



Figure 7. Impact perception responses (n = 1044).

## 5. Visitor perceptions of impacts

Perceptions of 26 specific impact items were surveyed, covering social impacts, physical impacts, and impacts associated with the facilities and services (refer Appendix 1, Question 5). Visitors were asked to respond to each item using the options of not experiencing the impact, experiencing it but not being bothered, being bothered a little, and being bothered a lot. The complete list of responses, as summarised in Figure 7, shows that in the main most visitors did not experience many of these impacts. This may be because the impacts did not occur, or because they were not noticed by the visitor.

The most prominent impacts reported here are indicated through combining the responses of those who were 'bothered' by impacts, and those who simply 'noticed' them. These 'impact aware' responses often represented a majority of the visitors. The main examples of these more prominent impacts, including the percentage of visitors who were 'aware' of them, included "Seeing too many in huts" (67%), "Over-development of tracks" (57%), "Uncertain water hygiene" (52%), "Seeing too many on the track" (51%), and "Noise in huts" (51%). These were the most prominent impacts noticed on the Kepler, although it should be remembered that there is a clear distinction between the impacts being "noticed" and tolerated, and being seen as "negative". What contributes to the progression from noticing and tolerating an impact, to becoming bothered by it (e.g., it becomes negative) represents an important question for future research.

The most negative impacts, those which most 'bothered' the visitors, appear to emphasise social hut conditions and physical track conditions. For social hut conditions, visitors were most bothered by "Seeing too many in huts" (33%), "Noise in huts" (31%), "Insufficient bunks in huts" (24%) and "Rushing for bunks" (21%). For physical track conditions, visitors were most bothered by "Track trampling shortcuts" (26%) and "Over-development of tracks" (25%).

Many visitors were also bothered by "Uncertain water hygiene" (30%). This was a response to the statement "Uncertainty about the water always being safe to drink". From consultations with managers, it can be concluded that this response most often represents general caution about water quality, rather than being a direct reaction to hygiene problems experienced on the visit. It was not clear if this caution was related to all water sources on the trip, or just those in trackside streams.

When visitors did notice impacts, many were not bothered by them. This response could be considered 'tolerance' of the impacts. For example, while 43% of visitors were aware of "Too much development of signs" as an impact, most were not bothered by it (36% *vs* 7% bothered). However, when most of those noticing an impact were bothered by it, it could be considered to show high 'intolerance' and unacceptability of the impact source. From Figure 7, impacts indicative of inappropriate behaviour by others appeared least acceptable to visitors (also see Figure 8, next page). These included littering of huts, campsites and tracks, seeing toilet paper and waste, and seeing wood cut for fires. Few of those noticing these impacts were not bothered by them. However, while these appear to represent the least acceptable types of impacts, they were not highly reported here.

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