

# New Directions in Corrections:

NIC Virtual Conference  
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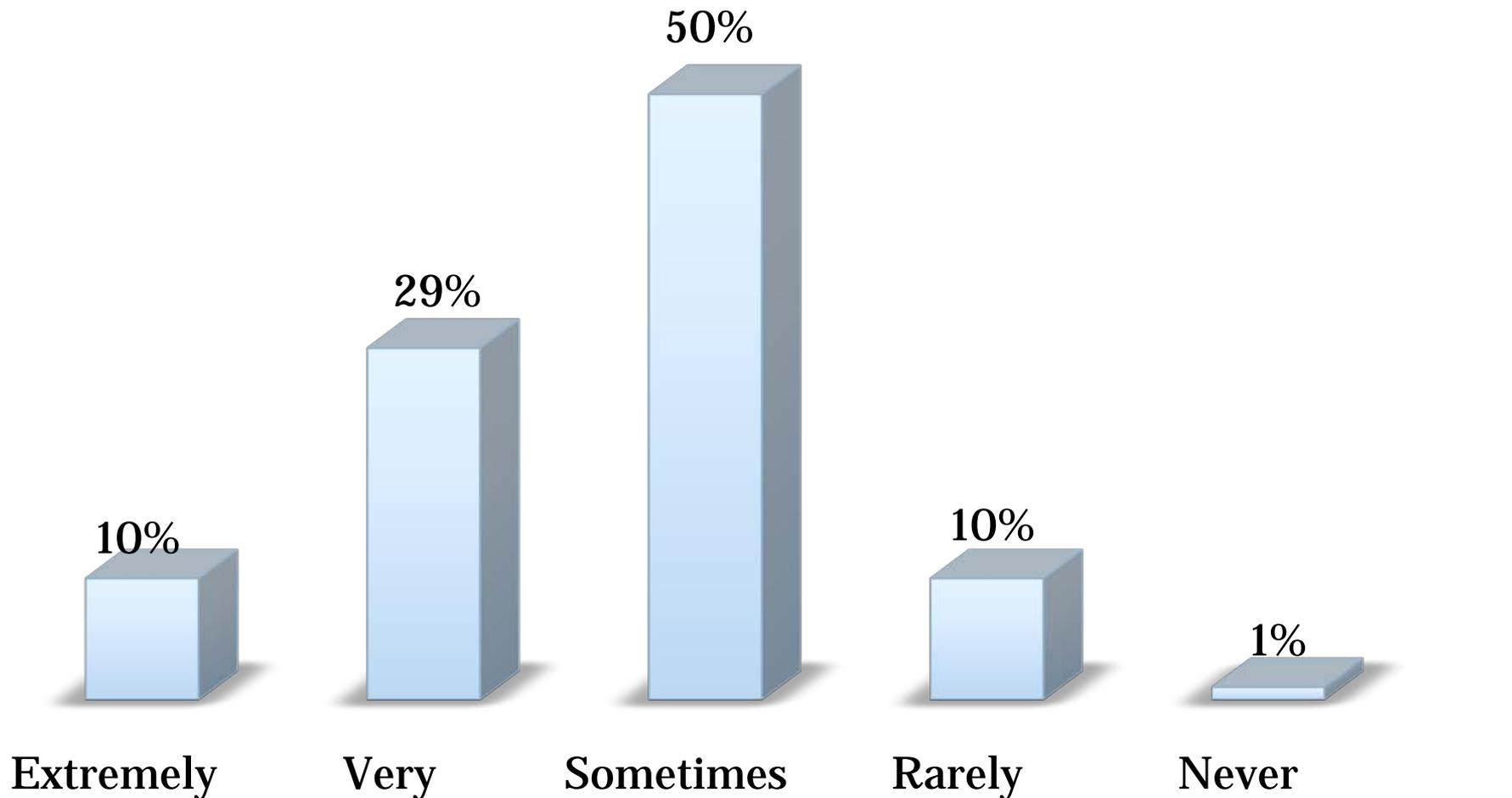
# Surviving the Trenches: Addressing Employee Stress and Wellness



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# Describe your level of stress at work



N=2,038

# Two types of workplace stress

1. Occupational/ systemic stress
2. Traumatic Stress



## **A. Primary traumatic stress**

Staff personally experience or observe a traumatic event

## **B. Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Indirectly exposed to another person's distressing event (i.e., reading reports, listening to details)

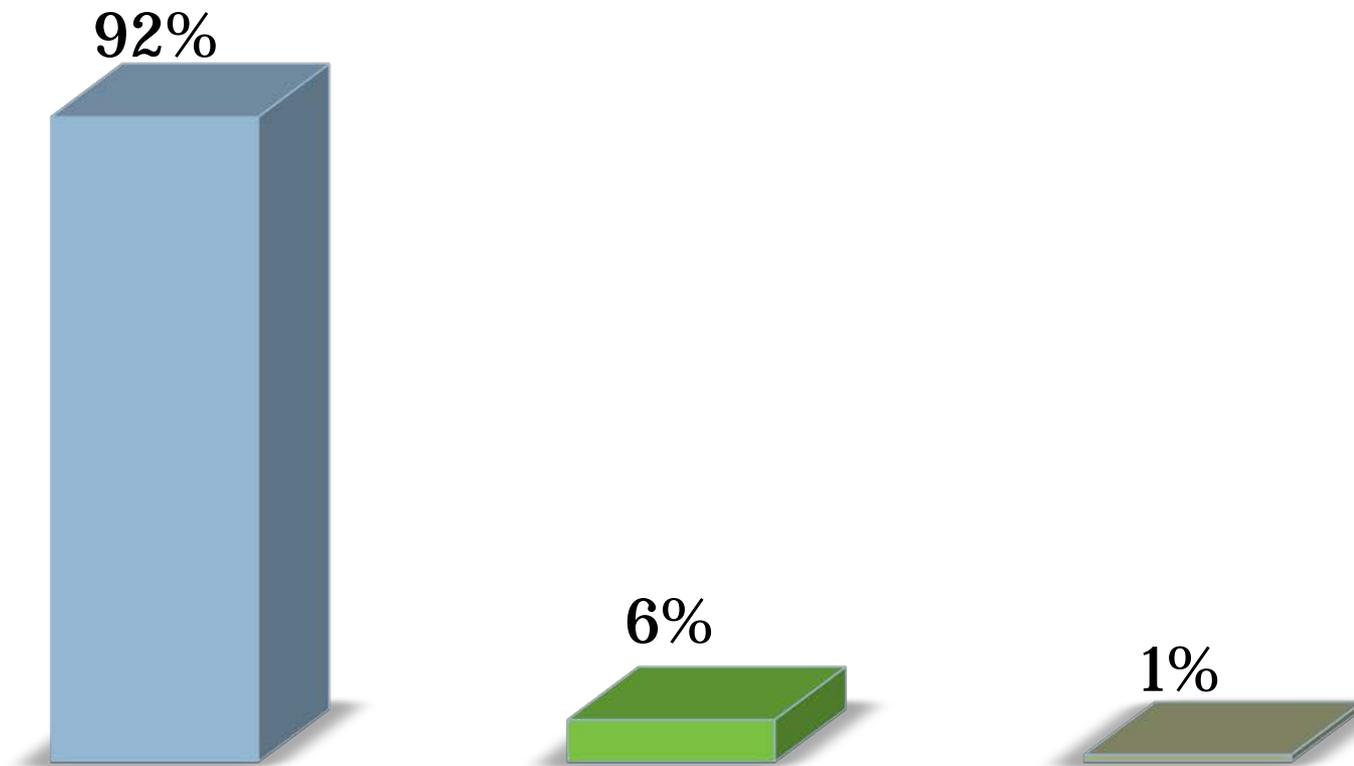
(Fisher, 2001)

# Traumatic Stress

1. The event is often sudden or unexpected
2. Creates some level of distress
3. Can overwhelm coping capacity
4. Has the potential to alter the way one views the world



Do you believe that working in the criminal justice system has changed the way you view the world?



Yes

No

Unsure

N=2,396



# Cynicism

- A pervasive distrust of human nature and motives



- A professional mindset
  - Officer safety

(Gilmartin, 2002)

# Primary Traumatic Stress

- Personally experience or observe an event that poses a risk to self or others
  - Being assaulted
  - Receiving threats
  - Dealing with riots
  - Hostage negotiations
  - Overseeing executions
  - Dealing with unethical conduct

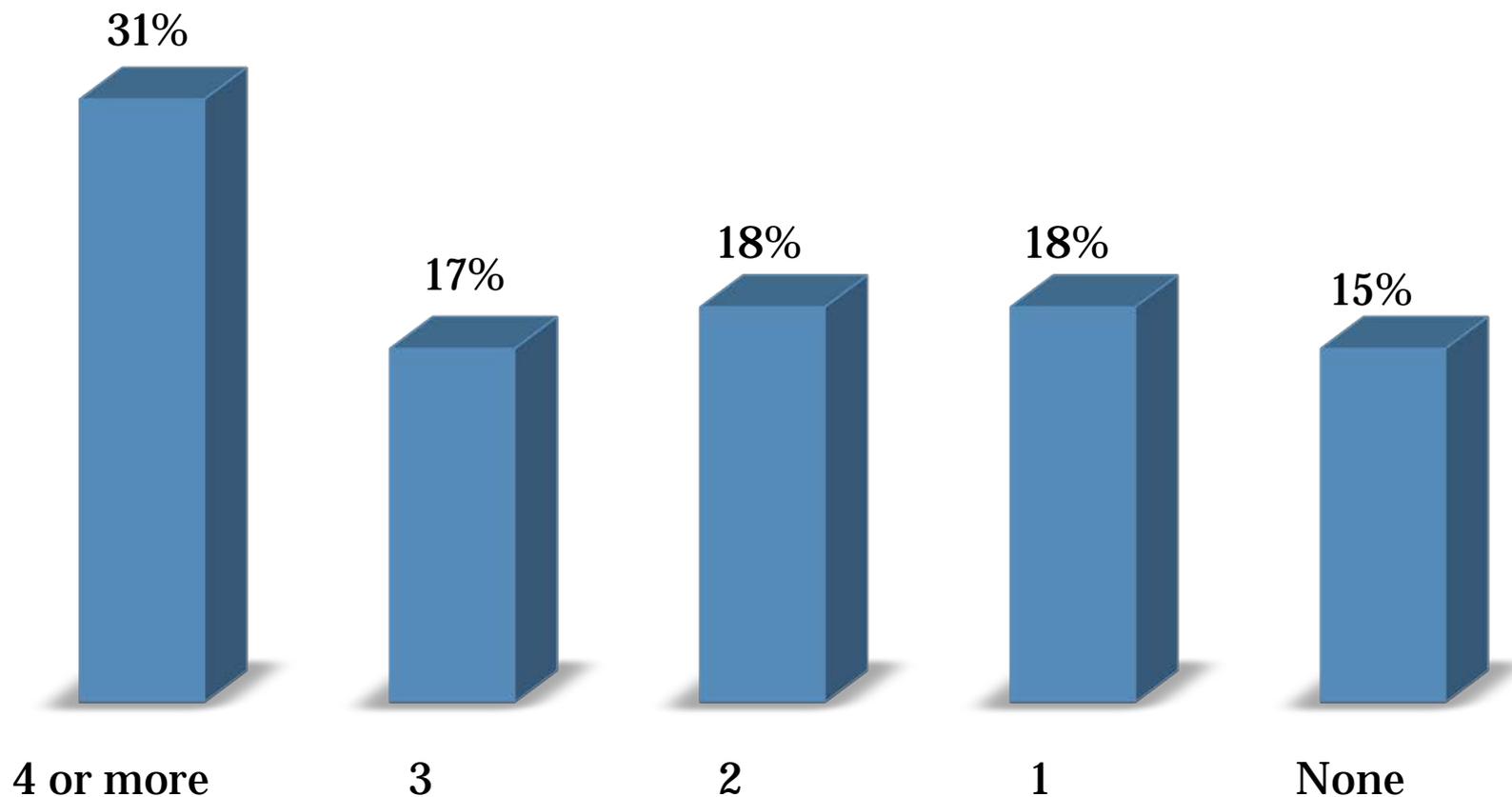


# Primary Traumatic Stress

- Personally experience or observe an event that poses a risk to self or others
  - Stalked by offender
  - Attacked by animal in the field
  - Observing violence, death or suicide
  - Conducting searches
  - Arrests
  - Near-misses

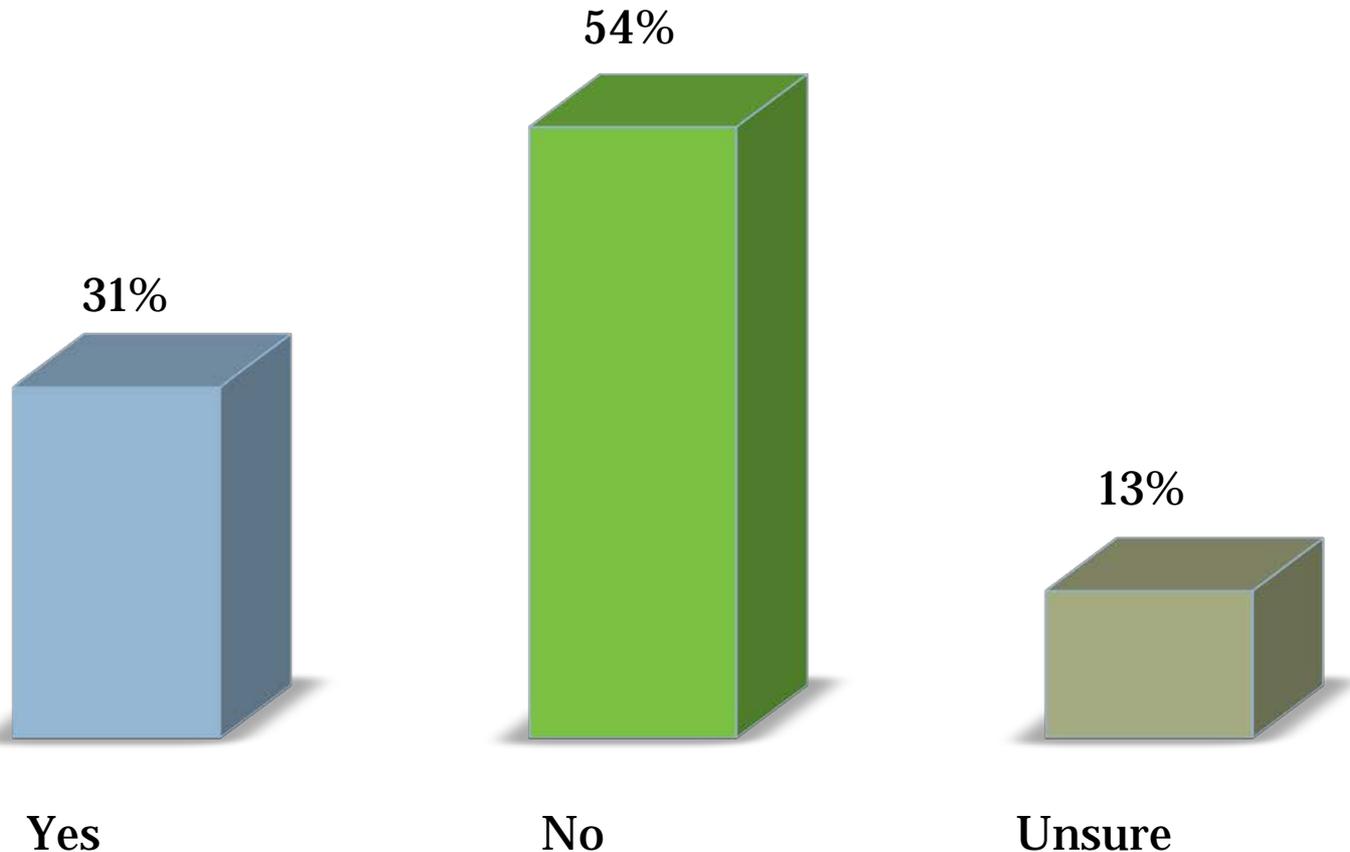


# How many primary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?



N=2,266

# Did you feel supported by your agency during or after your primary traumatic event?



N=327

# Physical Symptoms of Trauma

- Headache
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Higher blood pressure
- Fatigue
- Exhaustion



# Cognitive Symptoms of Trauma

- **Shock, disbelief, and numbness**
  - Especially for unexpected events
- **Intrusive imagery of the event**
- **Rumination**
  - Trying to make sense of it
- **Questioning one's world views**
  - Viewing the world and the people in it as less predictable and less controllable



(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999)

# Emotional Symptoms of Trauma

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression
- Sadness
- Guilt



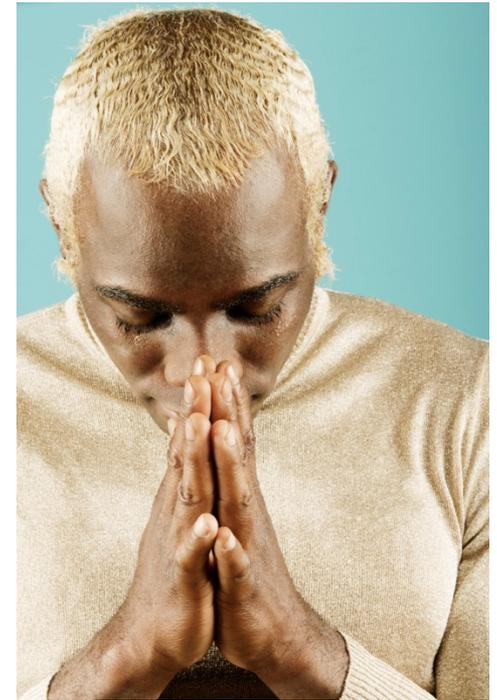
# Behavioral Symptoms of Trauma

- Decreased or excessive eating
- Alcohol/drug use
- Hyper-startle
- 1000-yard stare
- Sleep disturbance
- Withdrawal
- Family discord
- Crying spells
- Hyper-vigilance
- Violence



# Spiritual Symptoms of Trauma

- Anger at God or spiritual equivalent
- Question world view
- Withdrawal from faith-based community
- Cessation of faith-related practices





# SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

The Impact On Professionals

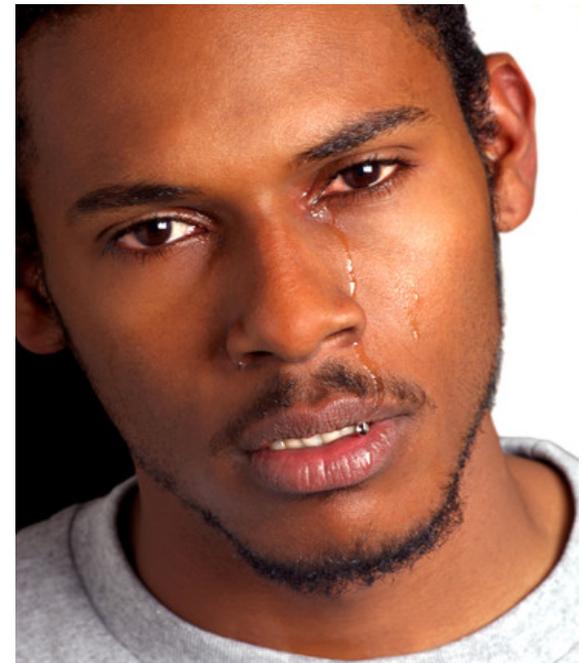
# Secondary Traumatic Stress “Compassion Fatigue”

- Professionals begin to experience trauma symptoms themselves due to their secondary exposure to human suffering
  - Hyper-vigilance
  - Intrusive thoughts
  - Feeling detached and numb
  - Difficulty falling or staying asleep
  - Irritability or outbursts of anger
  - Difficulty concentrating

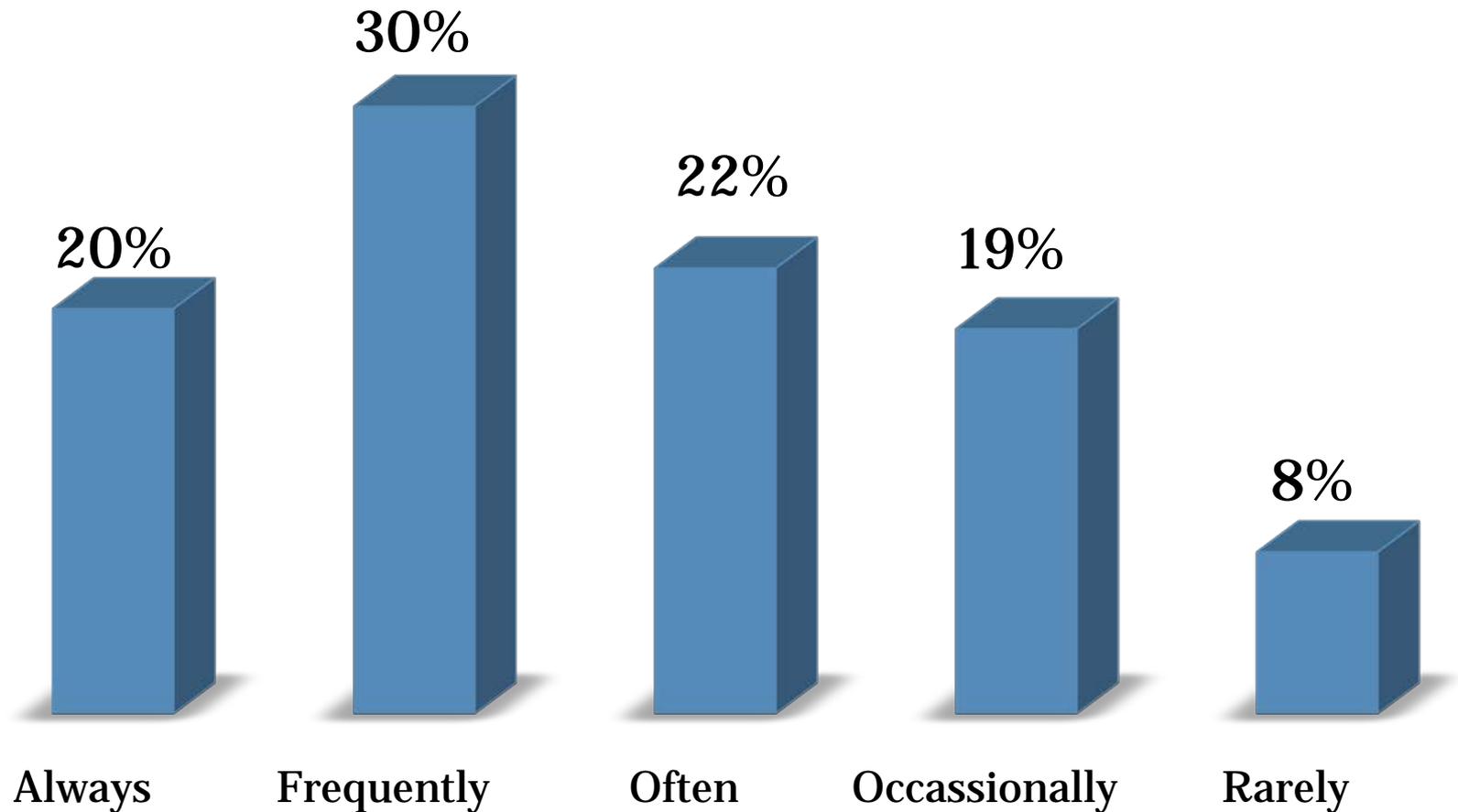


(Figley, 1995 p.1; Figley, 2002 p.1)

“Those who work with offenders are called upon to bear witness to the crime.” -Judith Herman, 1992



In the course of your day, how often are you exposed to traumatic material?



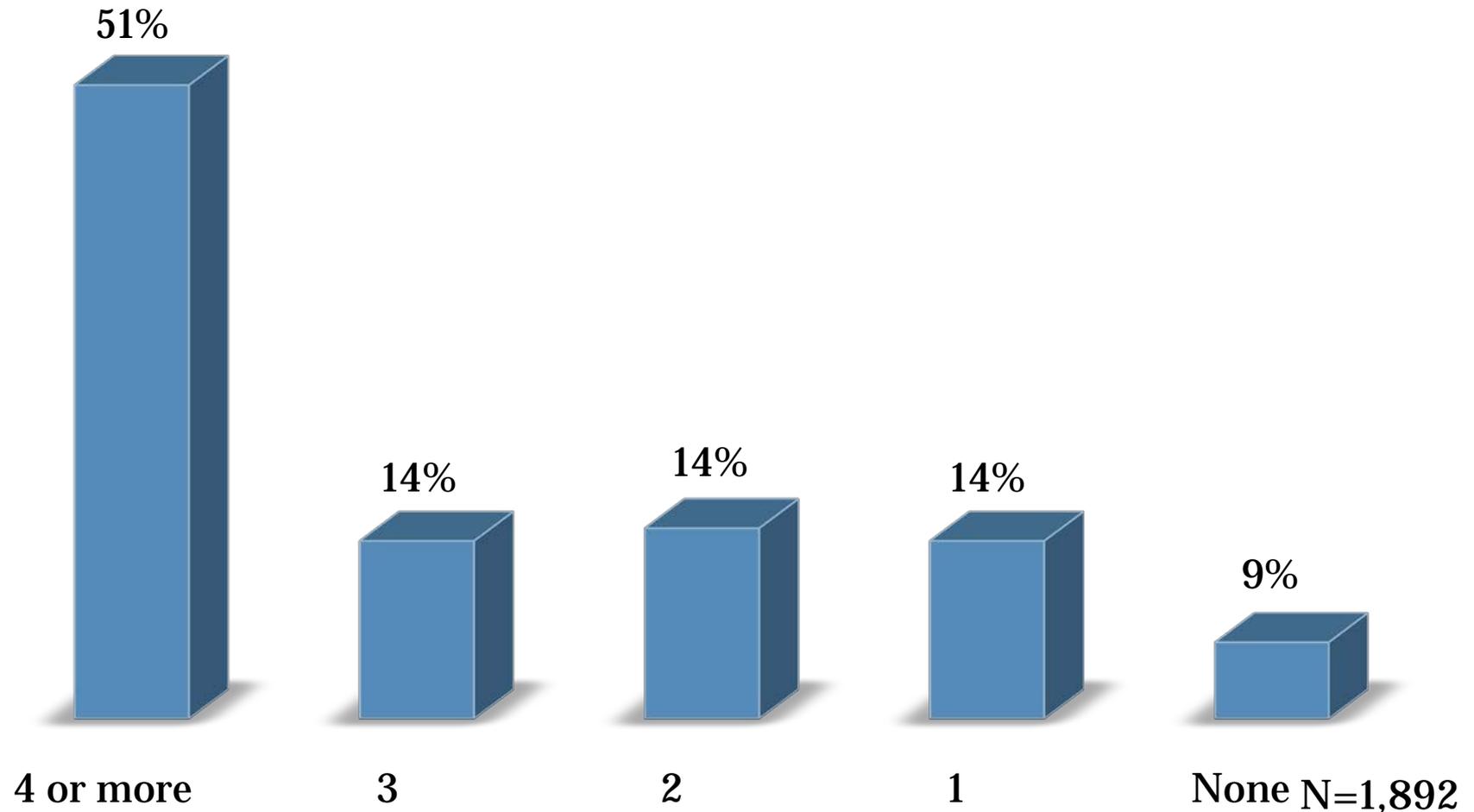
N=1,439

# Secondary Traumatic Stress

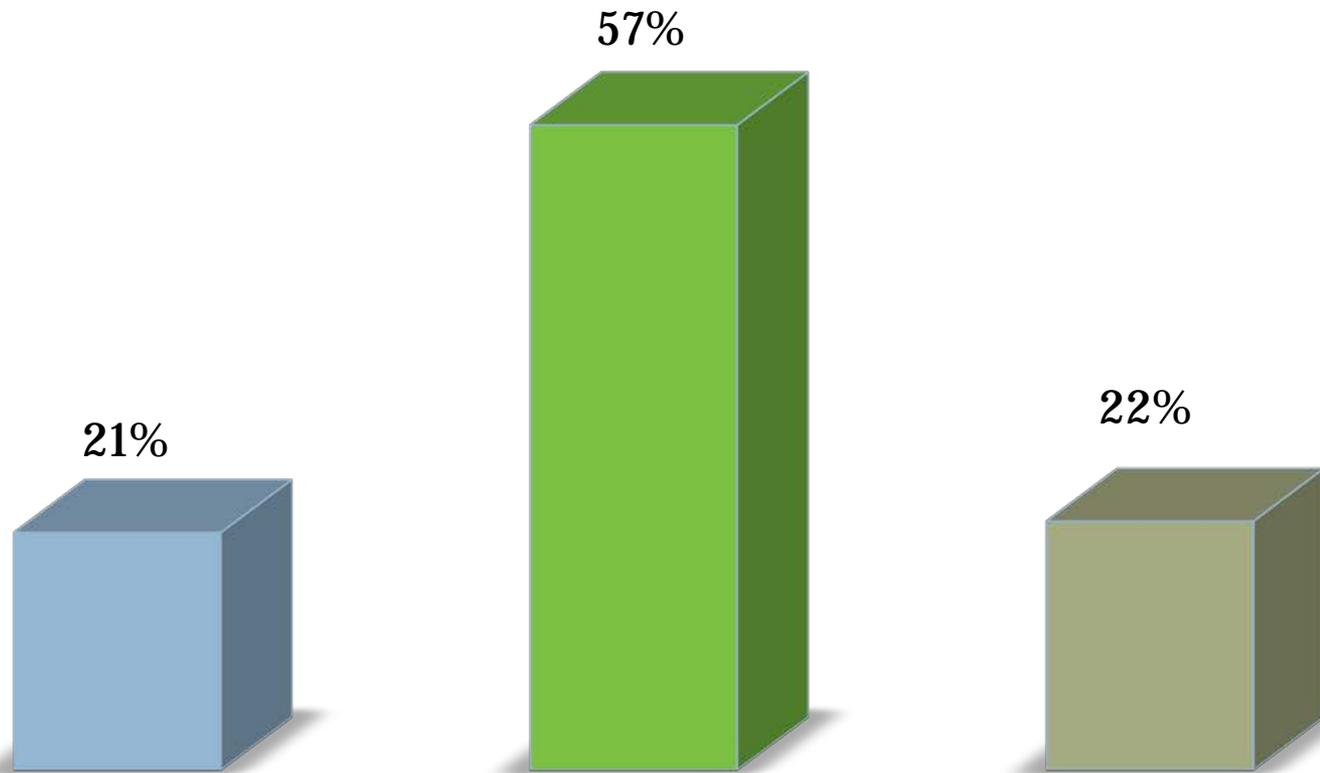
- Officers experience traumatic stress as a result of their secondary exposure to violence, injury, and death
  - Offender suicide
  - Violent death of offender
  - Delivering death notifications or other
  - Line of duty violence, injury, or death of a co-worker
  - Violent recidivism
  - Sexual recidivism



# How many secondary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?



# Did you feel supported by your agency during your secondary traumatic event(s)?



Yes

No

Unsure

N=338

# Symptoms of Secondary Trauma

1. Loss of trust (68%)
2. Sleep disturbances (60%)
3. Lower concentration (57%)
4. Increased anger, disgust, sadness, and/or distress (54%)
5. Chronic exhaustion (50%)
6. Hyper-vigilance (48%)
7. Avoidant behavior(s) (46%)
8. Feeling detached or numb (44%)
9. Preoccupation with trauma (30%)
10. Loss of innocence (31%)



# Vicarious Trauma

- Exposure to the trauma of someone else can cause people to vicariously experience a change in their own world view
  - Beliefs about humanity
  - Views of the world (safety)
  - Chronic suspicion
  - Cynicism
  - Loss of empathy



(McCann & Pearlman, 1995)

# Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

1. Feeling desensitized (76%)
2. Increased cynicism (75%)
3. Chronic suspicion of others (71%)
4. Less tolerant (70%)
5. Distorted world view (62%)
6. Loss of empathy (54%)
7. Intrusive thoughts (42%)
8. Interpersonal problems (40%)
9. Intrusive imagery (36%)
10. Question spirituality (22%)



# Empathy

- ▶ Empathy is the pathway through which trauma is vicariously transferred
- ▶ Ironically, the very quality that allows probation officers to be most effective in their work also makes them the most vulnerable



(Figley, 1995)



# Solutions

Managing Traumatic Stress

# The Starting Point

**“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”**

**-Naomi Rachel Reme**



# Education and Training

- ▶ If it is predictable... it is preventable!
- ▶ Training and education can enhance “psychological inoculation”
  - Normalize the responses
  - May prevent belief they are the only one negatively impacted
  - Early recognition = early intervention
  - Promote healthy coping strategies
  - Best accomplished at the onset of careers



# Understanding the Process

- Reactions to trauma exposure are adaptive and protective
- Conscious awareness = conscious choice
- Work cultures should promote healthy coping, awareness, and self-care practices
  - Addressing job impact is paramount to sustaining the highest quality of professionalism



# BUILDING RESISTANCE TO STRESS

- Engaging in regular self care practices
  - Exercise
  - Healthy eating habits
  - Massage
  - Social activities that rejuvenate
  - Hobbies
  - Meditation
  - Journaling



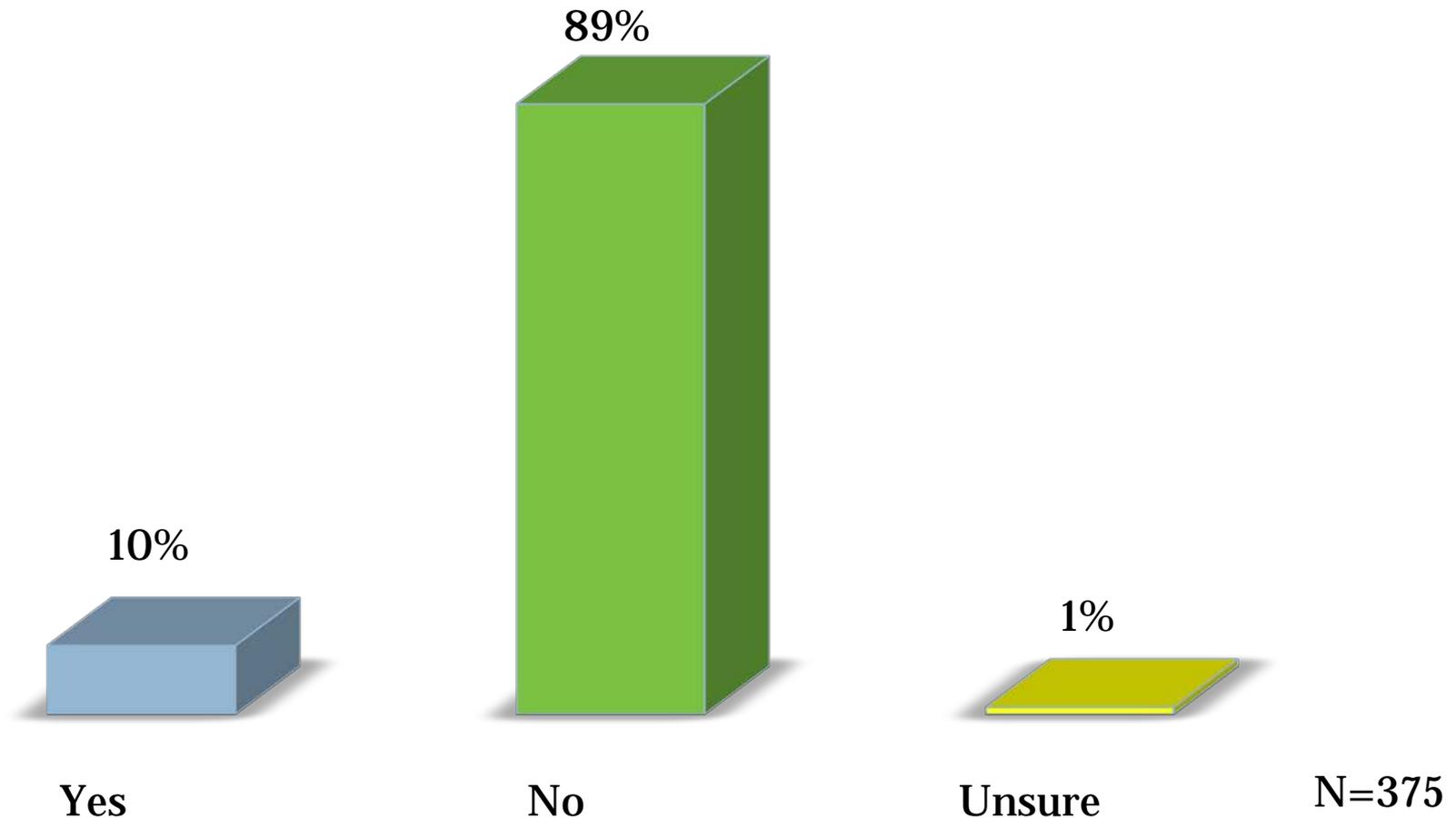
# Peer Support Programs

Peer support programs can be very beneficial for professions:

1. Specially trained and/or educated
2. Possess a unique culture
3. Extend minimal trust to those outside the profession
4. Reluctant to use external resources to manage stress



If your agency has a peer support team, have you ever used it for a work-related incident?



# Peer Support

- Must meet the needs of corrections staff
- Address the stigma of support services
  - Acknowledging impact is not a sign of weakness, it is the mark of professional integrity



# Peer Support

- The offer of peer support services should be procedural following incidents associated with high stress
  - May catch staff who otherwise would not request services on their own and/or may not recognize they need support



# Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program

- ▶ In 2009, the US Army began a \$145 million initiative to decrease the rate of soldier PTSD, anxiety, depression and suicide
- ▶ These 4 areas of fitness are credited with reducing depression and anxiety
  1. Emotional Fitness
  2. Family Fitness
  3. Social Fitness
  4. Spiritual Fitness



(Seligman, 2011)

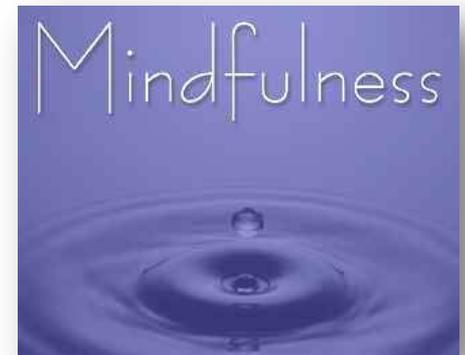
# Resilient Factors

1. Problem solving (76%)
2. Personal awareness (68%)
3. Optimism (55%)
4. Sense of meaning (55%)
5. Empathy (53%)
6. Strong social support (53%)
7. Comfort with emotion (46%)
8. Cognitive flexibility (46%)
9. Self-efficacy (46%)
10. Spirituality (45%)



# Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is a method of mental training that increases awareness
  - Disconnecting from autopilot
  - Attention and focus on present moment experiences
  - Observing physical and emotional reactions with non-judgmental curiosity



# Happiness and Life Satisfaction

- Studies have demonstrated significant improvements in optimism and life satisfaction by engaging in one of these activities every day for 3 weeks:
  - Write down 3 things for which you are grateful
  - Meditate for 3-minutes
  - Describe in a journal a meaningful experience of the day
  - Perform a random act of kindness



(Achor, 2010)