

# COVID-19 and Resident Wellness: The added stressors on top of an already extreme lifestyle



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## Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, focus has shifted to start enlightening the public to the unique needs of physicians experiencing heightened stress during a global crisis. It is well known that physicians experience burnout and mental health changes in the course of their work; this survey focused on the resident physician and the work-life dynamic influenced with public health emergencies, and the exacerbated burnout and anxiety impact thereafter.

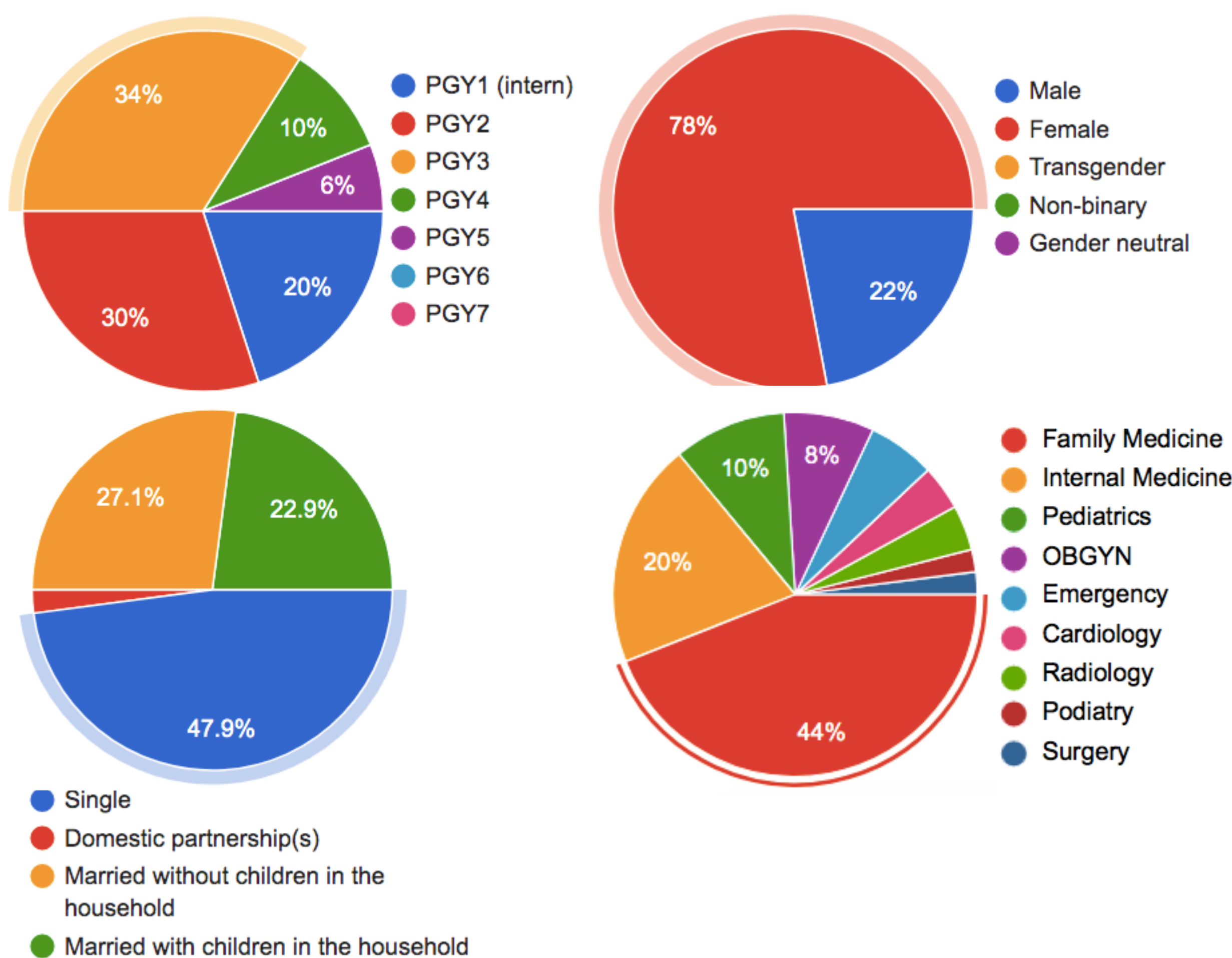
This survey study was to call attention to the mental health needs of resident physician, particularly in the time of a public health crisis.

## Goals, Methods & Data Collection

The goal was to quantify the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a hospital that was close to the epicenter of the first wave of COVID in the USA. Respondents to an anonymous, voluntary online survey about the stress and wellbeing of resident physician using a Google Forms survey. A total of 50 resident physicians answered the survey in a multivariable linear regression model, including short-answers for clarification on certain topics.

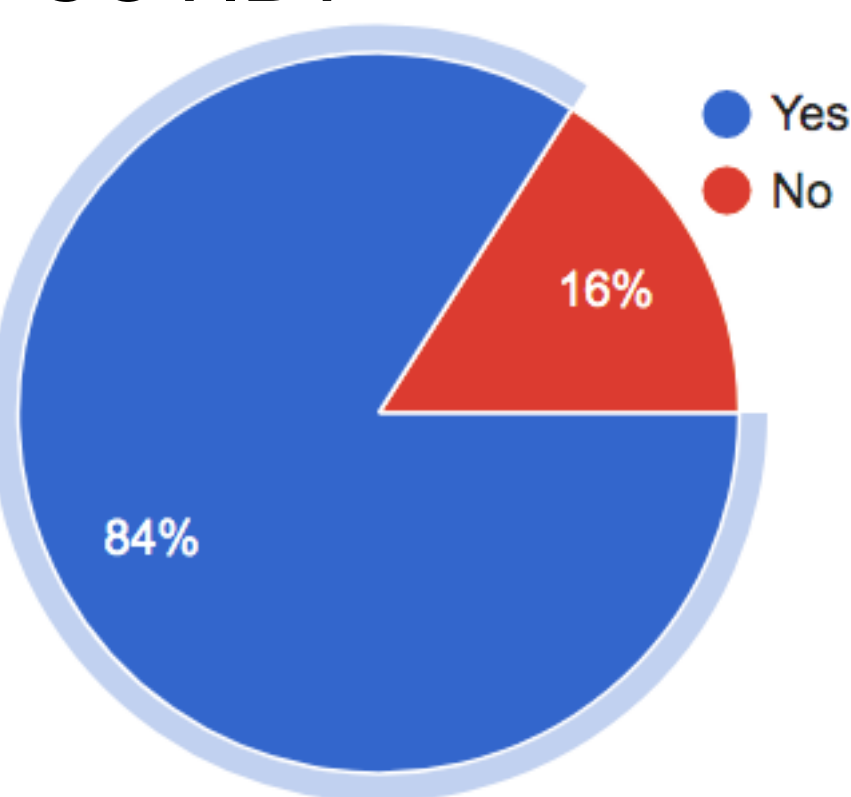
Initial questions focused on demographics including training year, sexual preference, marital status +/- children, and specialty of medical training. Although this study is limited by the possibility of bias due to nonresponse and its focus on an group of physicians in one geographic location, it offers intriguing evidence to motivate further research and help residency program leadership identify necessary changes to facilitate residents during the change of healthcare, and especially when faced with extreme times, including overall regular wellness and normalizing it within an overworked work force.

## Demographics

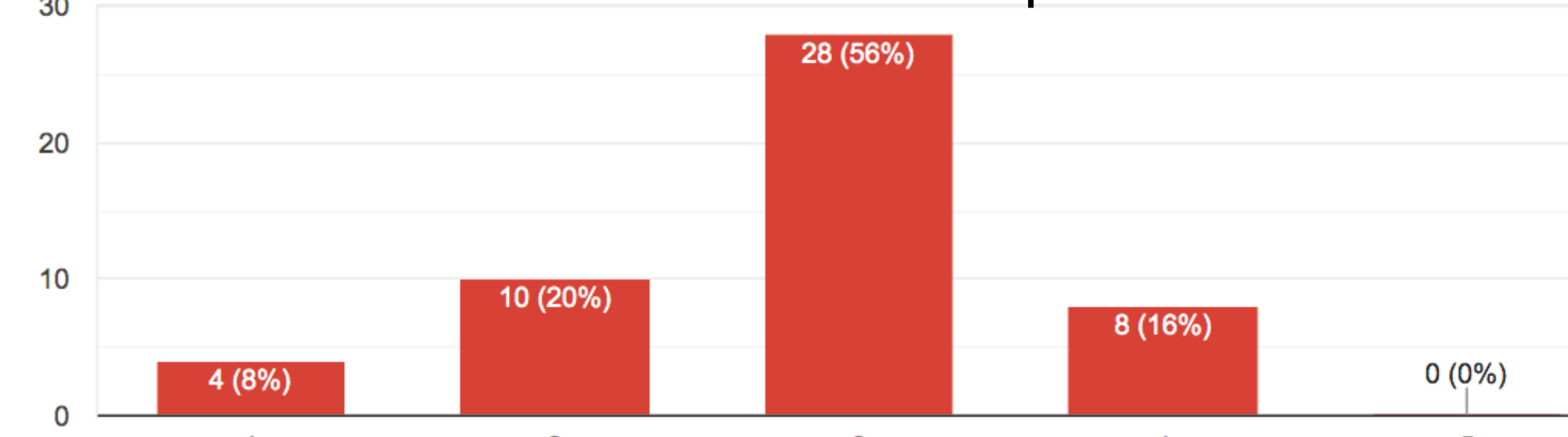


## Stress & Wellness Before COVID-19

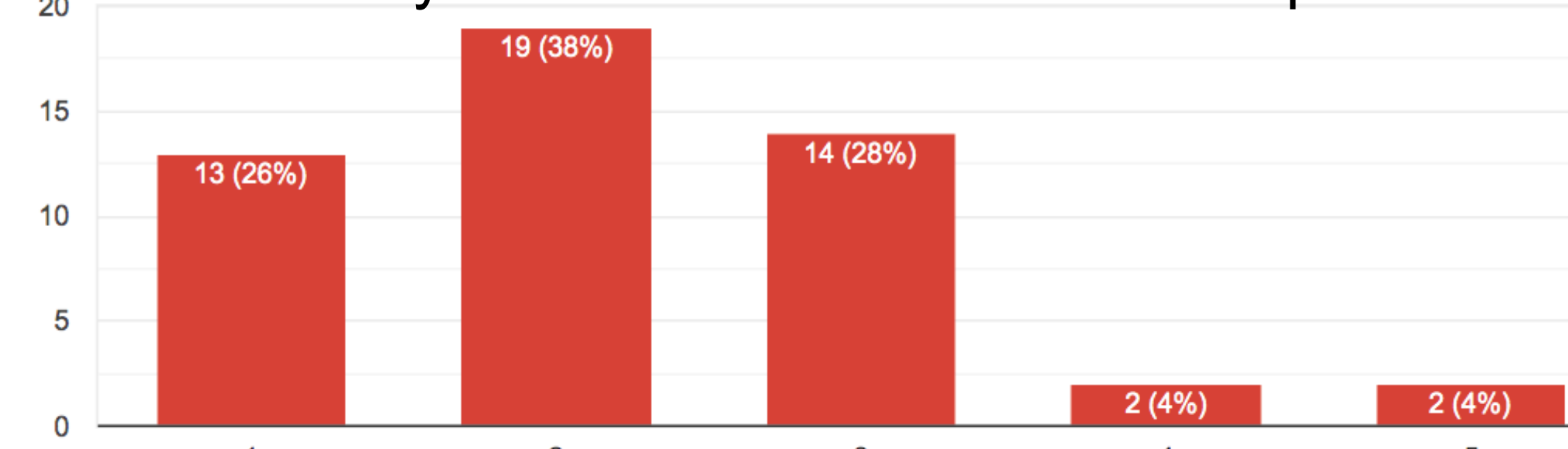
Did your program encouraged wellness amongst the residents and fellows prior to COVID?



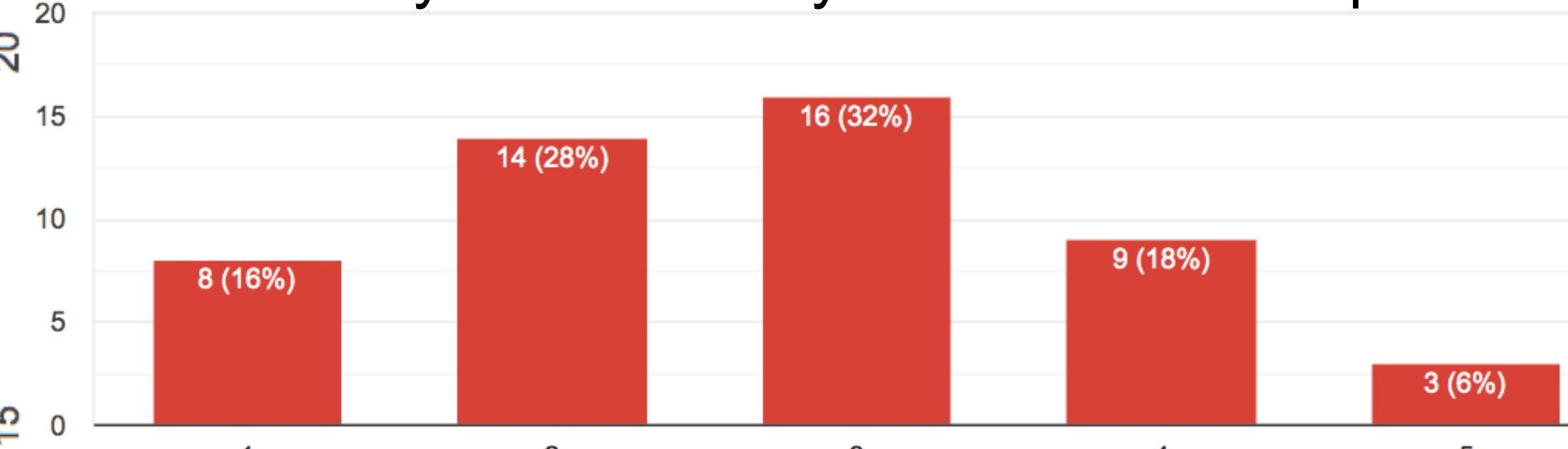
Estimated stress level before the pandemic:



Stress/worry level of self-health before the pandemic:



Stress/worry level of family health before the pandemic:



Which was the biggest stressor during training before the COVID-19 pandemic?

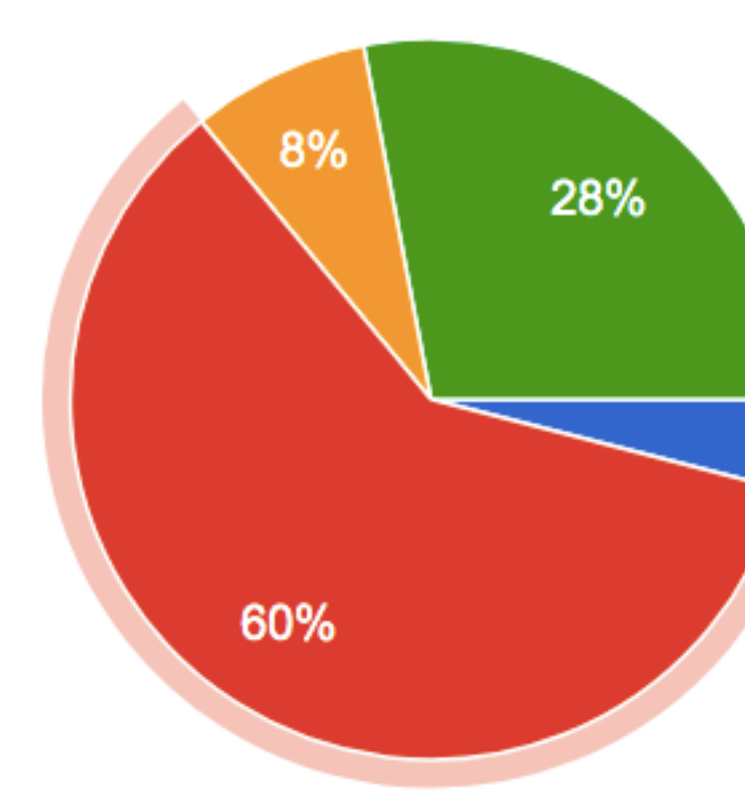
- 40%: Time management with work, home, and family
- 18%: Attending to the needs of my patients
- 16%: Completing my training without issues

### Top comments on wellness before the pandemic

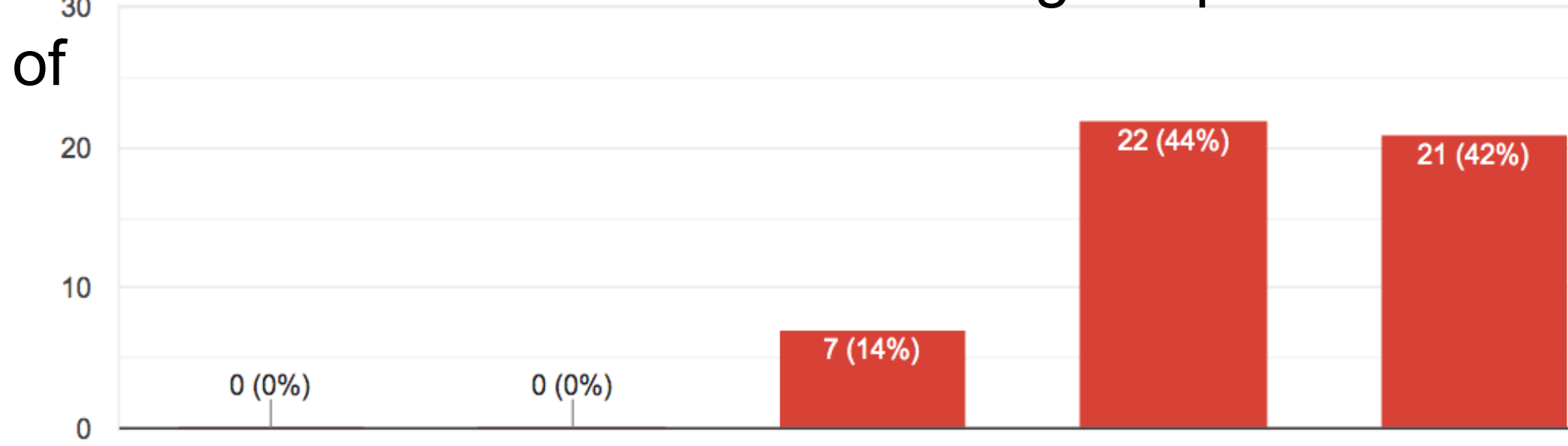
**Positive:** Social activities, camaraderie with co-residents and co-programs, family support  
**Negative:** lack of program support from the beginning, leadership doesn't care about resident wellbeing, inexperienced administration, business over education

## Stress & Wellness with COVID-19

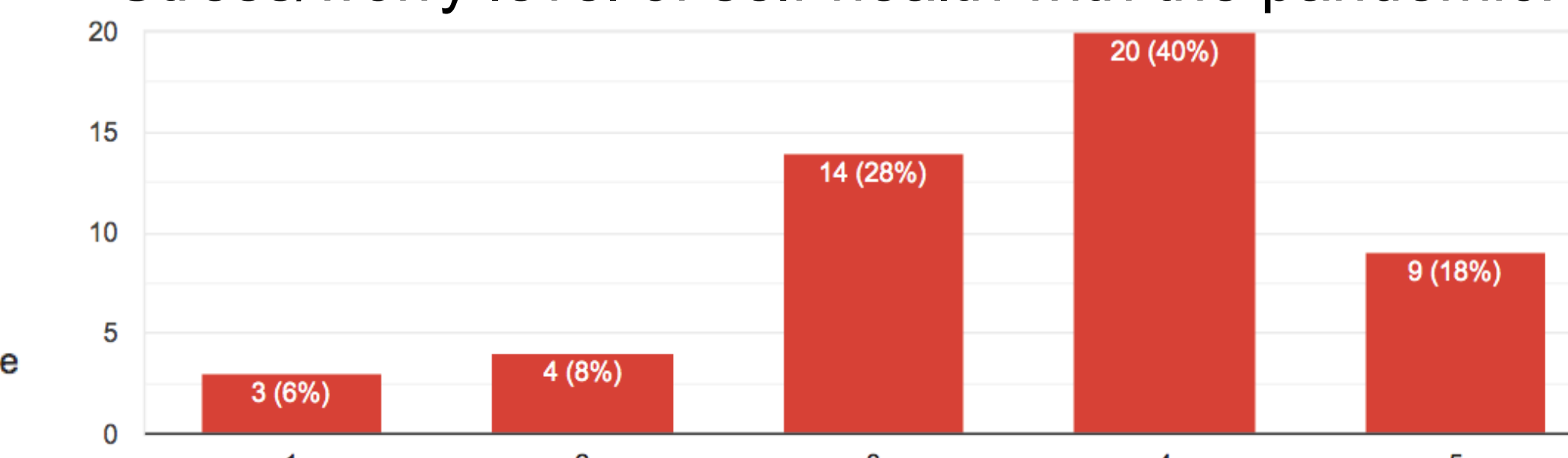
Has the pandemic changed the wellness of residency within your training program?



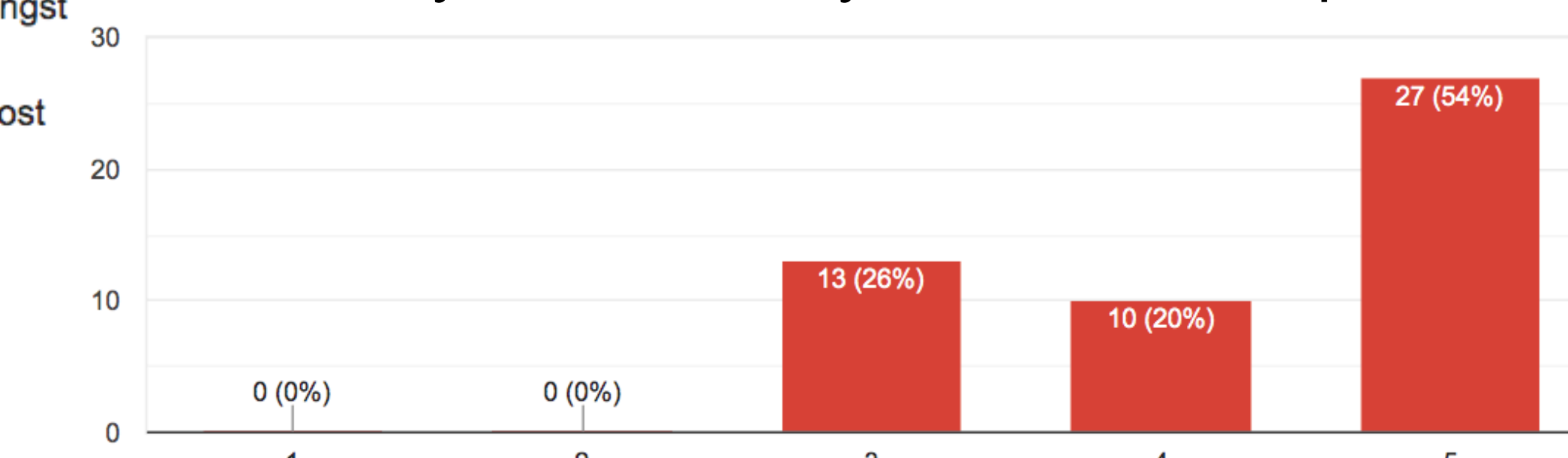
Estimated stress level with/during the pandemic:



Stress/worry level of self-health with the pandemic:



Stress/worry level of family health with the pandemic:



During the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the following became *less* stressful?

- 28%: Dealing with financial insecurity
- 14%: Accomplishing my own personal goals: time, milestones, training goals, etc.
- 12%: Nothing got easier

### Top comments on wellness with the pandemic

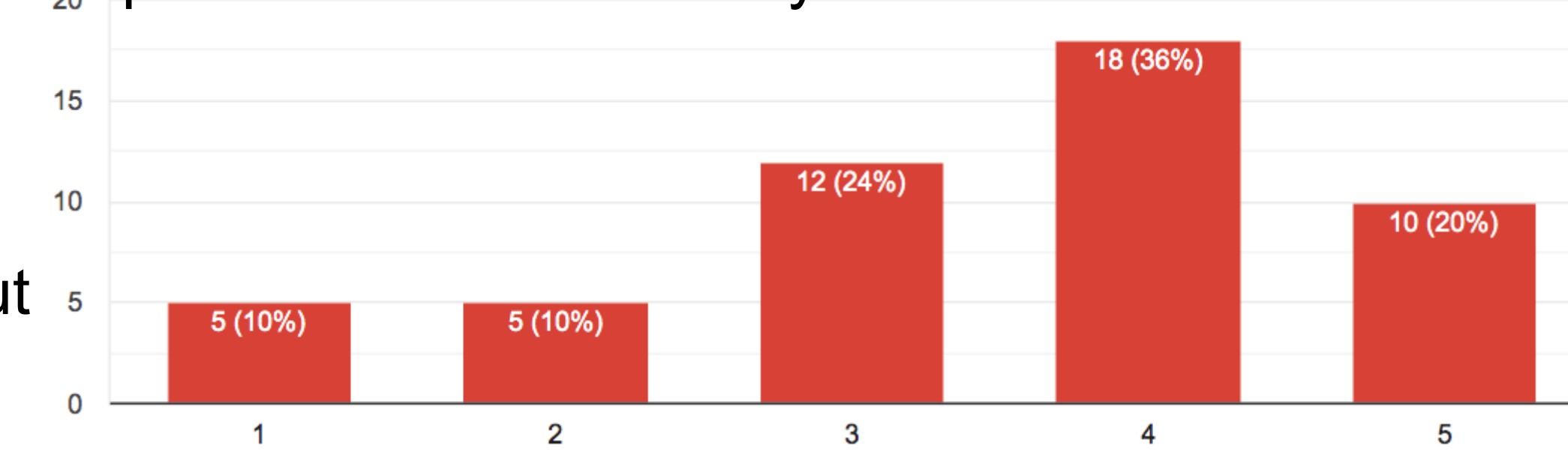
**Positive:** Increased awareness to resident burnout and our lifestyle is difficult normally, health and symptoms importance, co-resident support is greater than program support  
**Negative:** Not being able to help my patients, putting my family in danger, the loneliness, lost electives/rotations

## Results Summary & Discussion

"As the pandemic has worn on, feelings have shifted, showing signs of strain on the healthcare industry and its doctors."<sup>1</sup> The results of this survey are not surprising, but help visualize the stark increase in stress added onto an already known demanding work/lifestyle of a resident physician. During a normal academic training year, the daily demands of residency programs are already disproportionate to non-medical professions; residents are the first-face a patient sees at an academic institution, and that won't change.

The pandemic forced residents to work in "environments where information was continuously evolving about how to best protect oneself or one's patients, how to adapt and apply new guidelines."<sup>2</sup> And with the mandatory quarantining and social distancing, stressors in residency emerged exponentially as unprecedented enforcements led to the sudden absence of social support, the limited access to family, and the risk of infecting family members in the home. Residents are already overworked with an under-appreciation by the system; COVID-19 helped amplify the already known. Perhaps with highlighting this now patterned data, training programs will shift focus on resident wellness as being an equal importance to education.

How much did seeing patients (COVID+/-) during the pandemic contribute to your stress level?



1. Medscape "Family Medicine Physician Lifestyle, Happiness & Burnout Report 2021" Keith L. Martin; Mary Lyn Koval | February 19, 2021.  
2. Zoorob D, Shah S, La Saevig D, Murphy C, Aouthmany S, et al. (2021) Insight into resident burnout, mental wellness, and coping mechanisms early in the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0250104. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250104>