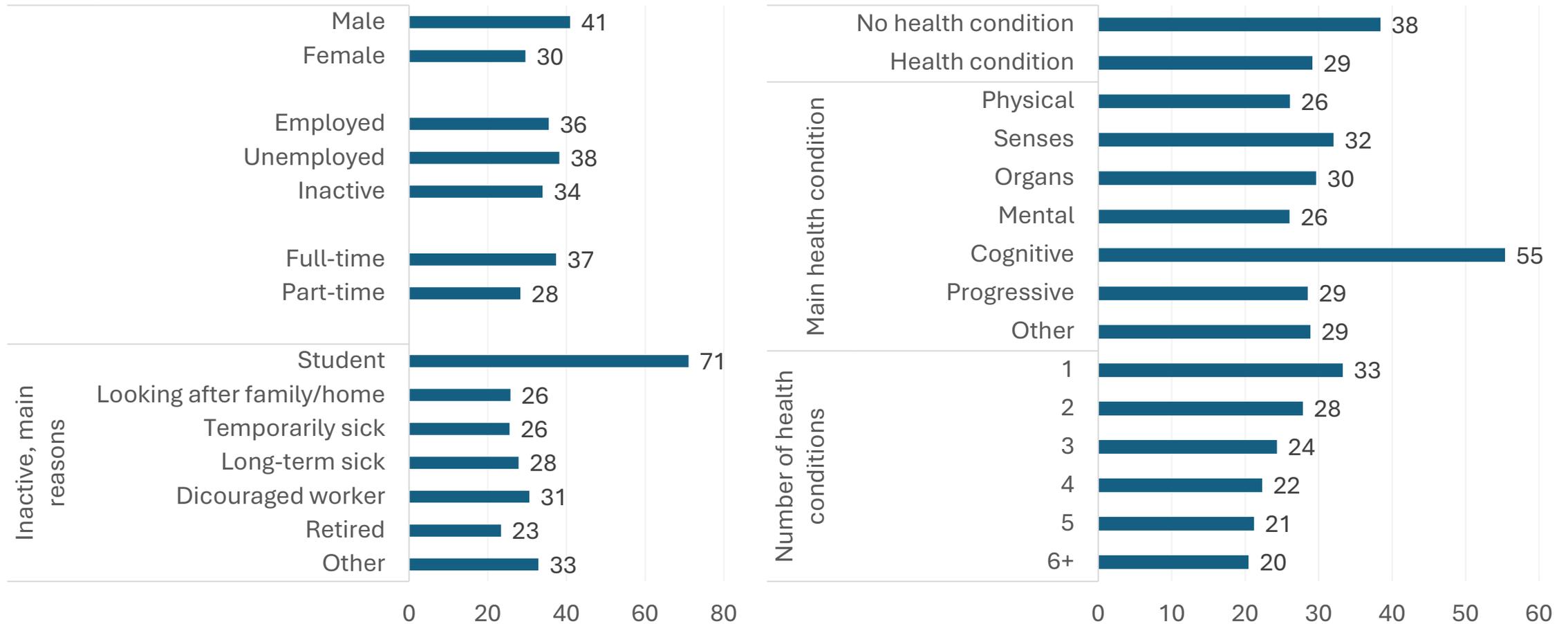
# Proxy responses come mostly from parents for the young, and spouse/partners for older adults



Source: LFS, authors' calculations. Notes: Excludes "data brought forward". No information on type of proxy responder in 2020

# Proxy responses are more prevalent for men, employed (full-time), no (fewer) health conditions

Proportion proxy responses (%), 2002Q1-2024Q4 pooled

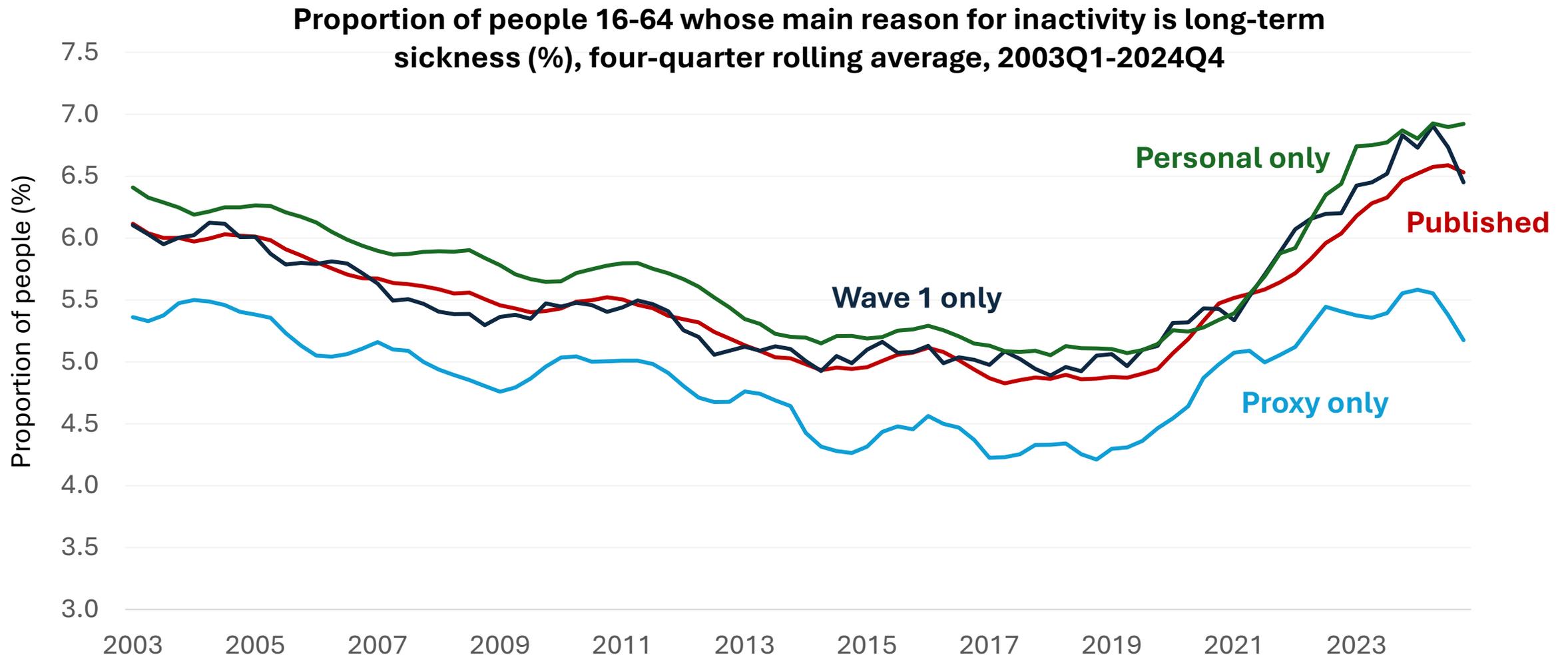


Source: LFS, authors' calculations. Notes: Excludes "data brought forward"

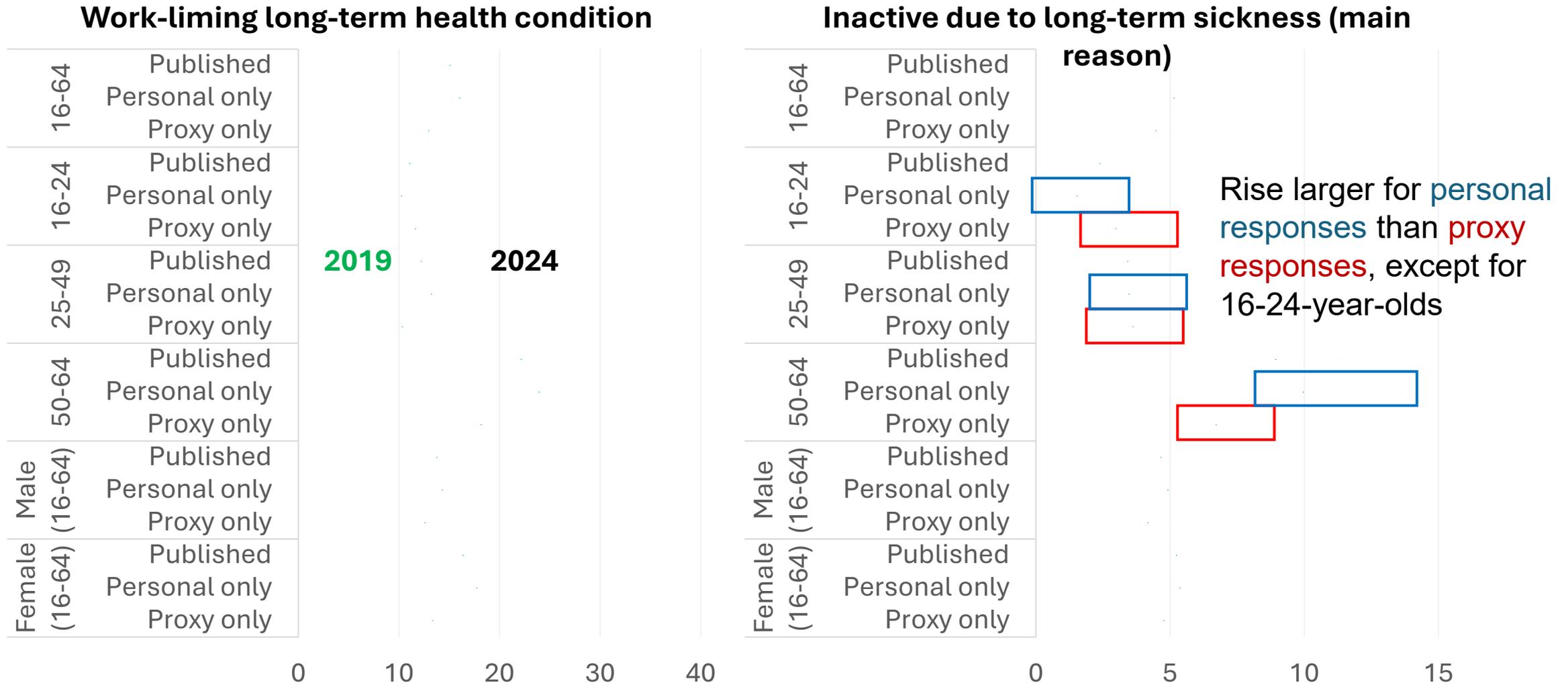
# Why care about proxy responses?

- Highly prevalent in LFS
- Potential quality implications
  - Pros – Proxies increase sample size, enable hard-to-reach groups to be covered, likely reasonably valid, reduces attrition
  - Cons – Proxies may have incomplete or inaccurate information
  - Dawe and Knight (1997) – study on UK LFS, but potentially out of date
  - People often report worse health in online surveys than face-to-face ones (Tipping et al. 2010, Christensen et al. 2014, Klein et al. 2020, Braekman et al. 2020)
- May shed light on different interpretations of a phenomenon
  - Personal response = personal subjective understanding + interviewer effects
  - Proxy response = proxy subjective understanding (often older, e.g. parent) + social norms?

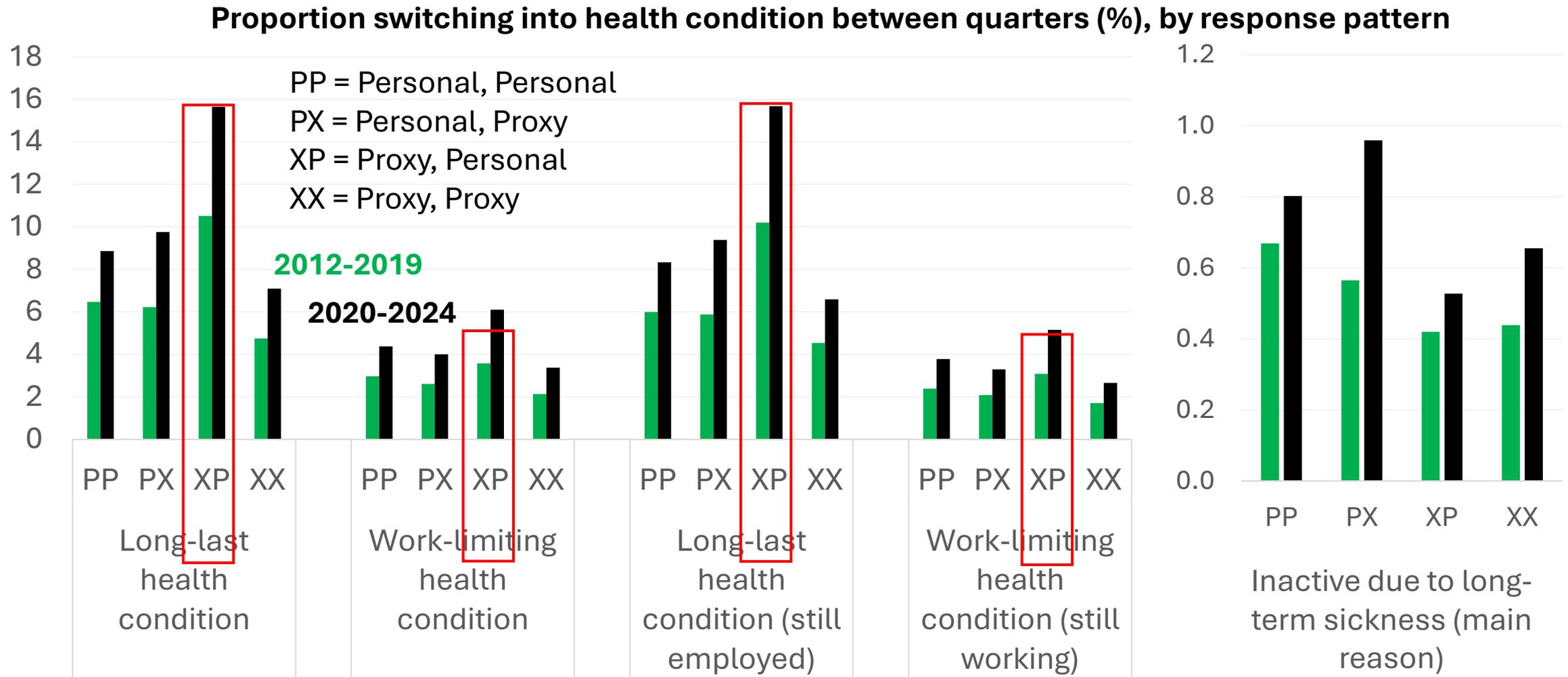
# Rise in long-term sickness is common across personal and proxy responses



# Personal and proxy responses show similar trend in long-term sickness across age groups and sex



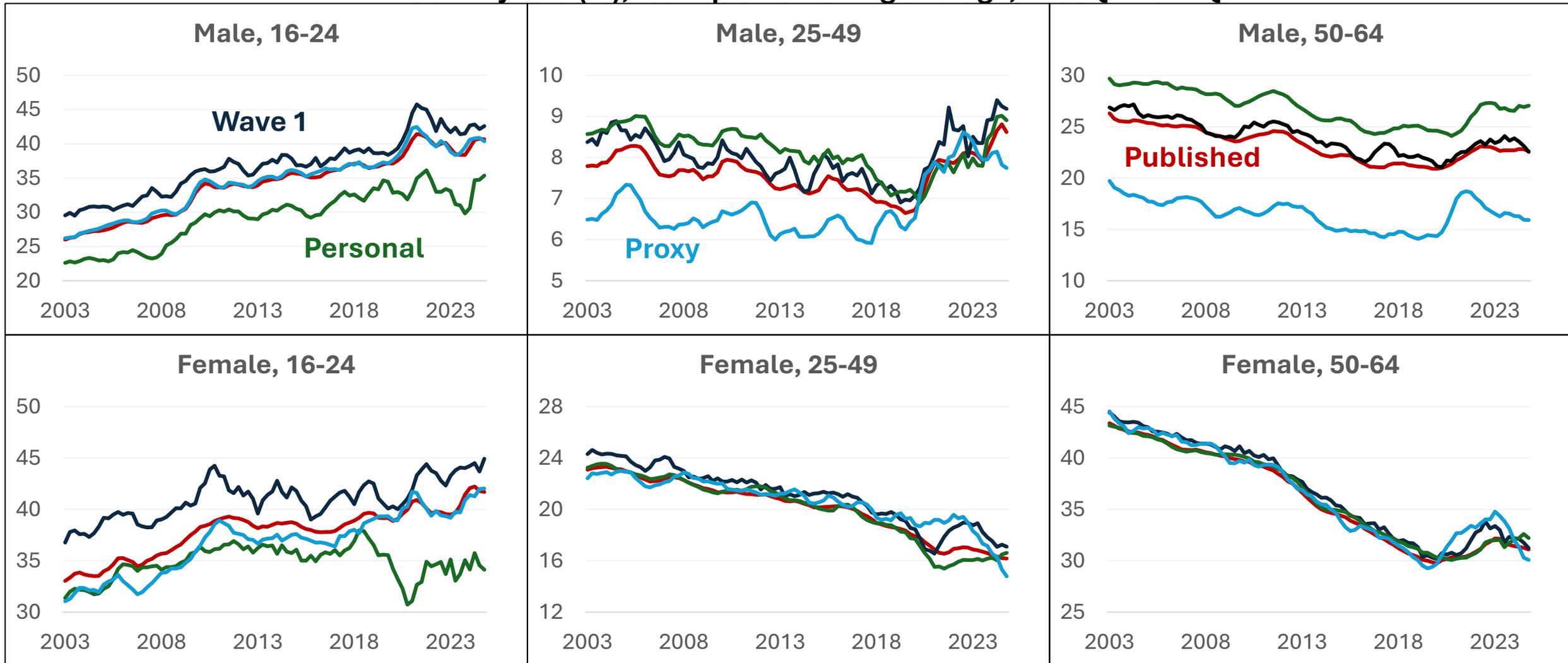
# Two-quarter data suggest proxy responses may understate long-term health conditions



Source: LFS, authors' calculations. Notes: Excludes several quarters which have missing information on responses

# Trends in inactivity rates also robust to different cuts of the data

Inactivity rate (%), four-quarter rolling average, 2003Q1-2024Q4



Source: LFS, authors' calculations. Notes: Reweighted to population total

# Conclusions

- Remarkably high prevalence of proxy responses in LFS data, especially amongst young people
  - Most of what we think we know about young people comes from their parents
- Trends in long-term sickness and inactivity seem robust to different cuts of the data
  - May suggest a change in social norms (proxies) alongside increase in perceived long-term sickness (personal)
- Some endogeneity between employment status, health status and response type – difficult to understand causal link
  - Longitudinal data suggests increase is genuine, and proxy responses may understate increase

# References

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