

Mental Health in Adults with Disabilities: A Needs Assessment

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Introduction

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being for adults with disabilities. **In New Hampshire, 42% of adults with disabilities report experiencing more than 14 mentally unhealthy days per month**, while only **11%** of adults with *no disability* report experiencing more than 14 mentally unhealthy days per month. (Disability and Health Data System [DHDS], 2022).

Research suggests that for adults with disabilities, positive mental health is shaped by multiple factors; environment, physical health or activity, interpersonal relationships, and overall satisfaction of one's current situation—which guided the domains explored in this survey (Komenda-Schned et al., 2024)

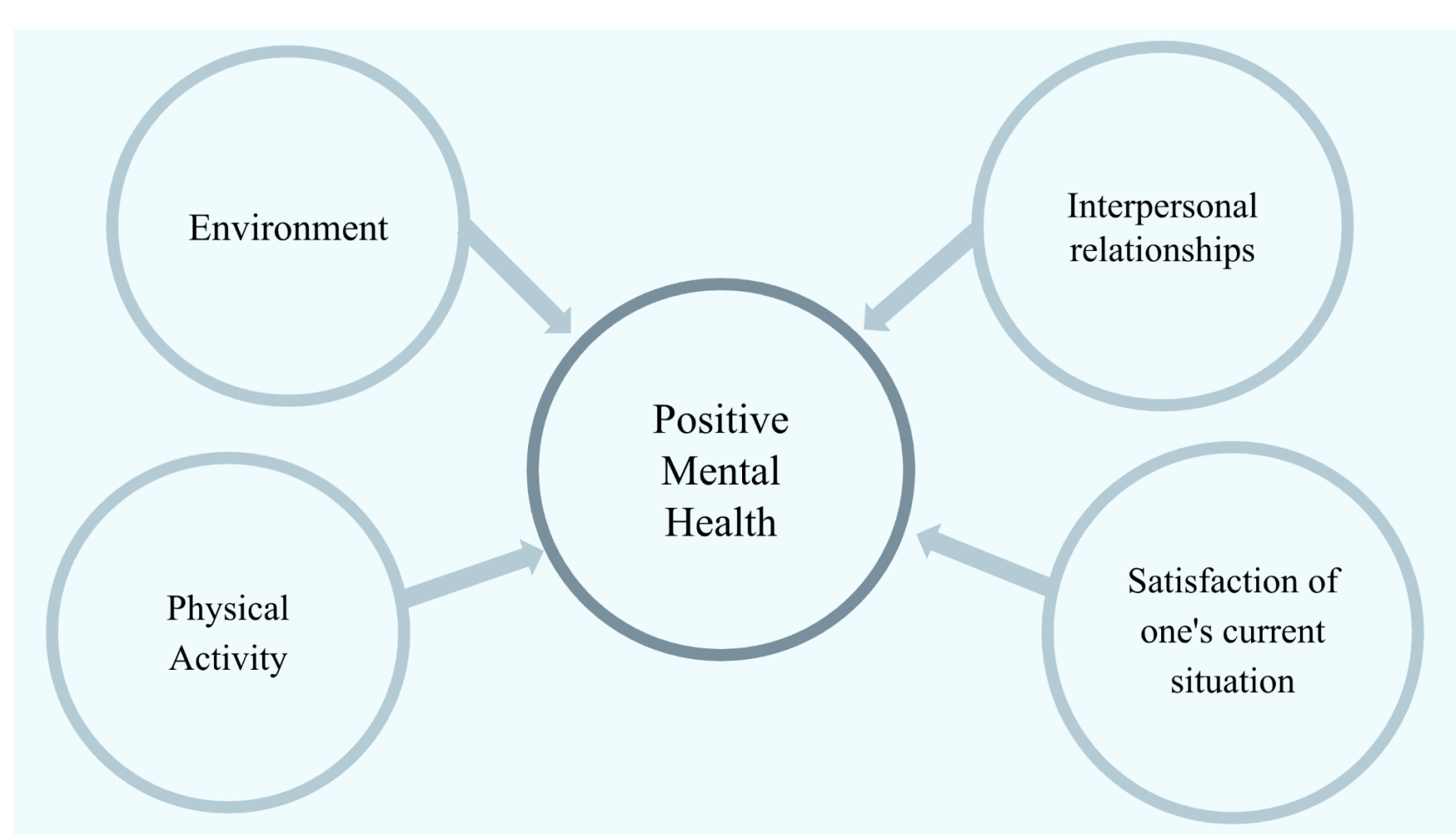


Photo depicts A diagram of a factors influencing positive mental health.

Methods

A 16-question self-report survey was developed based on domains of positive mental health identified from literature.

Survey questions assessed living arrangements, transportation, community and social participation, friend and peer relationships, inclusion in community, ability to access services, as well as barriers and facilitators in taking care of one's mental health. Question format included single select multiple choice, Likert scale, agree/disagree, and open-ended responses.

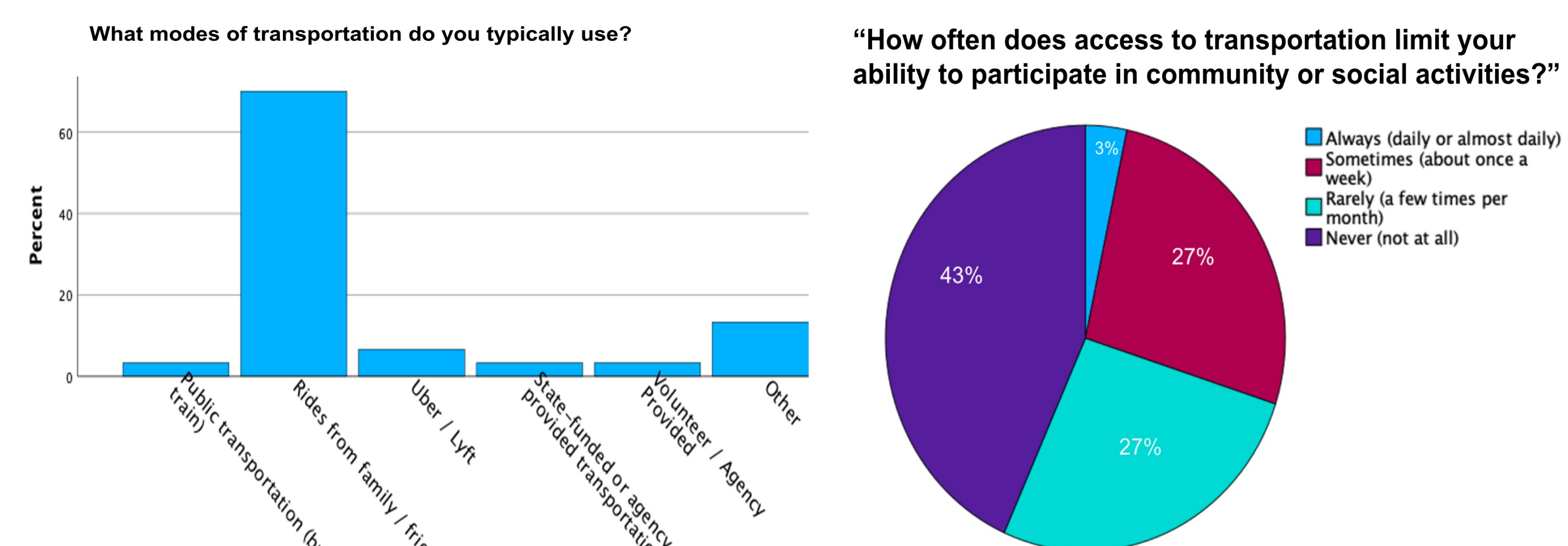
The survey was shared with organizations partnered with NH Disability & Health Program at UNH; including Northeast Passage, Sunset Hill Education Institute, New Futures, New Hampshire Family Voices, Community Bridges, the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council, ABLE-New Hampshire, and Camp Allen.

Inclusion Criteria for Research:

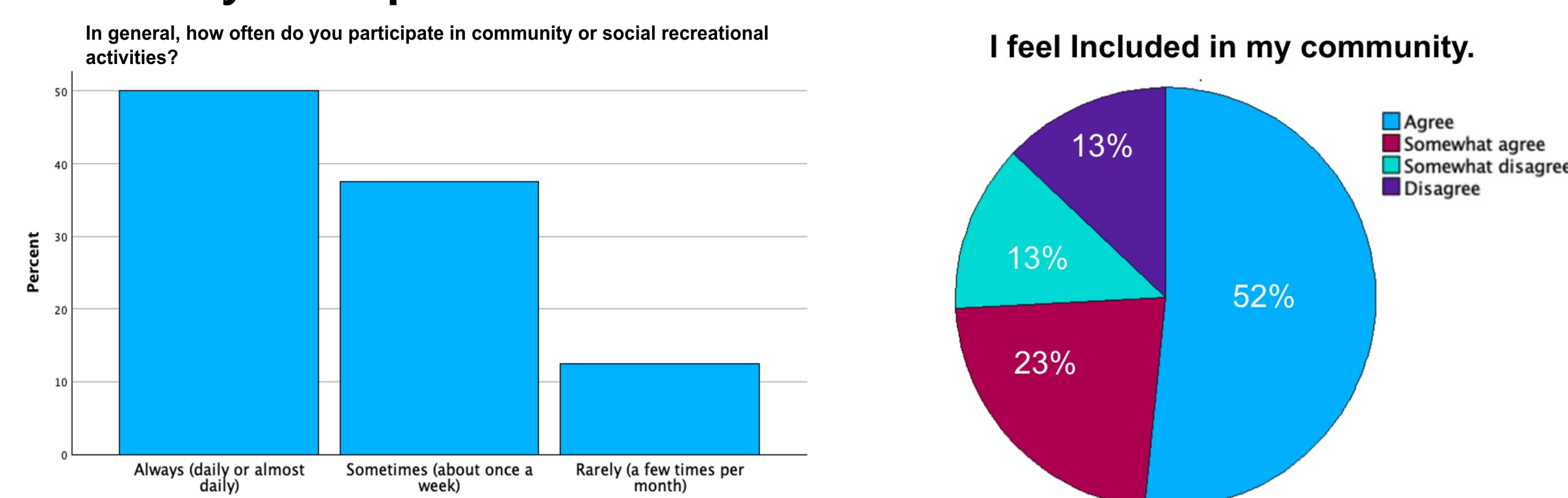
- Adult (18+) or caregivers / family members on their behalf
- Disability (a physical or mental health issue that limits major life activities)
- Living, or receiving services in New Hampshire

Data Analysis

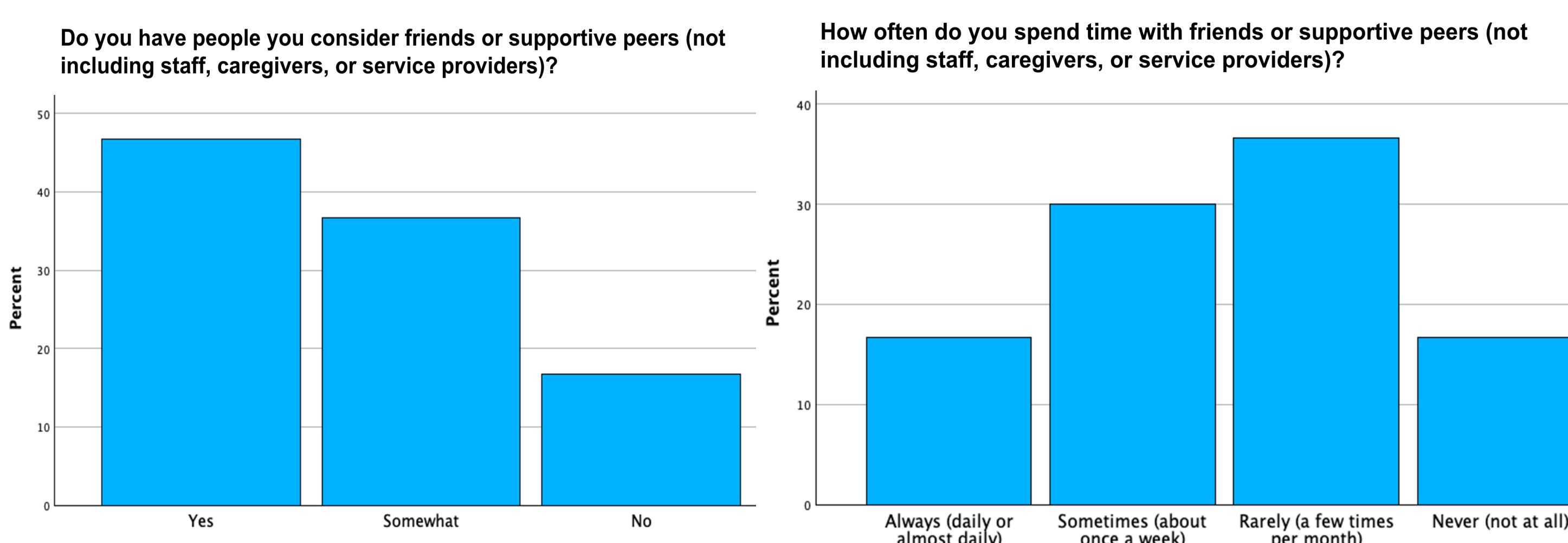
Transportation



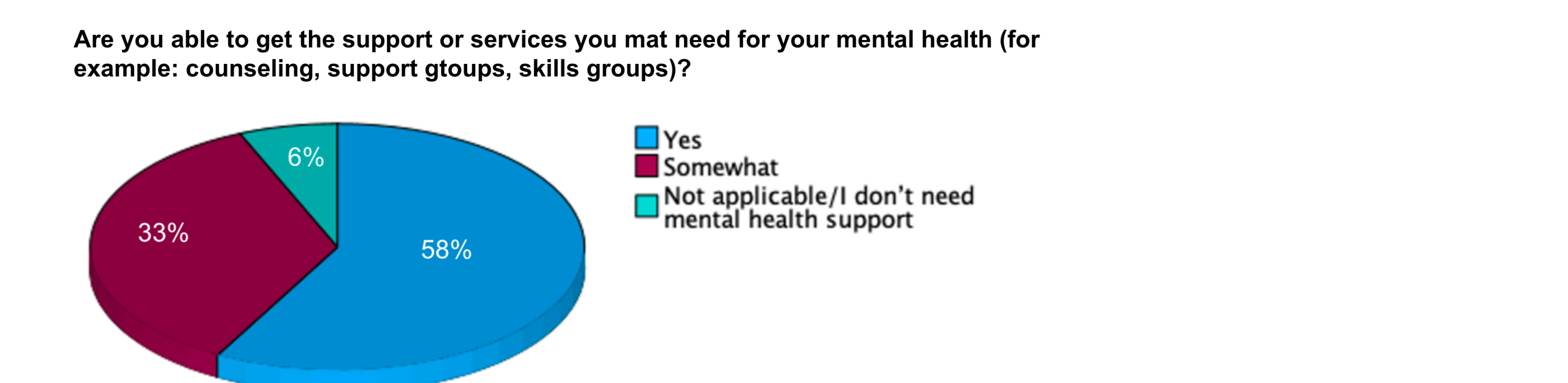
Community Participation and Inclusion



Friend and Peer relationships



Access to Services



Facilitators to Mental Health Care

- "community social activities- fairs , music festivals"
- "I engage in active physical activities as much as I can"
- "Hanging with other ND people."
- "My family."
- "Counseling via zoom"
- "Follow my routine everyday I'm autistic."
- "Meds, mental health provider, counseling"

Barriers to mental health care

- "Transportation and older caregiver"
- "cost of events"
- "On a waiting list. For over a year now."
- "Medicaid denied my need for mental health services"
- "Finding providers that have professional experience with IDD"
- "education and understanding"

Results

- 57 surveys were collected; most were completed on behalf of someone else (72%).
- Respondents were primarily adults aged 30–49 (41%).
- Most lived with family (56%) or in group homes/shared living arrangements (34%).
- The vast majority (91%) of respondents had an intellectual or developmental disability.
- Of the 57 responses, 38 were included in the analyzed dataset.
- Most respondents did not drive (94%) and relied on family or friends for transportation (70%).
- Half (50%) reported daily community or social participation.
- A majority felt included in their community (52% agreed, 23% somewhat agreed).
- Most reported access to needed mental health services (58% yes, 33% somewhat)

Conclusions

While **quantitative data indicated that transportation, community participation, social relationships, and access to services are generally accessible** and not majorly affecting mental health for adults with disabilities in NH, **open-ended responses show that insurance, cost of events, transportation, and clinician understanding of disability are areas that need improvement.** This likely reflects differences between objective measures and personal perceptions—participants may mention transportation or access as potential or situational barriers, even if these did not prevent service use in practice.

Further investigation should include participants who are not affiliated with organizations that promote social and community to capture a more representative picture of the disability community of NH. Future studies could also examine how modes of transportation, age, and living arrangements affect community participation and the ability to spend time with peers.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Disability and Health Data System (DHDS)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://dhds.cdc.gov/SP>
- Komenda-Schned, S., Landskron, S. J., Moritz, P., Brunevskaia, N., Santambrogio, J., Salvador-Carulla, L., Lueger-Schuster, B., & Zeilinger, E. L. (2024). Good mental health in people with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review. *Health Psychology Review, 18*(4), 954–976. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2024.2398021>

