

# LGBT+ Seventh-day Adventist Millennials: How Religiosity Connects to Risk and Protection

David Sedlacek, PhD, LMSW    René Drumm PhD, MSW

Shannon Trecartin PhD, Curtis VanderWaal PhD, Nancy Carbonell, PhD

# Purposes

- Report on acceptance/rejection quantitative findings related to spirituality and also examine whether spirituality or religiosity in this sample is a protective factor against depression, suicidal thoughts/behaviors, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behavior.
- Explore the spiritual journey of Seventh-day Adventist LGBT+ Millennials in their own words through their responses to qualitative questions.

# Purposes

- Articulate the types of interventions that could be helpful to LGBT+ individuals and their families when navigating the dissonance between their understanding of biblical teachings and their lived reality as an LGBT+ person.
- Offer suggestions about how Christian social workers and family members can assist an LGBT+ person to navigate the tension between their sexual orientation or gender identity and their Christian faith.

# Survey Construction

- Family acceptance/rejection questions
- Dependent variables – standardized questionnaires
  - Self-esteem, social support, depression, substance use, risky sex, suicidal ideation & suicide attempts
- Open-ended qualitative questions

# Data Collection

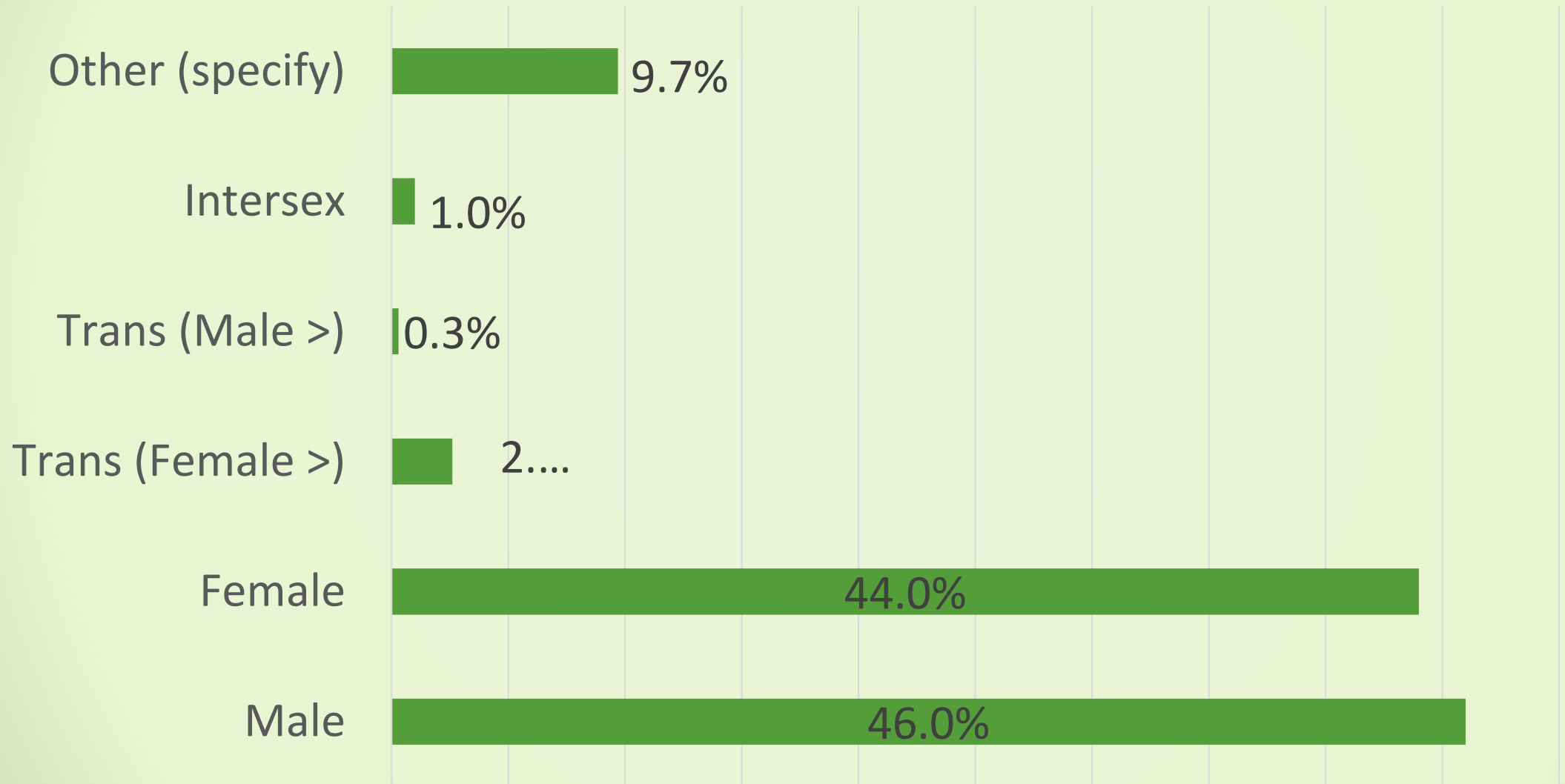
- Developed SurveyMonkey link
- Distributed to:
  - SDA bloggers
  - SDA Kinship readership list
  - Adventist Today readership list
  - Intercollegiate Adventist Gay/Straight Alliance Coalition

# Data Collection

- Criteria for involvement
  - SDA childhood background (96%)
  - Identify as LGBT+
  - Ages 18 – 35
- N = 310 LGBT+ individuals
- Confidentiality of data

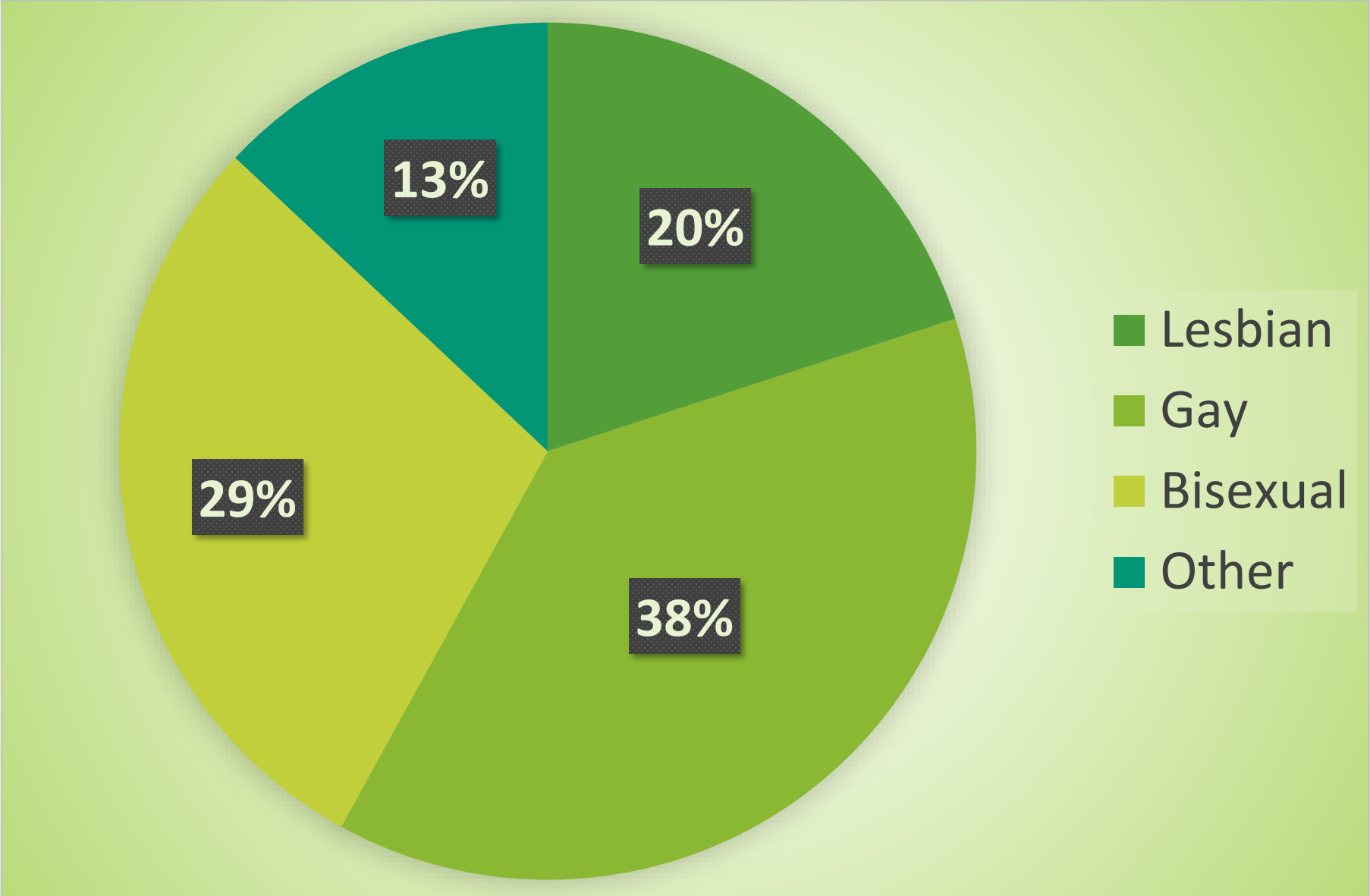
# Demographics

# Gender

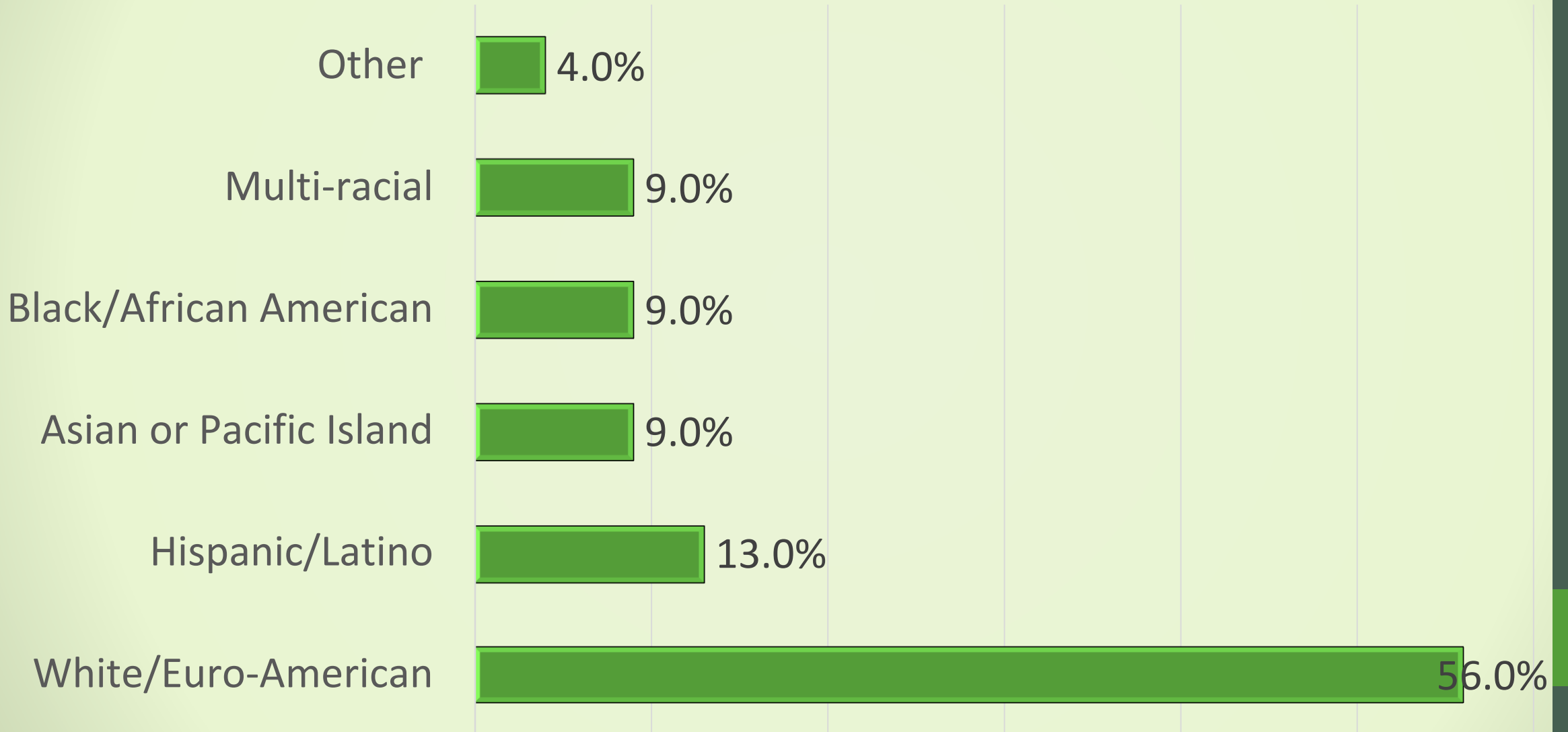




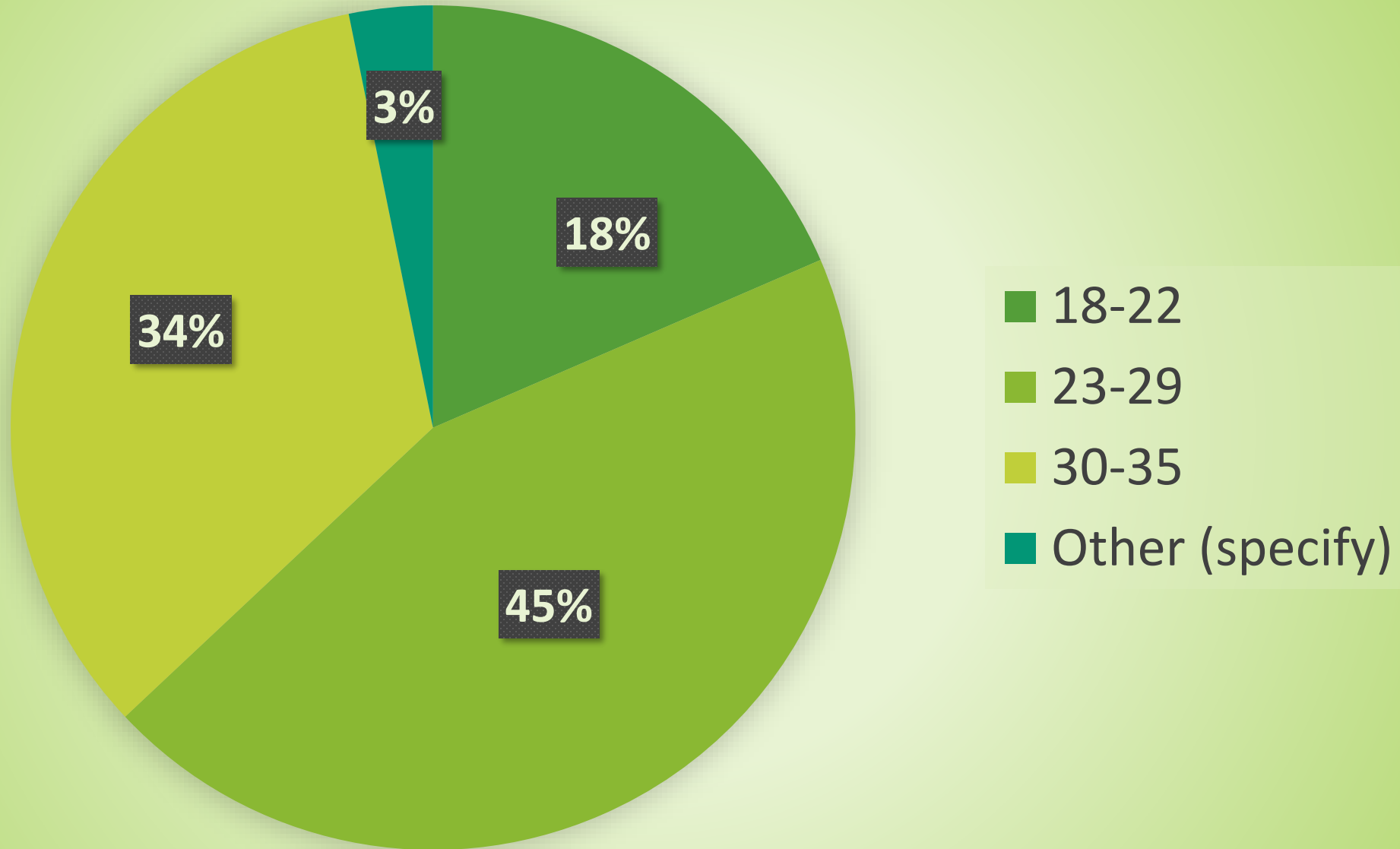
# Sexual Orientation



# Ethnic Background

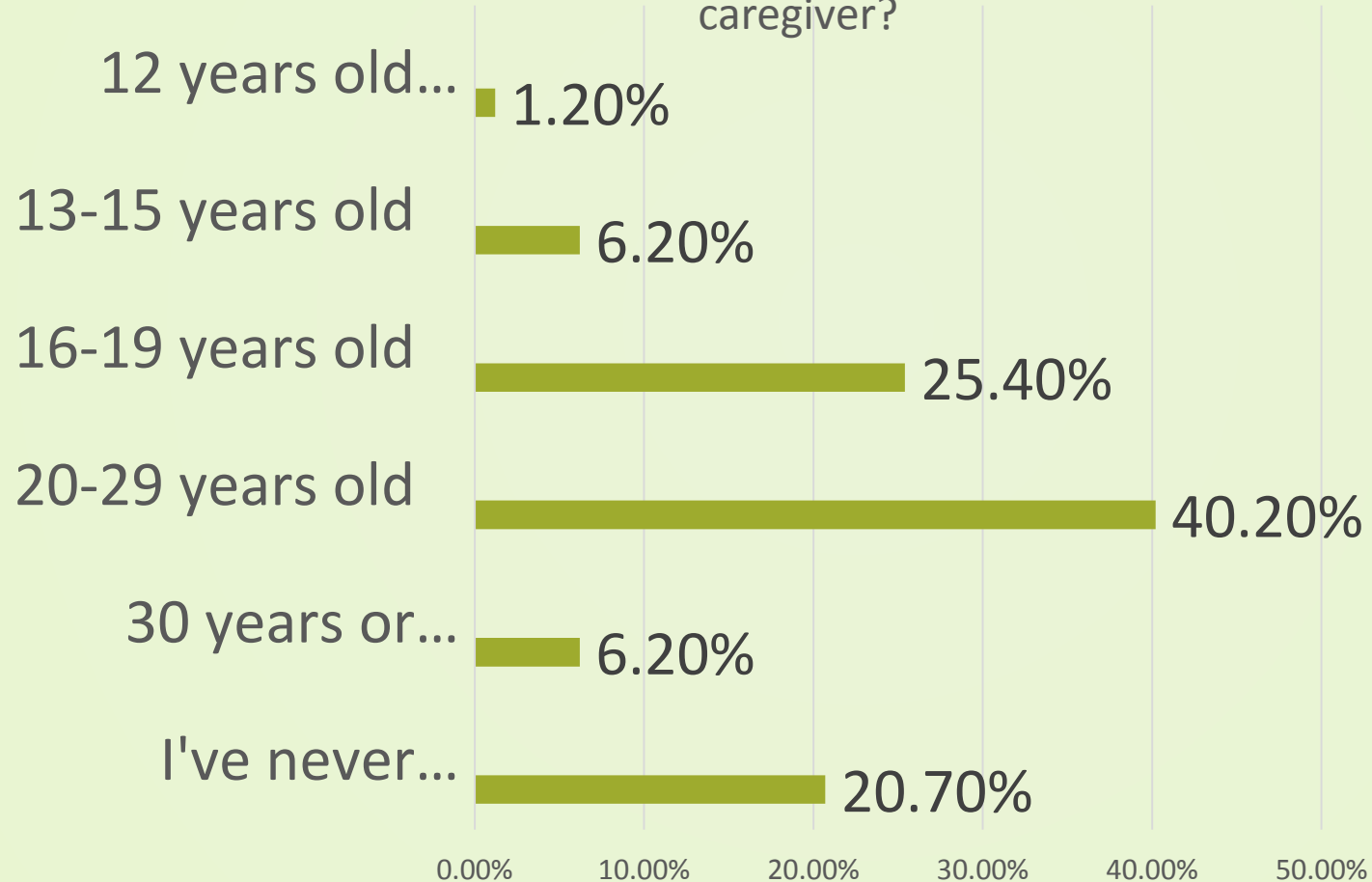


# Age



# Coming Out Age

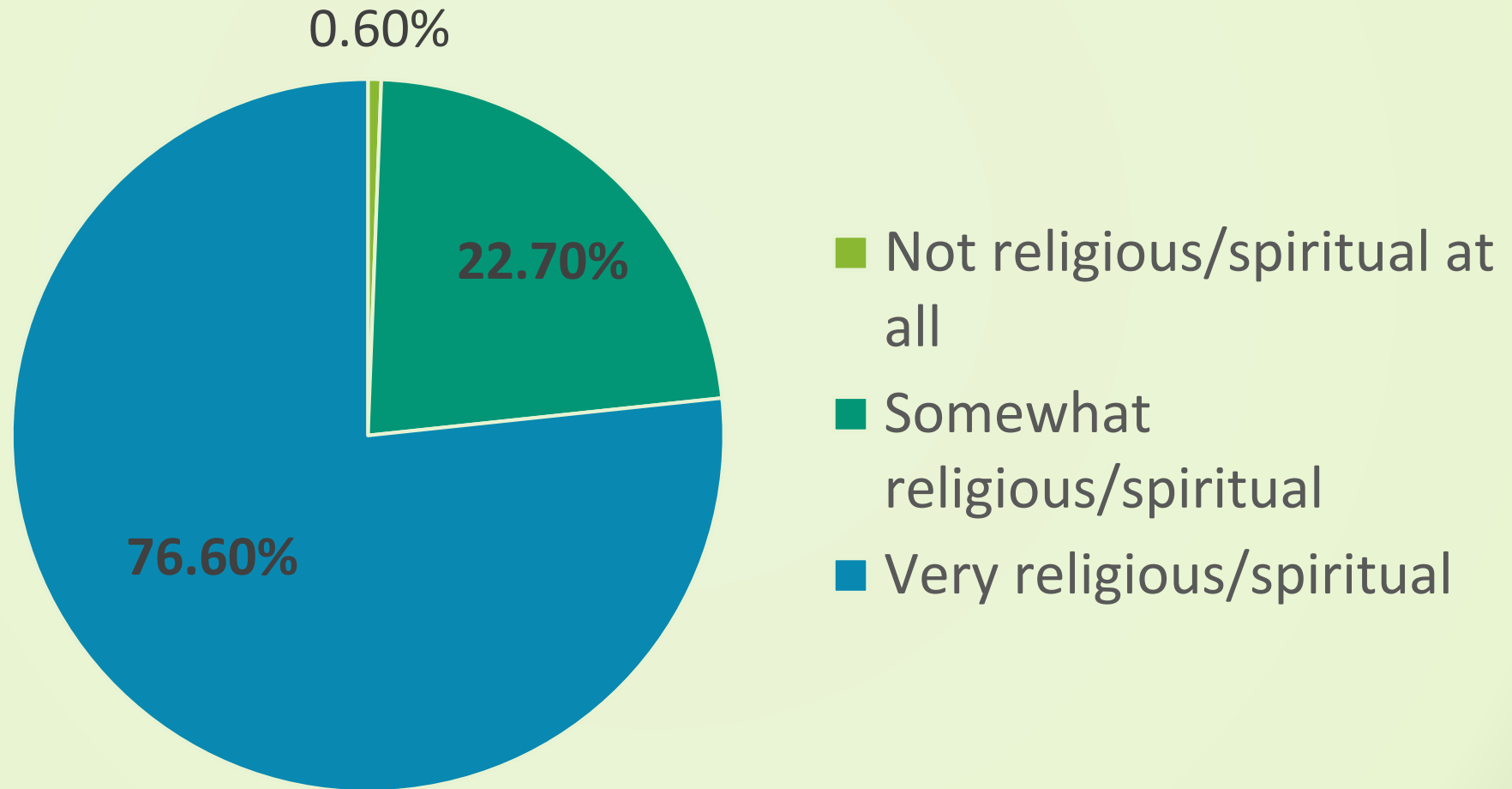
How old were you when you first came out to a parent or caregiver?



# Religiosity and Spirituality

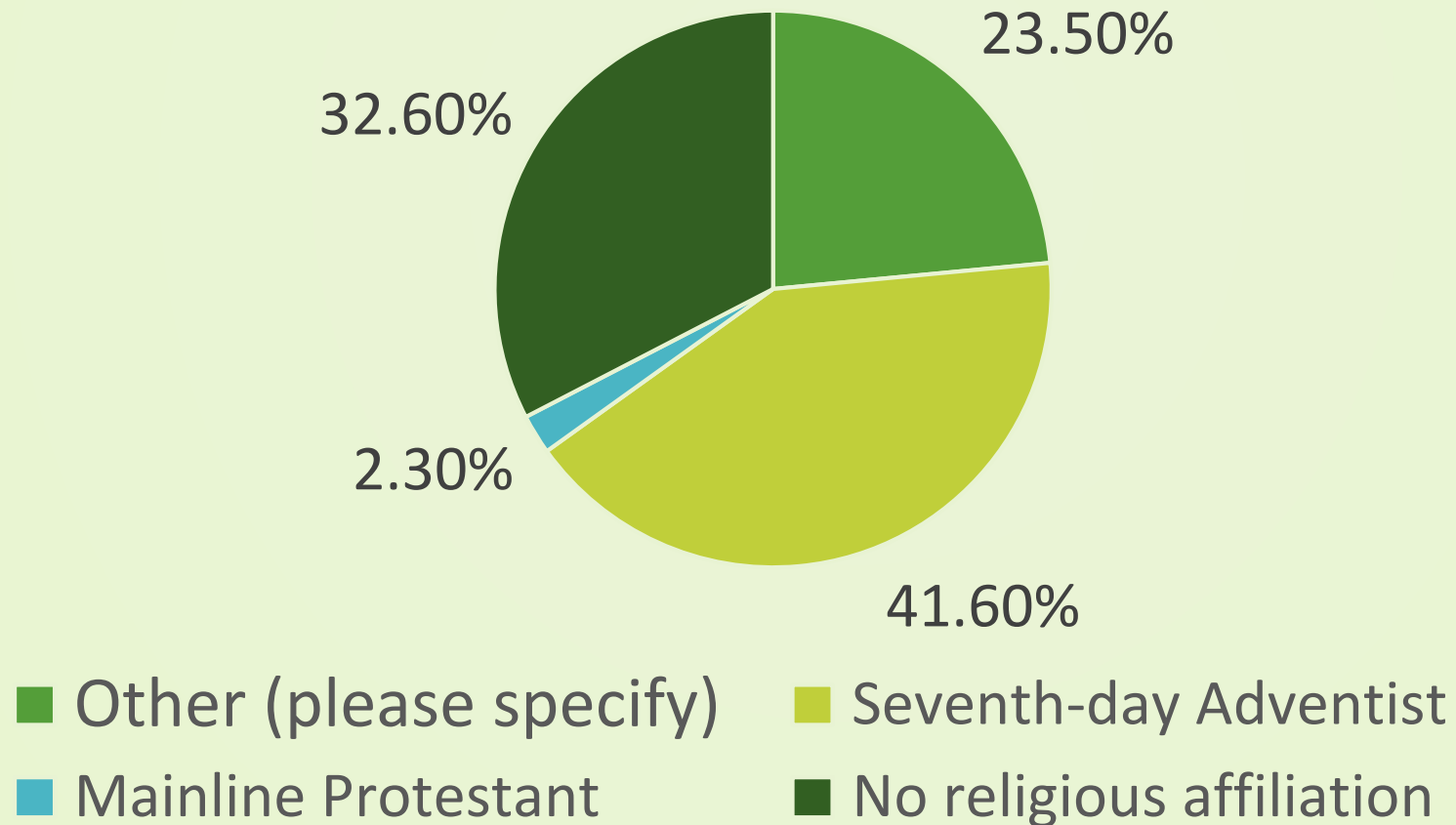
# Family and Religion

How religious/spiritual was your family as you were growing up?



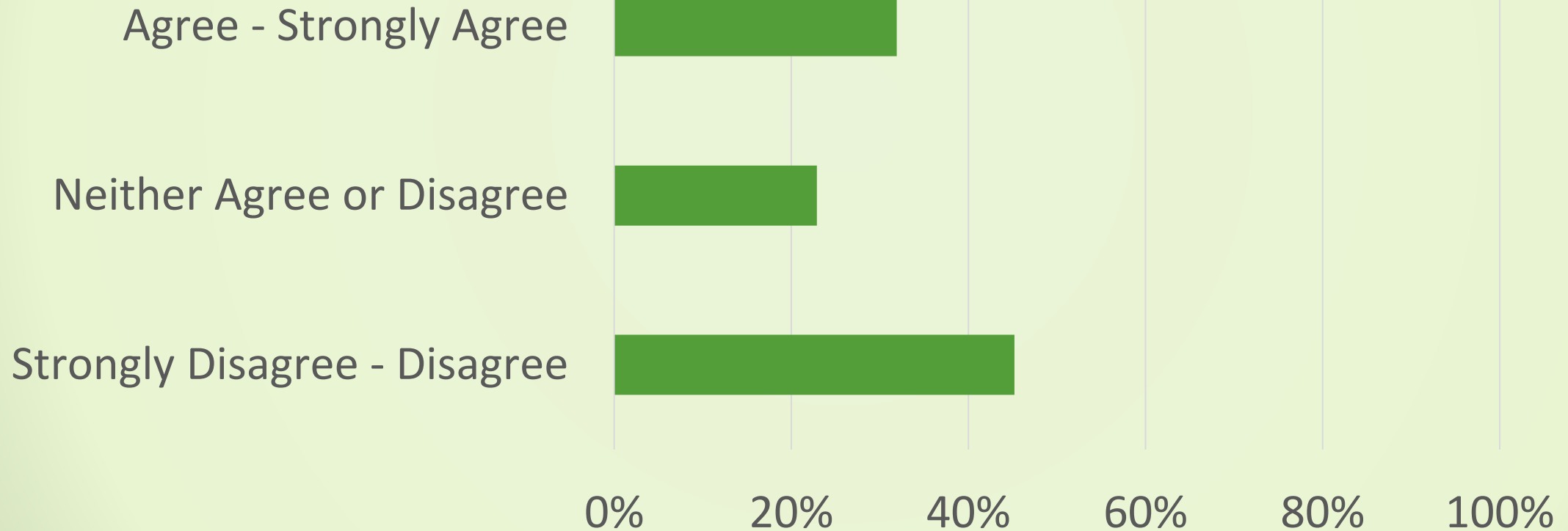
# Current Religious Affiliation

What is your current religious affiliation?  
(choose all that apply)



# Religious vs Spiritual

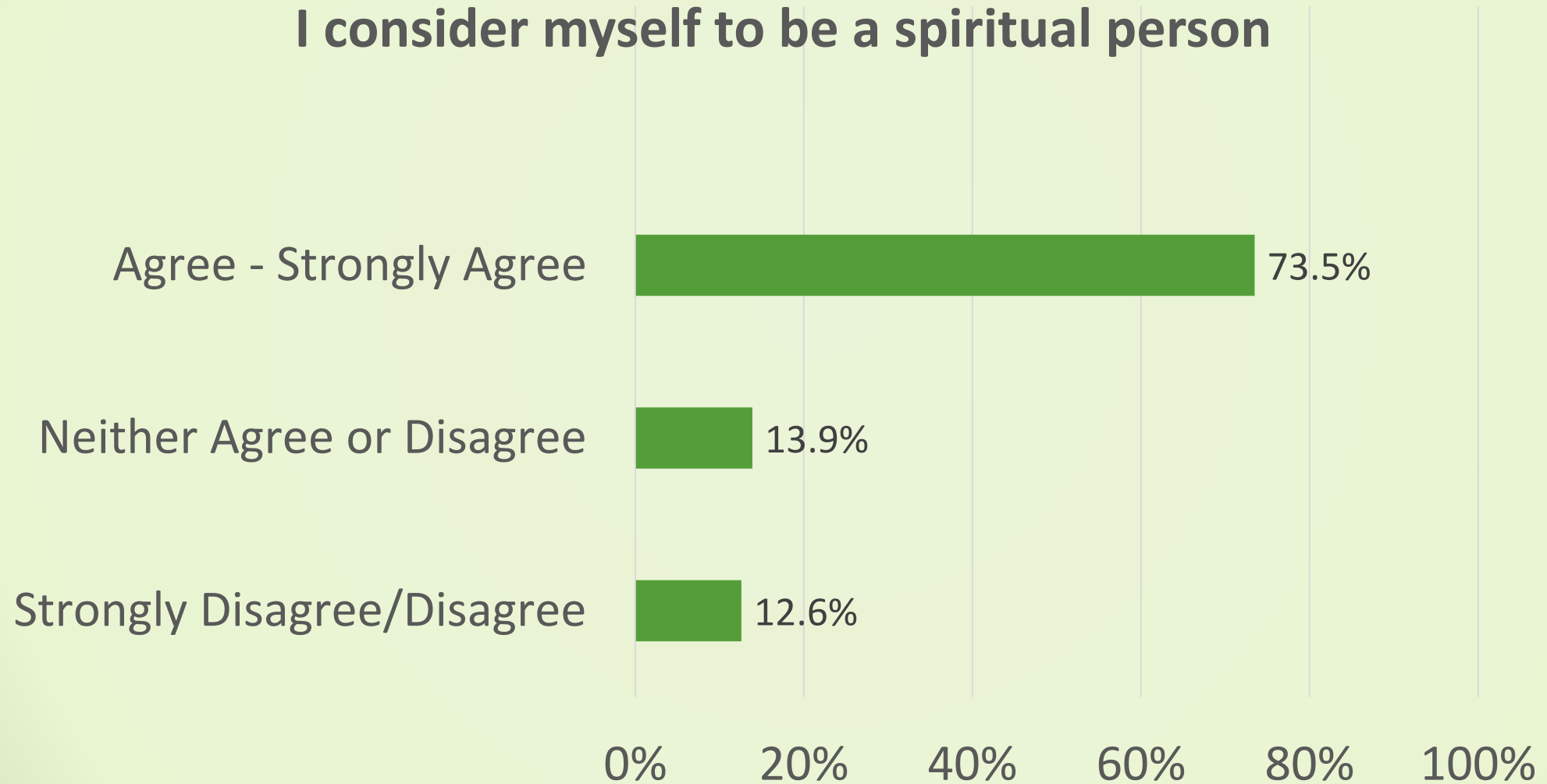
I consider myself to be a religious person





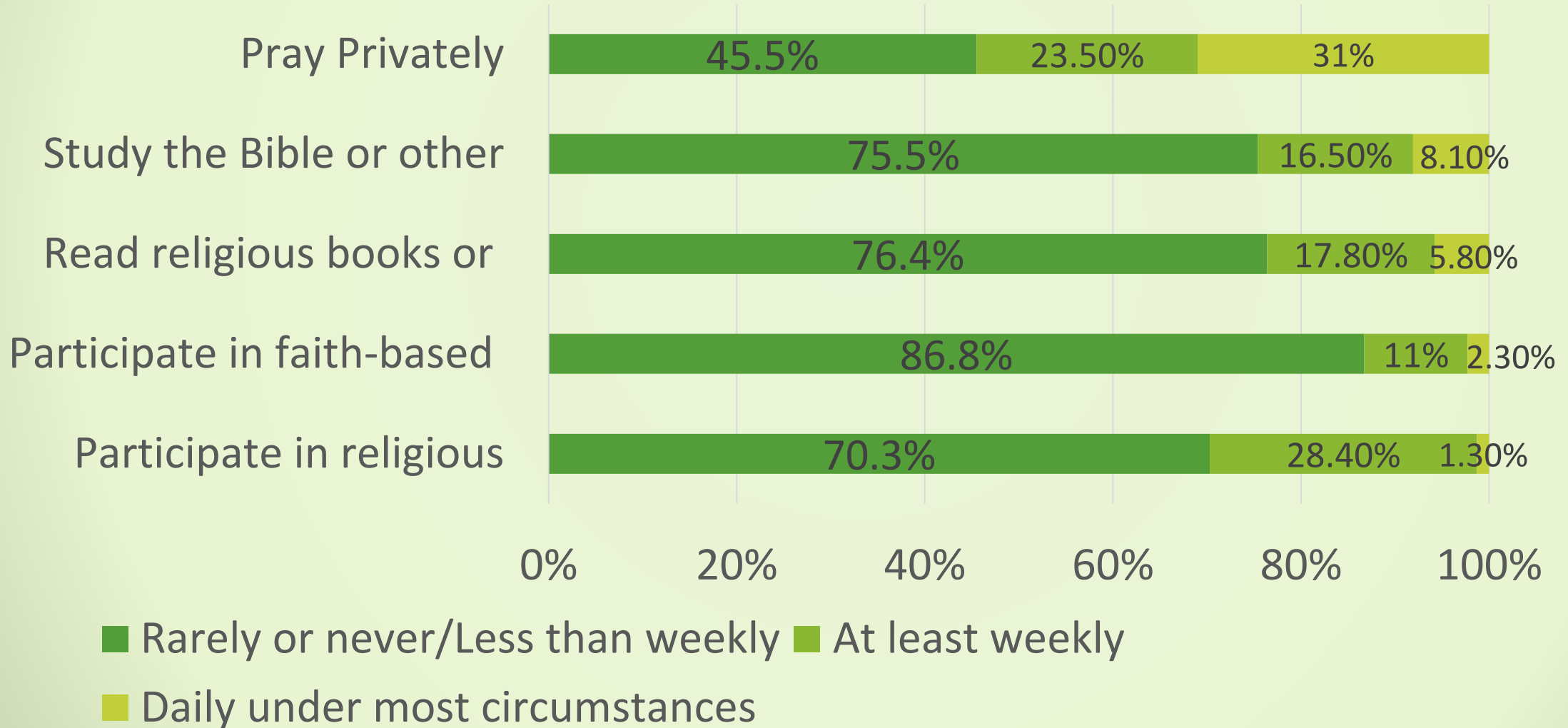
# Religious vs Spiritual

I consider myself to be a spiritual person



# Participation in Religious Activities

How often do you participate in the following activities?



# Data Analysis

# Parental Rejection

## MY PARENTS/FAMILY.....

### Strongly Agree/Agree

- Struggled to accept my orientation 81%
- Might disown me if I came out 57%
- Were disappointed when I came out 69%
- Felt my sexual identity was a poor reflection on them 65%

# Parental Abuse

## MY PARENTS/FAMILY.....

### Strongly Agree/Agree

- Ridiculed me (how I dressed and fixed hair) 42%
- Used demeaning language 37%
- Said financial support dependent on compliance 29%
- Called me names like 'sissy' and 'fag' 20%
- Kicked me out of the house 9%

# Self-Rejection

## Strongly Agree/Agree

- Due to religious beliefs, I had difficulty admitting to myself that I was LGBT+ 83%
- Scared to come out because I knew my family would think I was sinful and/or disgusting 81%
- Through teen years, felt isolated as I faced my orientation 81%
- Family prejudice made it difficult to come out 76%
- When I came out, religious beliefs triggered guilt and shame 75%

# Parental Support

## Strongly Agree/Agree

- My family listened attentively as I shared my sexual orientation/gender identity journey with them 41%
- Immediately or soon after coming out, my parents communicated that they loved me no matter what 25%
- My parents searched for organizations that would help them understand and support me 17%
- Took me to counseling to help me understand and accept my orientation/identity 12%

# Impact of Religion

## PARENTS.....

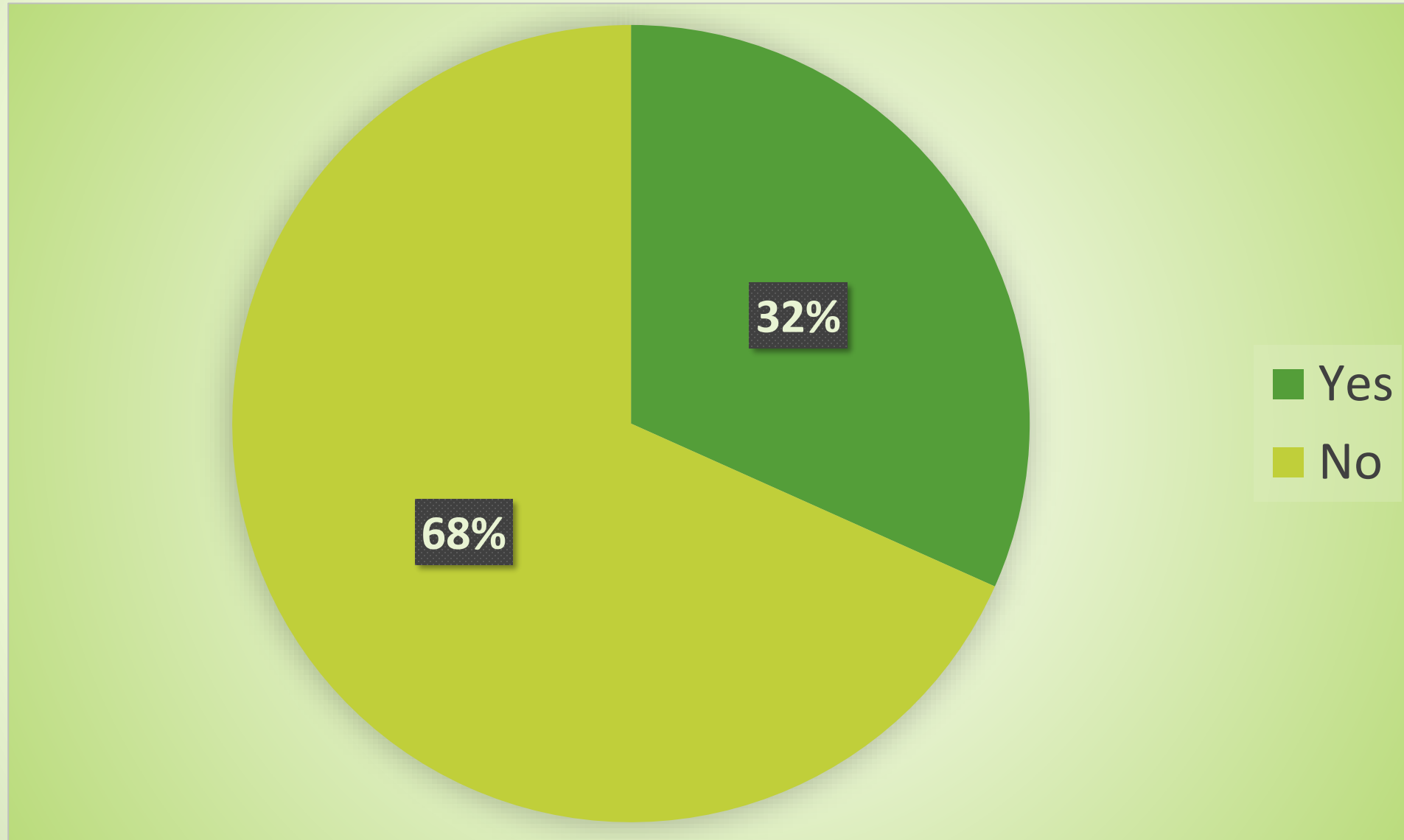
### Strongly Agree/Agree

- Had difficulty accepting orientation due to religious beliefs 82%
- Prayed that God would change my orientation 60%
- Used scripture to try to talk me out of my orientation 57%
- Drew upon religious faith to help them understand me 37%
- Took me to a pastor for prayer/counseling to help me change 25%

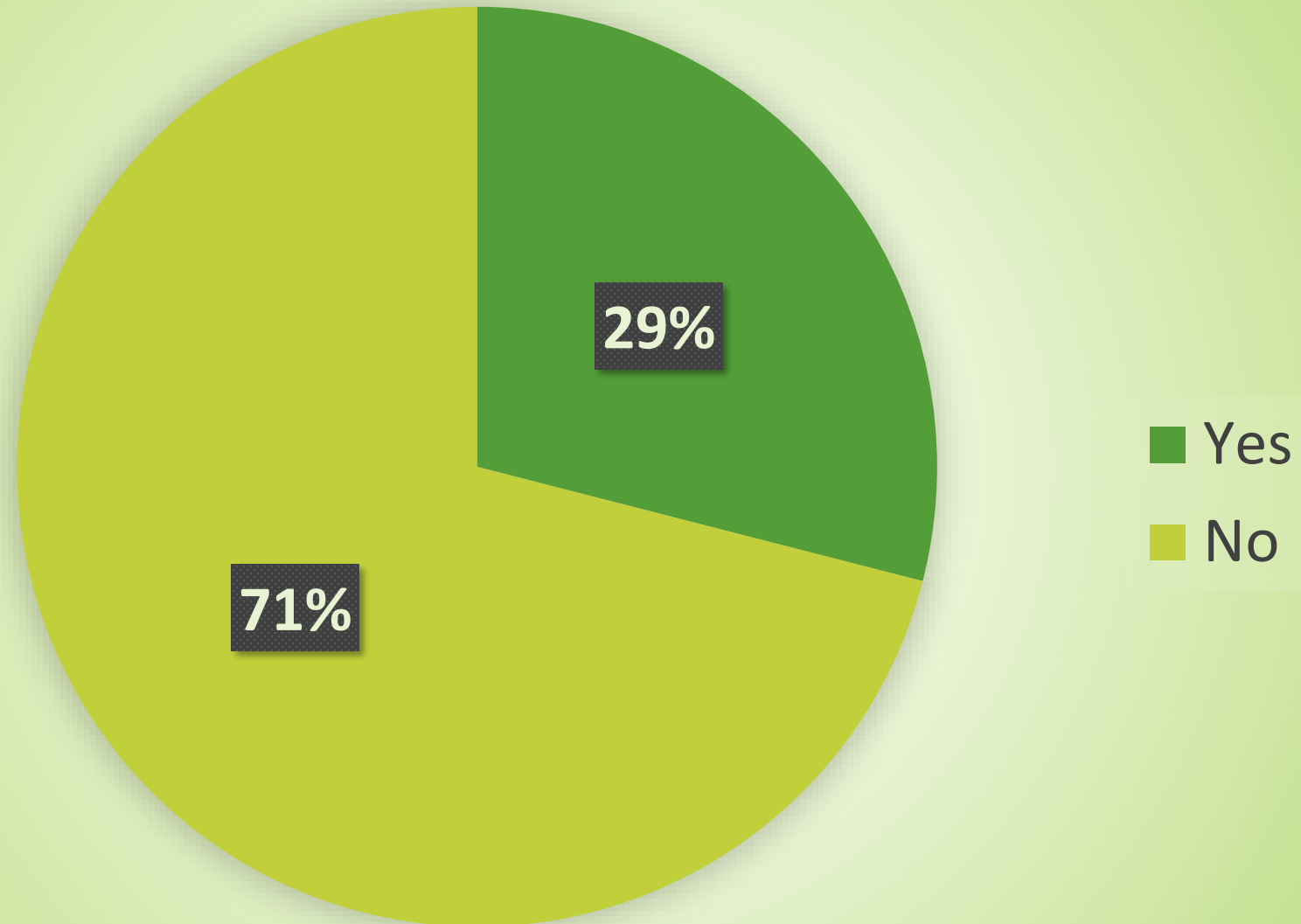


# Negative Outcomes

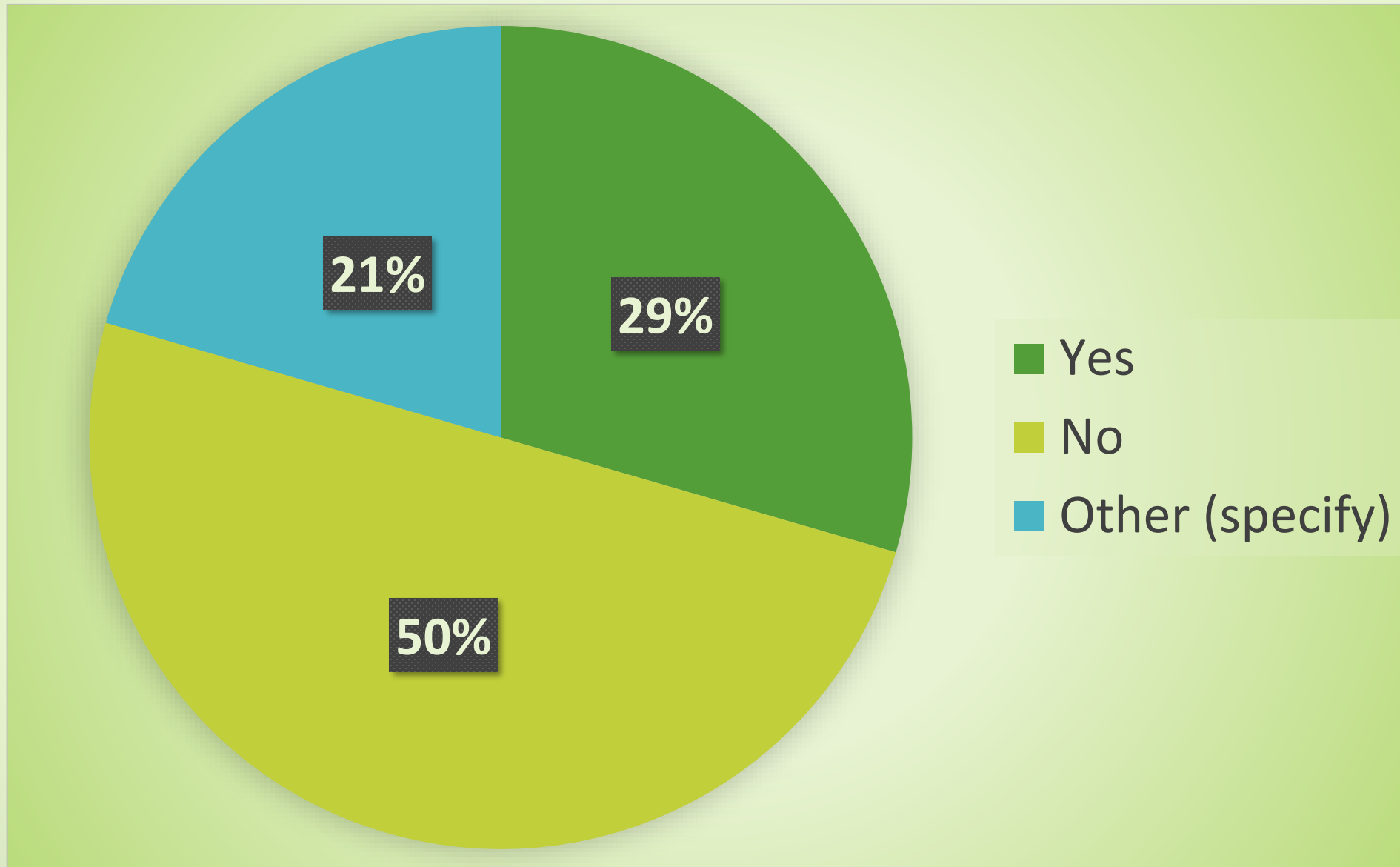
# Suicidal Ideation – Past 6 Months



# Lifetime Suicide Attempts



# Suicide – Connection to LGBT Orientation/Identity



# Depression Severity

Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9) N = 254, M= 6.6, SD = 5.9					
Severity	None	Mild	Moderate	Moderately Severe	Severe
*Range	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-27
Our Findings	39.0%	27.2%	15.4%	18.5%	
General Population	76.4%	18.1%	4.2%	1.3%	

# The Effects on Depression and Suicide

## Correlational Analyses

- **Parental Support**

Greater support was associated with having **fewer suicidal thoughts** and **less depression**

- **Parental Rejection**

Greater rejection was associated with **higher levels of depression.**

- **Parental Abuse**

Greater abuse was associated with **suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts,** and **increased depression**

- **Self-Rejection**

Greater self-rejection was associated with **suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts,** and **increased depression**

# Religiosity and Spirituality Correlational Analysis

**Subscales and Dependent Variable Correlations \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$**

	Suicidal Thoughts	Suicide Attempts	Depression	Unprotected Sex	Tobacco	Alcohol	Marijuana
Religious Person		-.12*	-.17**			-.30**	-.13*
Spiritual Person							
Private Prayer	-.15**		-.17**			-.16**	-.15**
Bible Study or Other Text				-.14*		-.26**	
Religious Books or Journals	-.16**					-.16**	
Religious Services			-.12*	-.12*	-.13*	-.29**	
Faith-based Community Service	-.17**		-.16**			-.25**	

# Spirituality/Religiosity as Protective Factors

Participants who:

- Consider themselves religious, report fewer suicide attempts, less depression, and less alcohol and marijuana use.
- Consider themselves spiritual (not religious) did not benefit from these protective effects.



# Spirituality/Religiosity as Protective Factors

Participants who:

- Engage in private prayer reported fewer suicidal thoughts, less depression, and less alcohol and marijuana use.
- Studied the Bible had less unprotected sex and consumed less alcohol.
- Read religious books or journals reported fewer suicidal thoughts and consumed less alcohol.
- Attend more religious services have less depression, less unprotected sex and use less tobacco and alcohol.
- Engage in more faith-based community service have fewer suicidal thoughts, have less depression, and consumed less alcohol.

# Protective Factors against Depression

Multiple regression analysis reveals:

- The items most predictive of **lower depression scores** were **identity as a religious person and reading religious books.**
- The items most predictive from having **suicidal thoughts** were **reading religious books** and **having family support.**
- **Identifying as a religious person** resulted in lower odds of **lifetime suicide attempts.**
- Spirituality, private prayer, bible study, participation in religious services and participation in faith-based community service were not protective against depression.

# Qualitative Findings: Parents

My son came out to me as gay one day when he was really upset with me. He had been struggling with his sexual orientation for some time, it turns out. I had sensed this struggle so was not surprised when he came out. I am encouraged that he has chosen pastoral ministry as his profession and that he is committed to celibacy.



# Qualitative Findings: Parents

- Our daughter was born as a boy, but revealed his transgender desires two years ago. I had been working as a pastor with LGBT+ students who had taught me much, so when he revealed his new gender identity, I was able to provide support. Our relationship has grown in a very positive direction since she has embraced a M-F transgender identity. I am glad that she came out. She seems less conflicted.

# Qualitative Findings: Parents





# Qualitative Findings: Parents

I struggled when my daughter revealed that she was a lesbian. I asked myself “how could this be?”. However, I love my daughter and have welcomed her into our home. This is something that she said that she appreciates. My wife struggles to accept her as a lesbian. She still does not acknowledge her as that. She believes that she is still heterosexual and that one day she will come to accept it. My faith has helped me to accept and love her even though I too hope that one day she will change.



# Qualitative Findings: Millennials

When I came out, my parents berated and shunned me based on their and the church's interpretation of the Bible. I found a community of God that gave me hope regarding being loved by God. After I healed I began to talk to my parents about a different interpretation of the Bible. We eventually agreed to disagree.





# Qualitative Findings: Millennials

It is the love of God and respect for his Word that in the end made it possible for me to see this is how He made me and I got that deep affection for God from my parents but they have not been able to see that and think I have lost it.





# Qualitative Findings: Millennials



# Qualitative Findings: Millennials

- For these reasons, faith and belief remain at the center of the struggle I have with my parents, almost as though it is the only way for me and any other decisions I make to remain legitimate.
- My family is still not ok with me and my life and religion is still very much thrown in my face.
- It is better but the theology of a person will not change even though they still love you unconditionally and you still love them.
- I miss my parents and I miss having a church life.

# Qualitative Findings: Millennials



# Qualitative Findings: Millennials

- I no longer have a relationship with either parent or my church. It has been over 10 years since I've seen them.
- My relationship with my Adventist parent has suffered greatly, and I have only contacted them once in the last 10 years.
- I feel as if I have been forced to distance myself from my blood family and move on to more colloquial family and friends in order to remain mentally healthy.

# Guidelines for Pastors and Teachers

Include. Many youth and young adults who identify as LGBT+ love God and want to be a part of His church. Never try to convince a young person they are not really a Christian because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Listen. It takes courage for LGBT+ young people to come out. They risk potential rejection or judgment.



# Guidelines for Pastors and Teachers

Protect. No gay jokes. By now, it should be apparent how important it is to treat LBGT+ people with respect and care. No micro-aggressions. No bullying, teasing, name-calling, anti-gay statements, “outing” someone, or social media harassment.

Invent. Words are important, but justice requires personal investment and action. Offer to host or join students in bullying prevention programs. Encourage student leaders to be attentive to their peers, especially those who appear to be isolated or subject to mistreatment and exclusion.

# Recommendations for Christian Social Workers

- Be humble enough to know that you do not have all of the answers.
- Listening to LGBT+ clients' stories and not imposing your beliefs upon them is important.
- Learning cultural competency skills related to the LGBT+ population is essential.

# Recommendations for Christian Social Workers

- Philosophically, understand that Christians in various denominations have differing understandings of biblical teaching on the morality of being LGBT+ and the practice of LGBT+ behavior. However, Christian ethics require love, welcome and respect for all.
- Since the rejection of LGBT+ persons by family and church members is highly correlated with depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, it becomes a social justice issue to advocate for our LGBT+ clients.
- We will have to find a way to navigate the tension between differing values.



ADVENTIST EDITION

# GUIDING FAMILIES

OF LGBT+ LOVED ONES

FOR ADVENTIST FAMILIES,  
MINISTRY LEADERS, AND  
ALL WHO CARE

<https://www.adventsource.org/as30/store-productDetails.aspx?id=39347>