

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare systems in rural areas face many difficulties. Once health professionals are recruited to the area, it is challenging to keep high retention rates. There has been research conducted to determine how different aspects of healthcare in rural areas affect the well-being of practicing physician assistants. Rural physician assistants claim their location has a negative impact on their job satisfaction¹. Challenges range from low feelings of accomplishment², being the only provider in the area³, high patient volume⁴, emotional exhaustion⁵, to low compensation⁶.

In Kentucky, we face the same challenges as many other rural areas. Taking the time to find out what is concerning to our current health professionals will allow us the proper insight to make changes needed to retain our valued rural workers. Though previous studies have shown us what is concerning to physician assistants in similar areas, there needs to be more focus on the root of the issue. This study is designed to learn more about job satisfaction of rural Kentucky physician assistants.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

- Provider burnout is something that has often been studied in urban areas discussing the implications of how burnout effects job satisfaction, relationships and mental health. However prior research of burnout in physician assistants specifically in rural Kentucky.

- Objectives of this study:

- Discover job satisfaction of rural Kentucky physician assistants.
- Provide insight on how rural Kentucky physician assistants feel about compensation, job isolation, and challenges they are facing practicing in rural areas.
- Is there a relationship with burnout and Kentucky's low retention rate of rural physician assistants.

METHODS

- This research project and survey was approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board (IRB). The survey was created using Qualtrics, and the questions were formulated by the research group.
- To obtain the study population the Kentucky Association of Physician Assistants' (KAPA) email database was utilized. An email was sent to all members on the KAPA email registry with a link that would take participants to Qualtrics and the survey.
- Before the participants could answer any item on the survey they had to read and agree or disagree to the terms of the consent form. The consent form was also approved by the University of Kentucky IRB. If participants did not give consent, they were not utilized in the results.
- No identifying data was obtained from the participants.
- Inclusion criteria for the results included if the participant answered yes to currently practicing as a physician assistant and answered yes to practicing in a rural area. As well as, if the participant answered no to currently practicing but said yes to practicing in a rural area. Exclusion criteria included if the participant answered no to currently practicing and no to practicing in a rural area.
- The questions of the survey explored and were not limited to the geographical, mental and professional aspects of the physician assistant career. Most of the questions were in a yes or no format. Two questions were formatted differently in that if the participants answered yes to that question, they were taken to a series of follow up questions that explored further why they answered the way they did.
- Microsoft excel was utilized for descriptive statistical analysis of the results, specifically percentages.

RESULTS

Chart 1: "Do you feel that you make a positive impact on the patients you serve?"

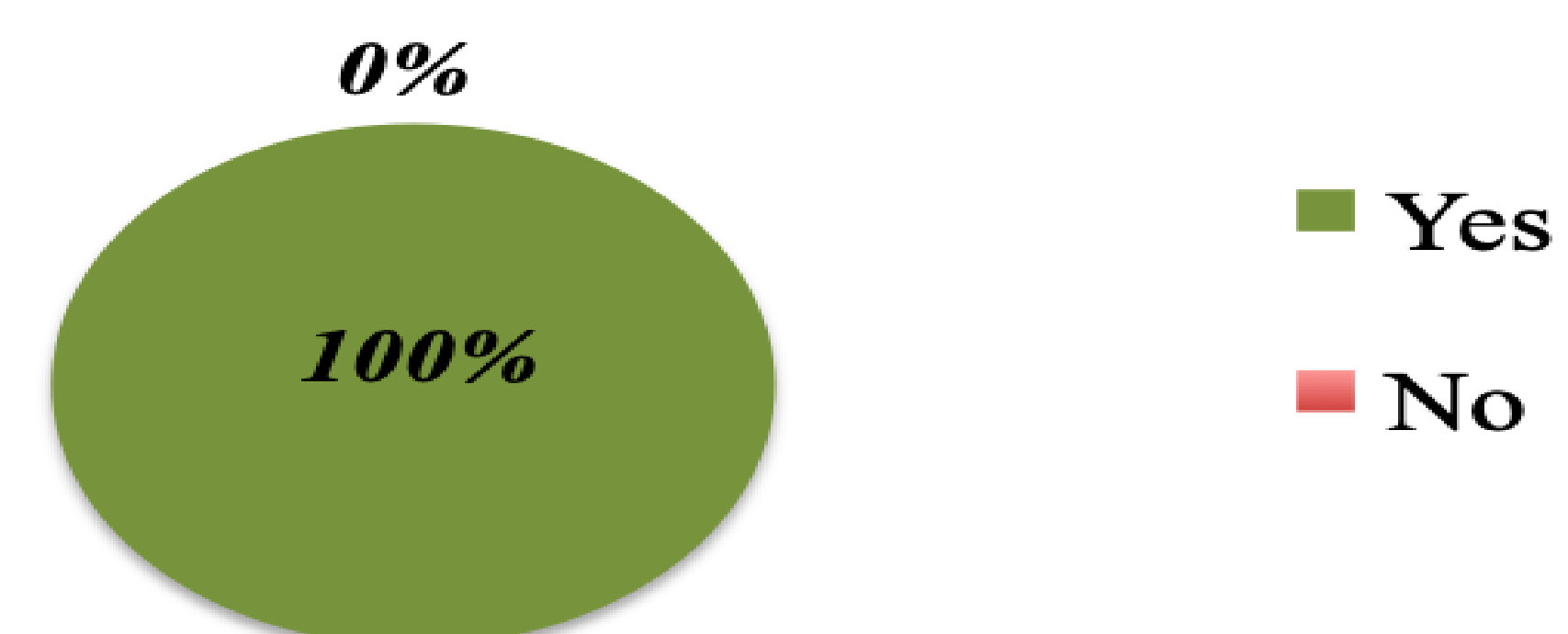


Chart 2: "Do you feel that you are respected within your community?"

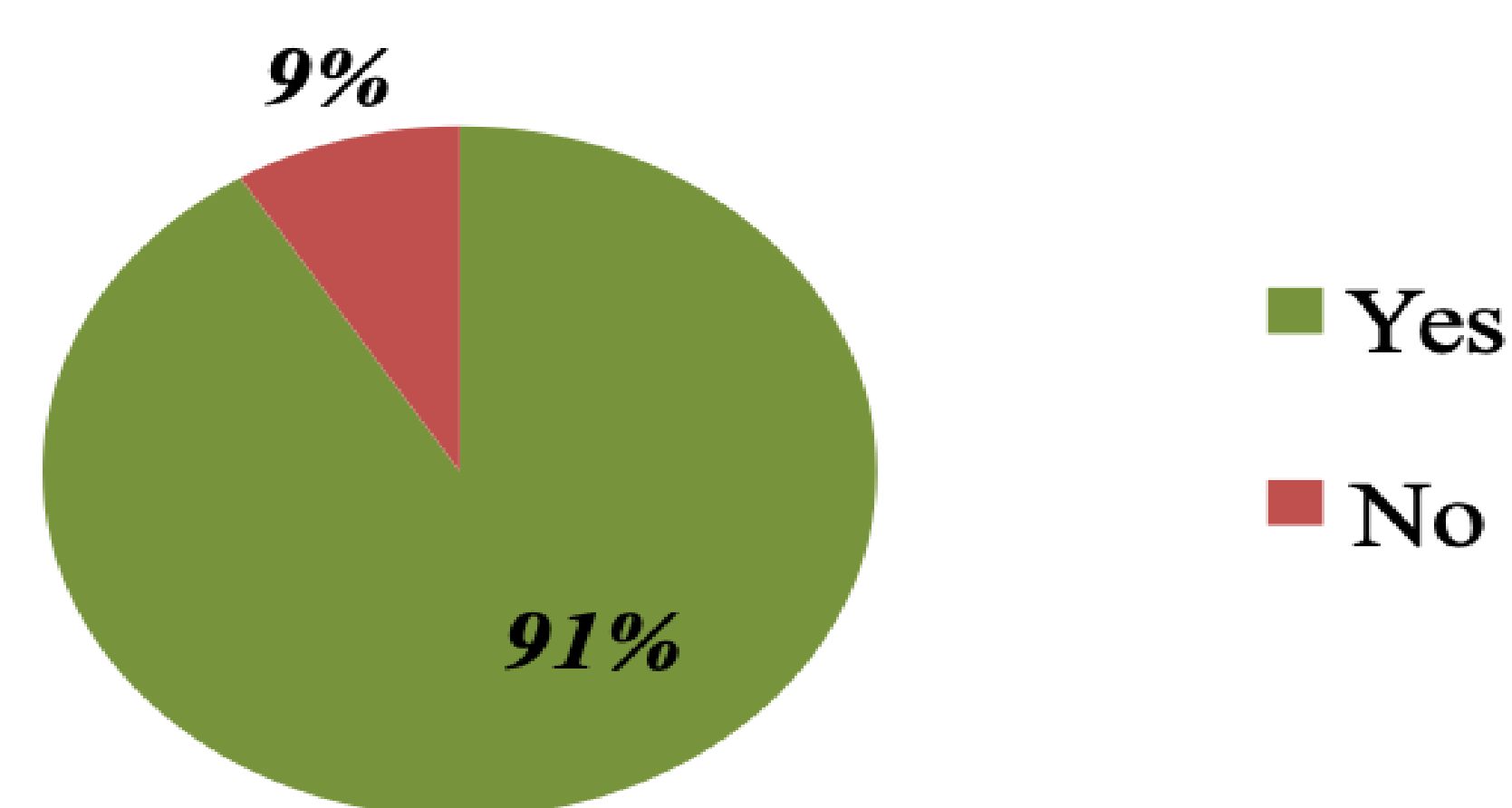


Chart 3a: "Do you feel working in a rural area contributes to your job satisfaction?"

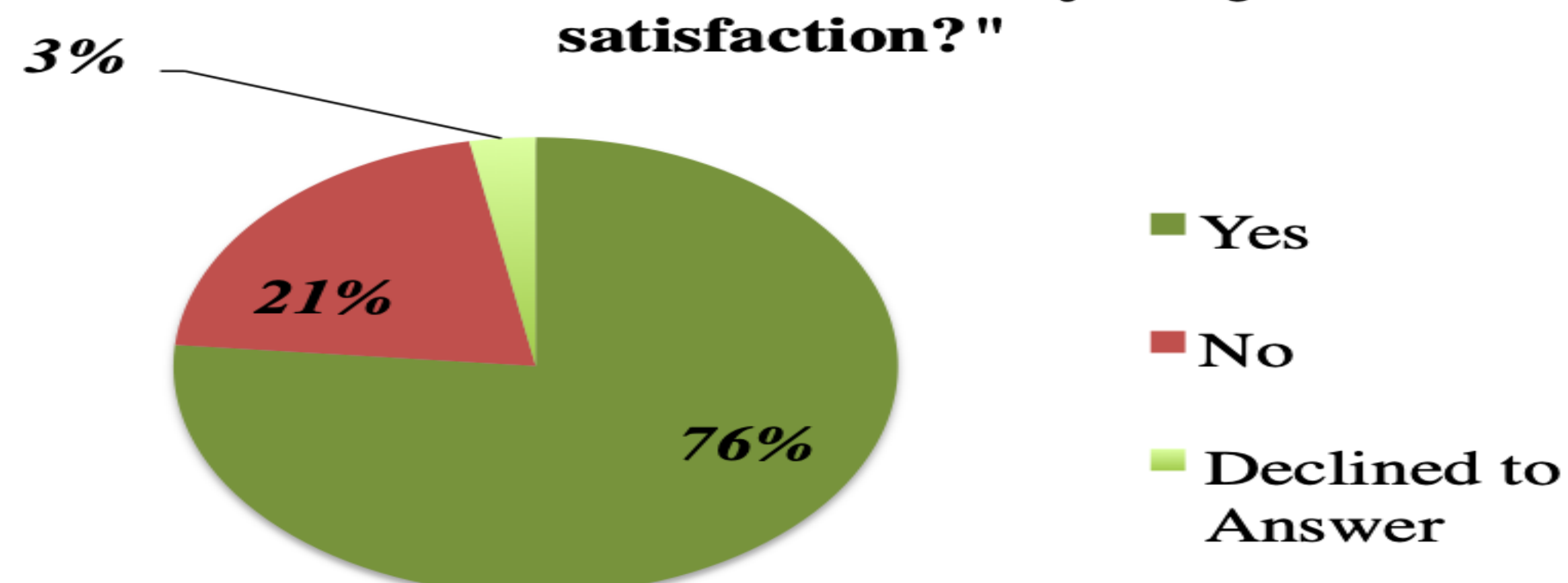
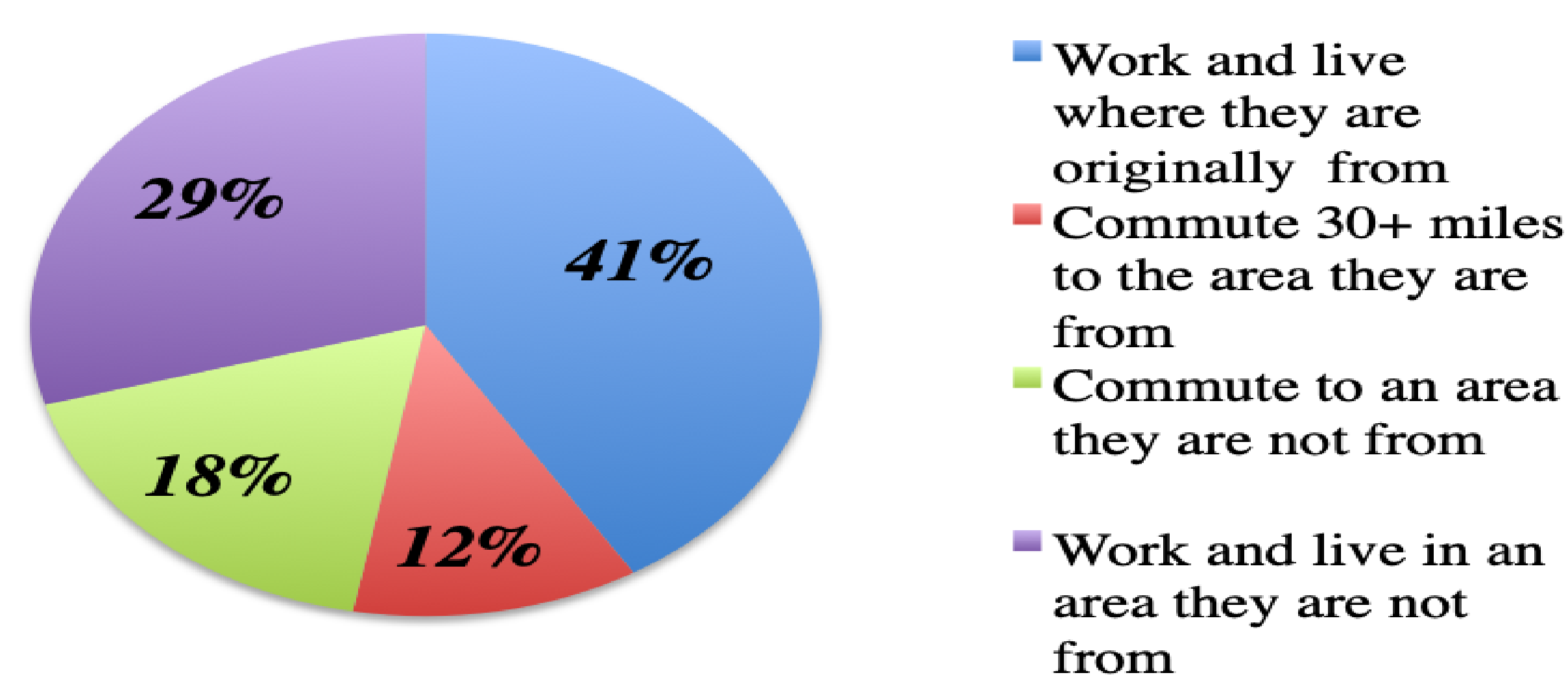


Chart 4: Area of Practice vs. Where Provider Lives



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

101 participants responded to the 20 item Qualtrics survey. Of those, 34 participants answered "YES" to identifying as a certified physician assistant, as well as considered their area of practice rural. The survey responses of those 34 participants are the data compiled into the following charts, 1-9b.

Chart 1: 34 respondents answered "YES." 0 respondents answered "NO."

Chart 2: 31 respondents answered "YES." 3 respondents answered "NO."

Chart 3a: 26 respondents answered "YES." 7 respondent answered "NO." 1 respondent declined to answer.

Chart 4: 14 respondents answered they work in the same area that they are originally from. 10 respondents answered they live and work in an area that they are not originally from. 6 respondents answered that they commute to an area where they are not from. 4 respondents answered that they commute 30+ miles back to the area that they are originally from. This totaled 18 of 34 respondents working in the rural area they are originally from, and 16 respondents working in a rural area they are not originally from.

DISCUSSION

Chart 1, the only question that had a 100% equal response rate from all that answered, and who fit the demographic. It demonstrates the care that rural physician assistants are providing is making a positive impact, and they recognize it. Chart 2, 91% of the respondents responded that they do feel that they are respected within their community, while only 9% responded that they do not. One could hypothesize that when a provider feels they are respected within their community, they have a sense of pride in their work and their role as a medical care provider which ultimately leads to providing better care for their patients.

Chart 3, the 76% that answered "Yes" could feel this way because they sense the need and value of the care that they provide in underserved rural areas, and that in turn leads to their job satisfaction.

Chart 4, almost half of the group belongs to each category. Per that data, physician assistants are almost equally likely to stay in their hometown to work or move to a different rural area, perhaps, specifically for a job.

CONCLUSION

This current research demonstrated that study participants felt that their rural location contributed positively to their overall job satisfaction. After completing this study, it was found that factors such as a healthy work environment, respect within your community, and fair compensation are all contributors to overall sense of job satisfaction. These are all important elements that we recommend employers evaluate, within their own practice, to ensure subsequent job satisfaction among their employees.

Implications

- Increase the sample size to obtain more power
- Compare and contrast job satisfaction between rural and urban physician assistants
- Determine if gender has an impact on what contributes to job satisfaction
- Determine if there is a correlation between years of experience and job satisfaction

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