Supporting At-Home Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Study (SASY): A Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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PIRE | SOUTHWEST

- Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation – Southwest Center
  - Independent, nonprofit organization merging scientific knowledge and proven practice to create solutions that improve the health, safety, and well-being of individuals, communities, and nations around the world.
- This work was supported by:
  - PIRE Corporate Development Grant, PIs: Shattuck and Gunderson
  - Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1R01HD83399), PIs: Willging and Ramos

- SGM = Sexual and Gender Minority
- LGBTQ+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning

Parent Study: "RLAS"

- Implementing School-based Strategies to **R**educe **L**GBTQ+ **A**dolescent **S**uicide
  - Use Implementation Science to implement and scale up evidence-based practices in secondary schools across NM to create safer and more supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth.
  - To reduce suicidality and other risk behaviors like substance use
  - Cluster randomized controlled trial – 38 schools in NM
  - 2016-2021
- Select Publications:
  - Amplification of school-based strategies resulting from the application of the Dynamic Adaptation Process to reduce sexual and gender minority youth suicide (2021) Implementation Research and Practice.
  - Implementing evidence-informed practices to make schools safer and more supportive of sexual and gender minority youth (2021) Journal of School Health.
  - Applying a structural-competency framework to the implementation of strategies to reduce disparities for sexual and gender minority youth (2020) Journal of School Health.
  - Implementing school nursing strategies to reduce LGBTQ adolescent suicide: a randomized cluster trial study protocol (2016) Implementation Science.
- Implementation and health outcomes pending analysis

The Pandemic, Public Health Safety Measures, and RLAS

- March 2020 - Present
- Schools closed for onsite learning
- Stretched and stressed staff
  - Juggling childcare and education demands at home
  - Moving to online learning has led to new time and labor demands, exceeding "normal" work demands
  - Fulfilling broader support needs in communities
  - Cannot effectively serve at frontlines of recognizing and responding to student signs of risks and mental distress
- Low parental engagement
- Not knowing LGBTQ+ resources (incl. virtual ones)

The Pandemic, Public Health Safety Measures, and RLAS

- Research partners, community organizations, and school staff feared negative implications of the pandemic and social distancing measures for already marginalized populations , like sexual and gender minority youth.
- Decreases in positive interactions
  - School- and peer-based supports
  - Sources of resiliency
- Increases in negative interactions
  - Non-supportive or dangerous home environments
- Economic strain, housing instability, and food insecurity

- Systems for collecting data on the real-time impacts of the pandemic were limited.

Research with SGM Youth and the Pandemic

- Supporting At-Home Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Study (SASY): A Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Summer – Early Fall 2020
- To assess the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health guidelines (e.g., social distancing and remote learning) on SGM youth's mental health and substance use.
- Quantitative survey with SGM youth in NM
- Qualitative interviews with 15 SGM youth, 6 family members, 7 behavioral health providers, and 6 school-based professionals

Survey Dissemination

- In partnership with the New Mexico Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network and the Mountain Center
  - Social media efforts
- Paid advertising on Instagram
  - Geographic target: New Mexico
  - Age: 13-20
  - Further targeting "interests" examples include LGBTQ+, Pride, Transgender
  - Ads link directly to survey
  - Cost effective and substantial response
- Survey available between June and August of 2020
- Prompt for interview volunteers

Survey Questions

- Demographic Questions
- The **C**o**R**onav**I**rus Health **I**mpact **S**urvey (CRISIS), Youth Self-Report
  - Coronavirus/COVID-19 Health and Exposure Status
  - Life changes due to the coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis
- GLSEN School Climate Survey
  - Safety and Identity: School, Home, Community
- NM Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS)
  - Violence*
  - Substance Use
  - Cyberbullying*
  - Self-Injury*
  - Sadness and Suicidality*
  - Housing
- School-based supports, mental health providers, virtual supports, and social network-based support

- *Time frame adjusted from past 12 months to 3 months

Preliminary Survey Findings

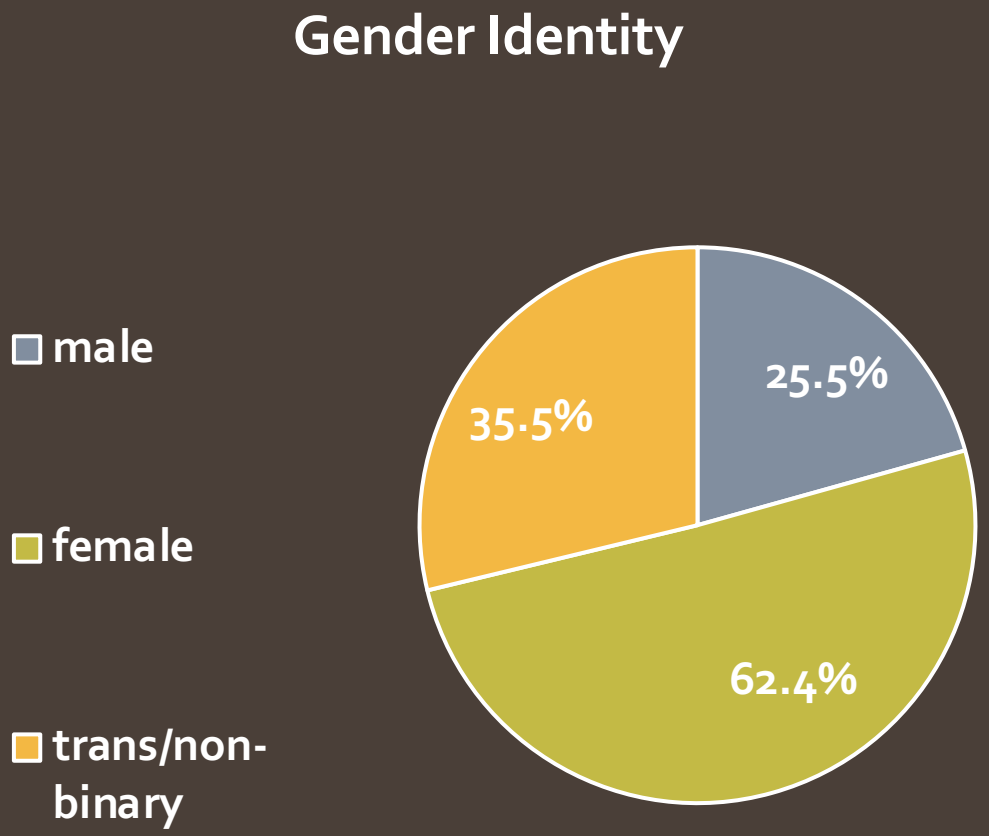
Survey data from Summer 2020

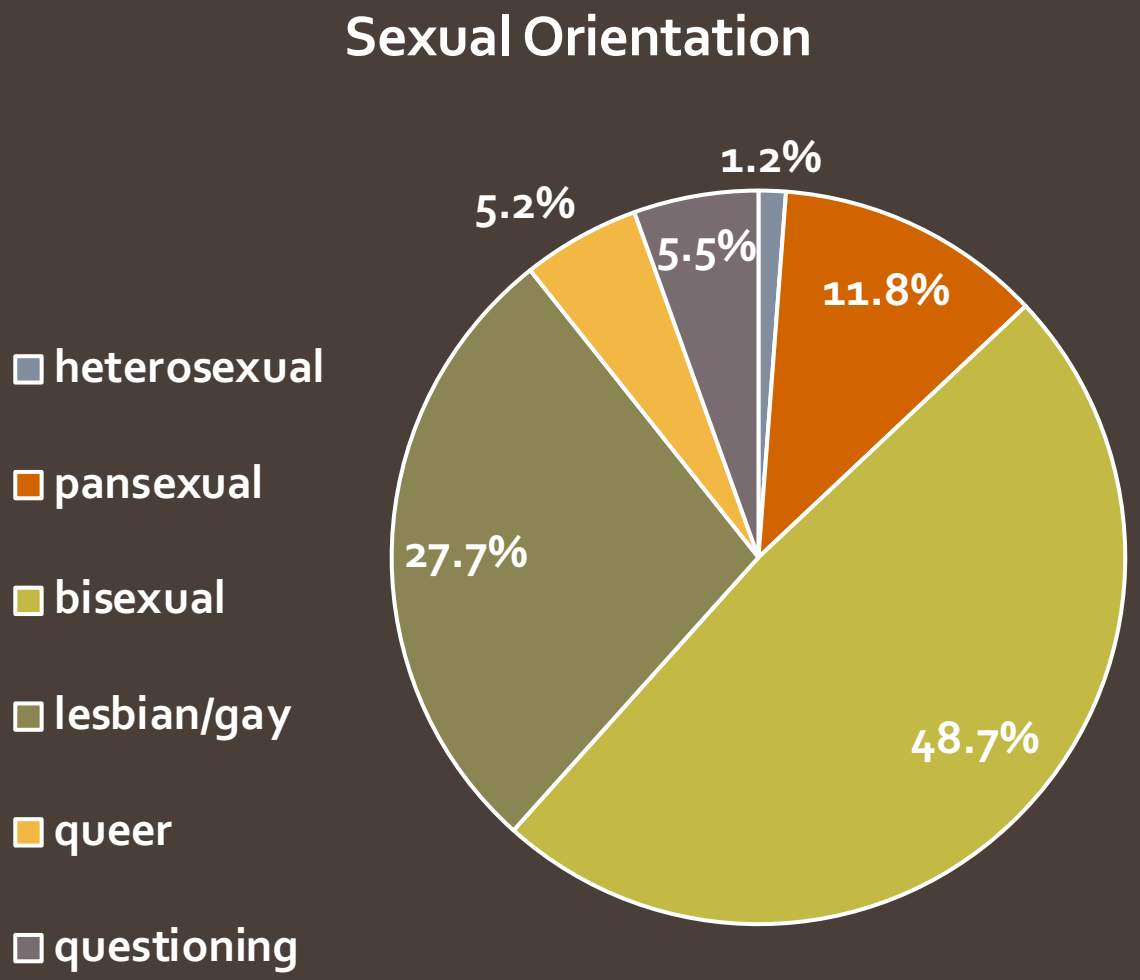
Comparison to 2019 YRRS LGB & T data

- A statistical comparison of the two data sets is not possible at this time, data is presented for context and superficial comparison.

Survey Respondent Demographics

- N = 379 self-identified LGBTQ+ youth





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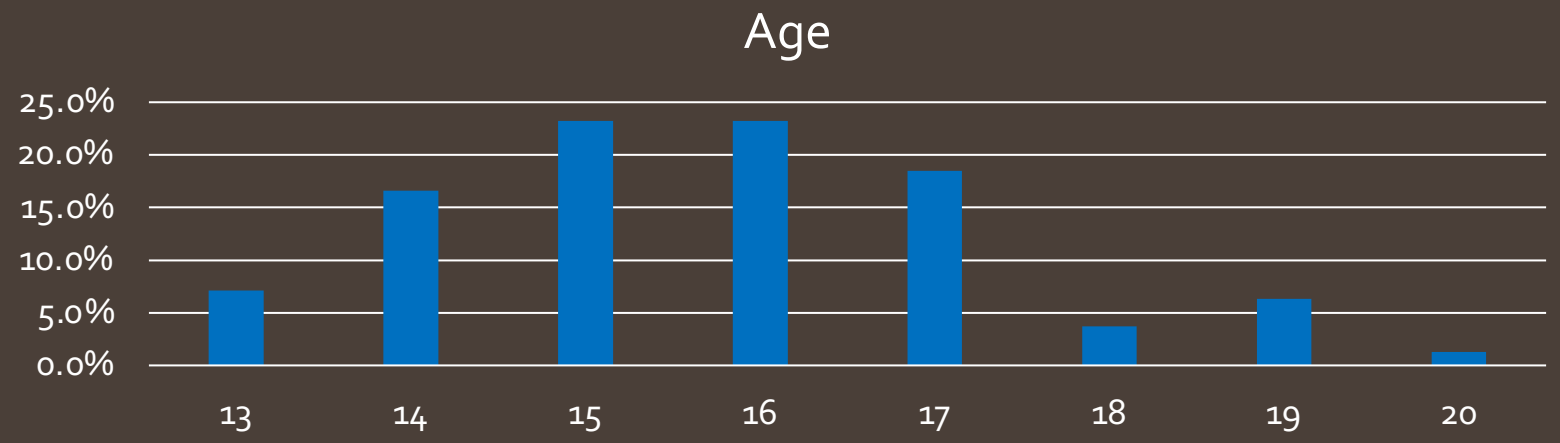

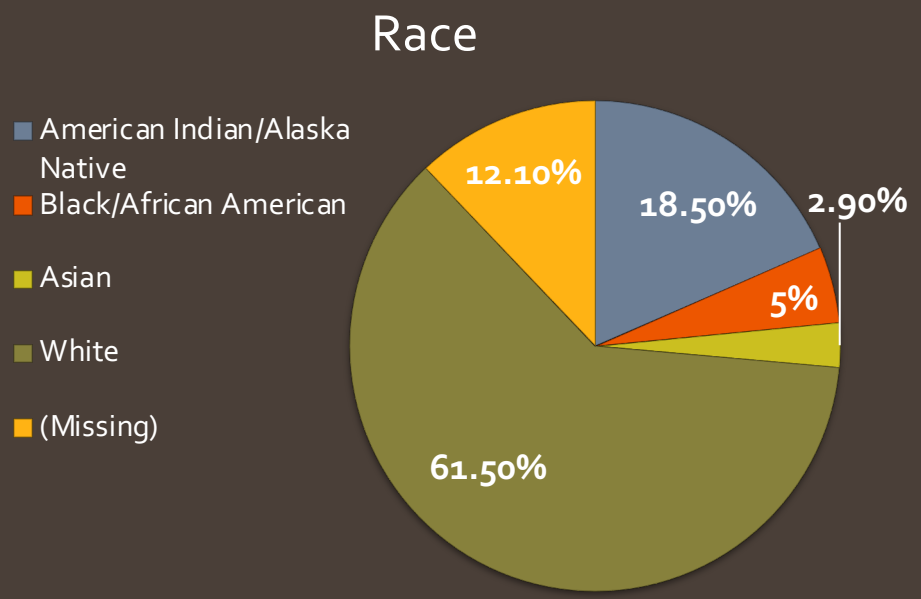

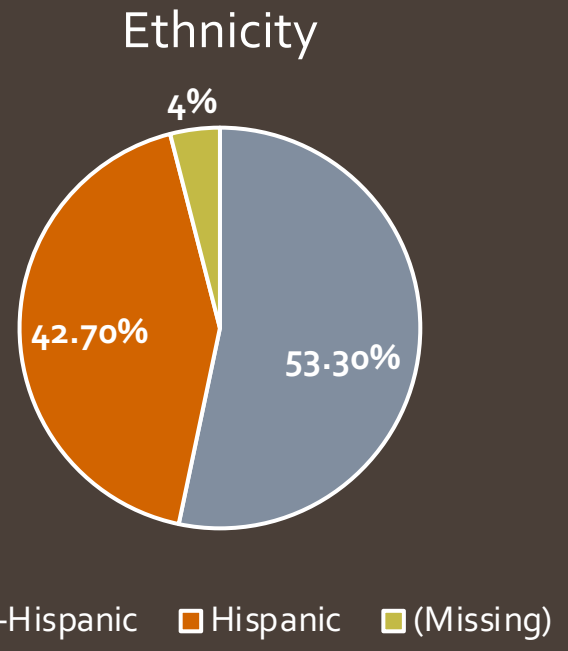

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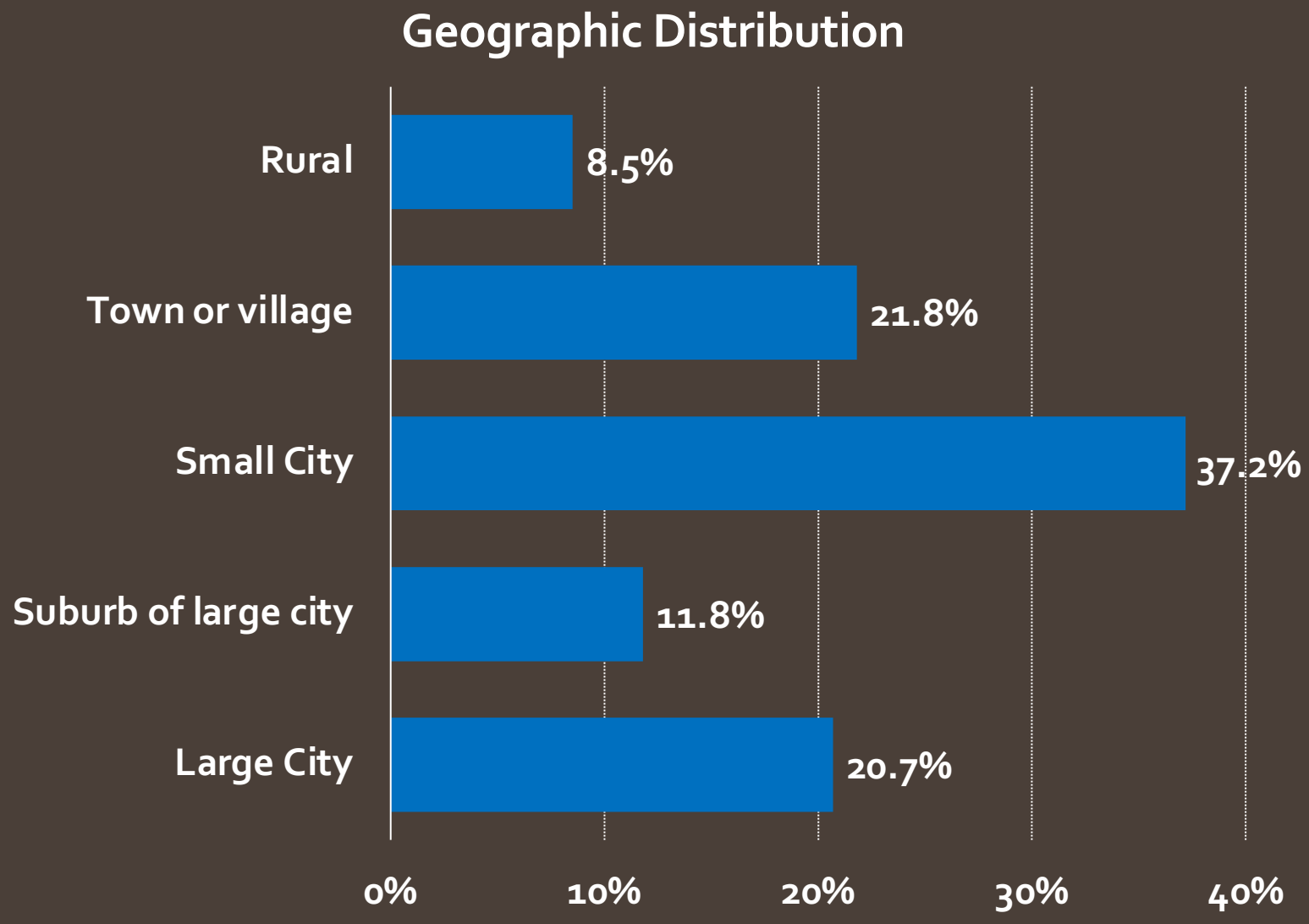
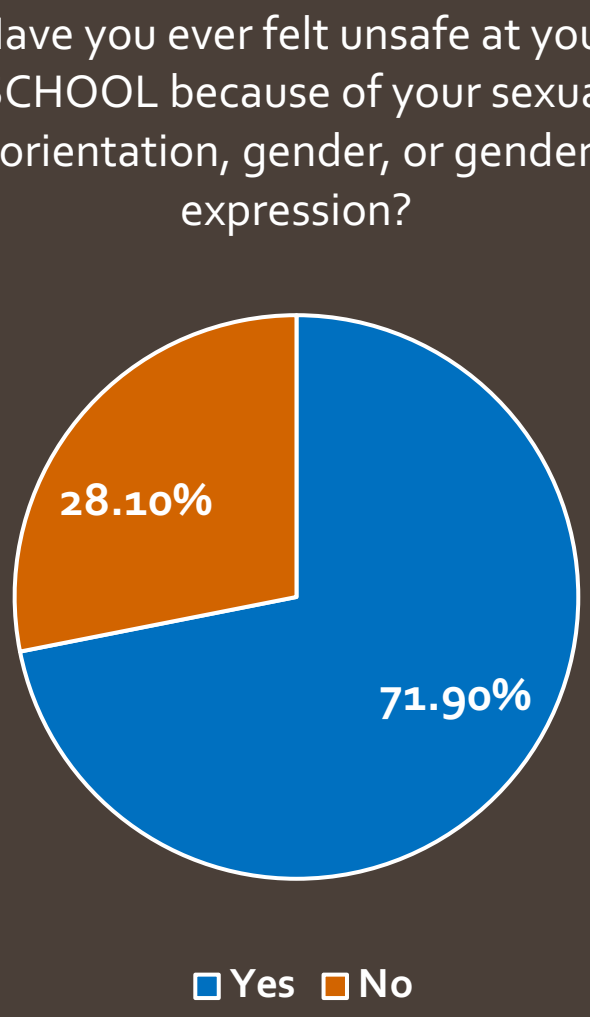
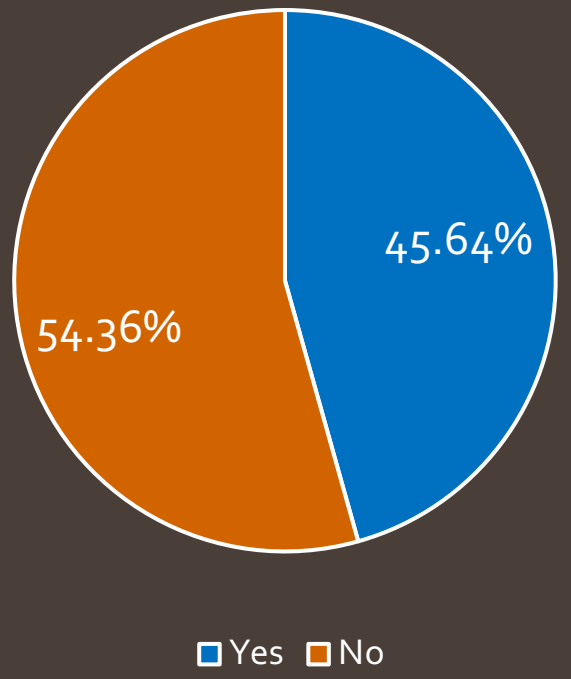


School Safety

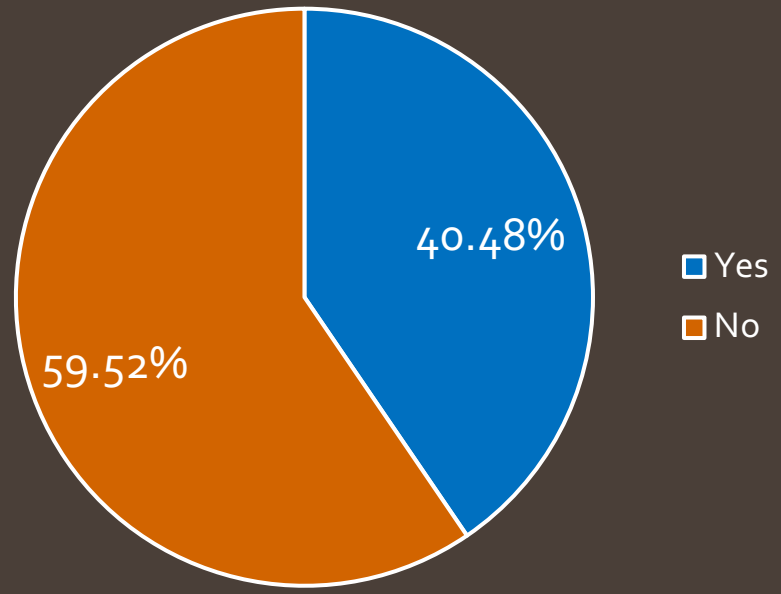


Home Life

Before the pandemic, did you ever feel unsafe IN YOUR HOME because of your sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression?

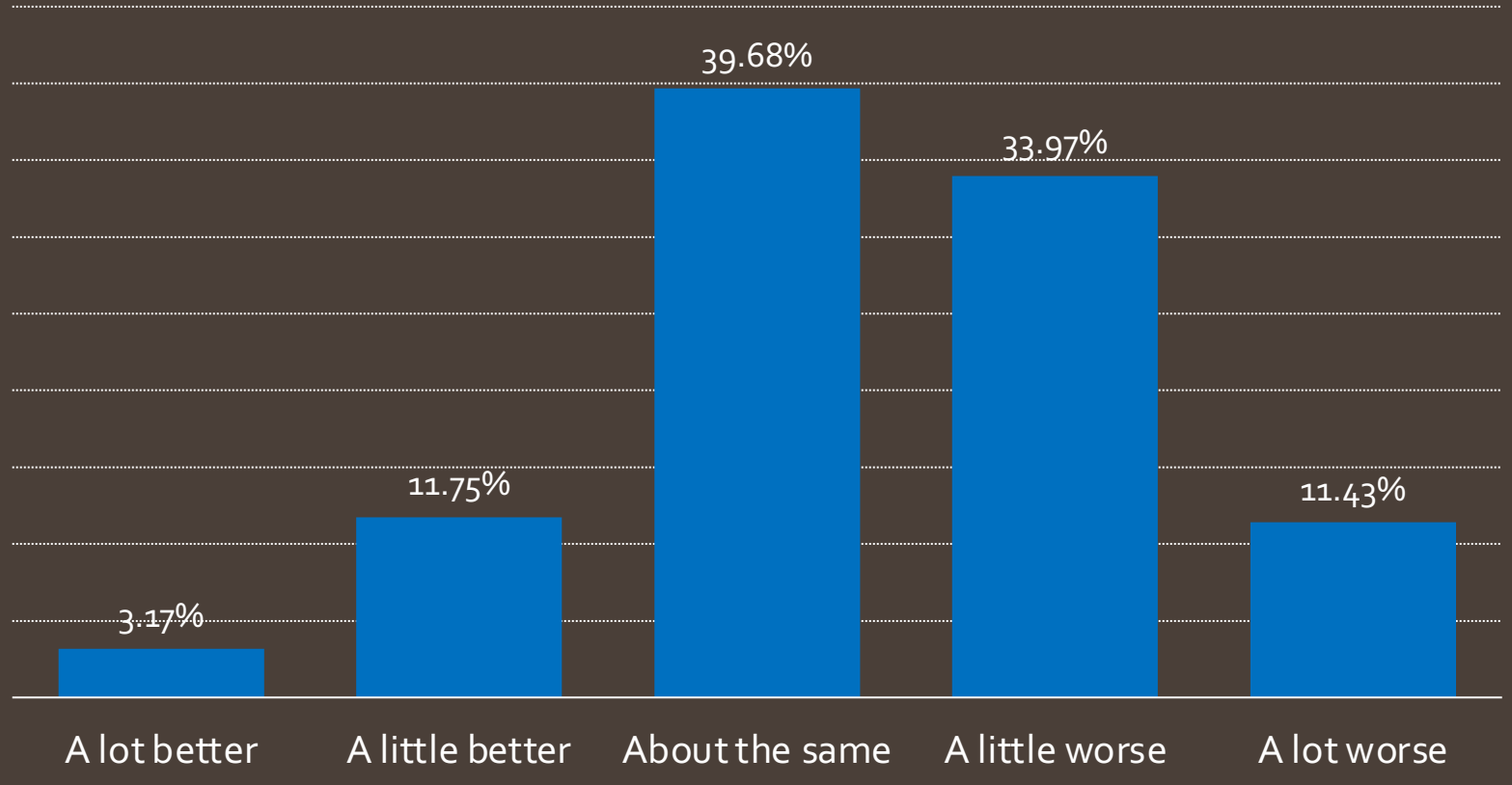


Currently, do you feel unsafe IN YOUR HOME because of your sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression?



Relationships

During the past 3 months, has the quality of the relationships between you and members of your family changed?



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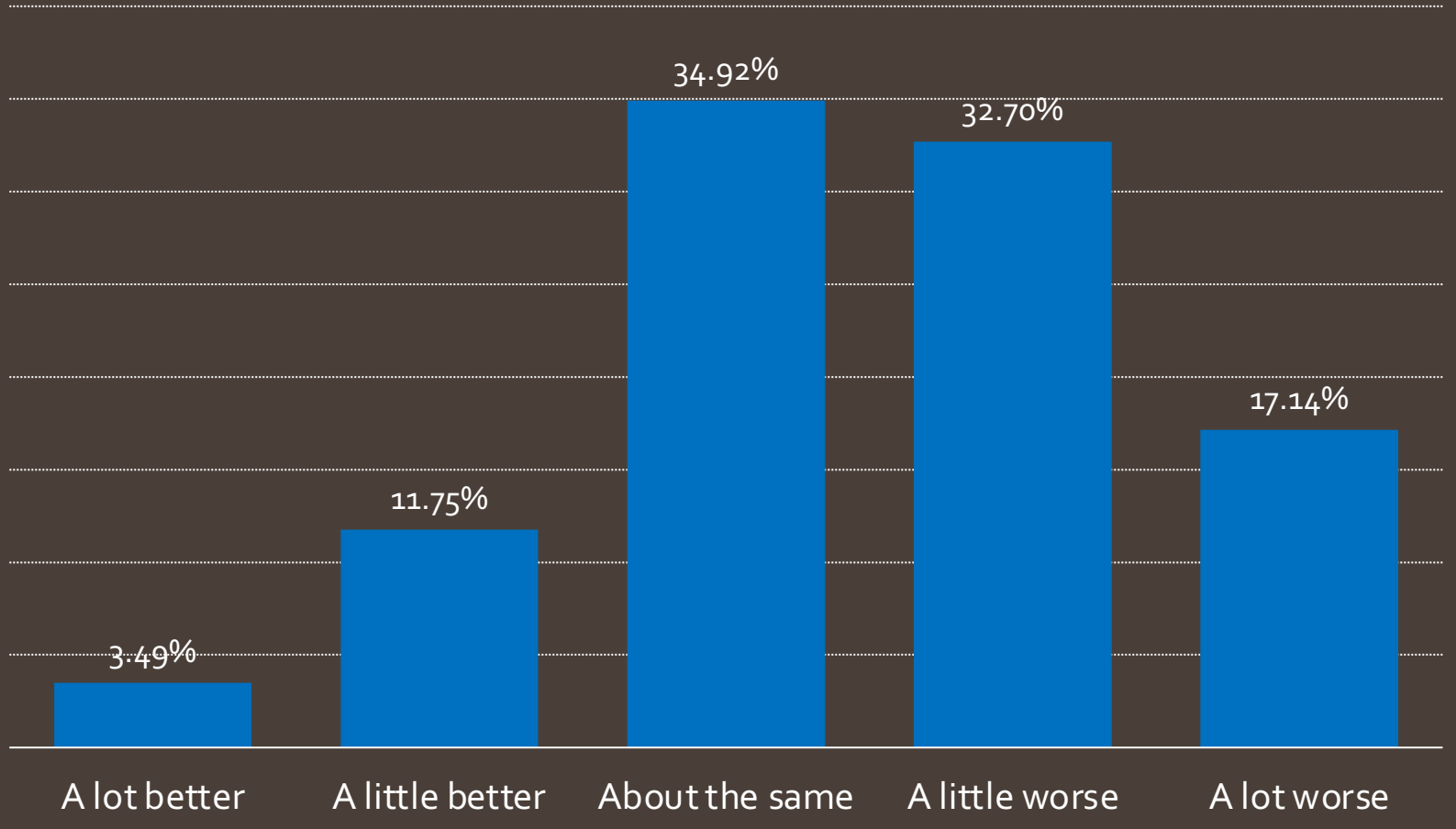
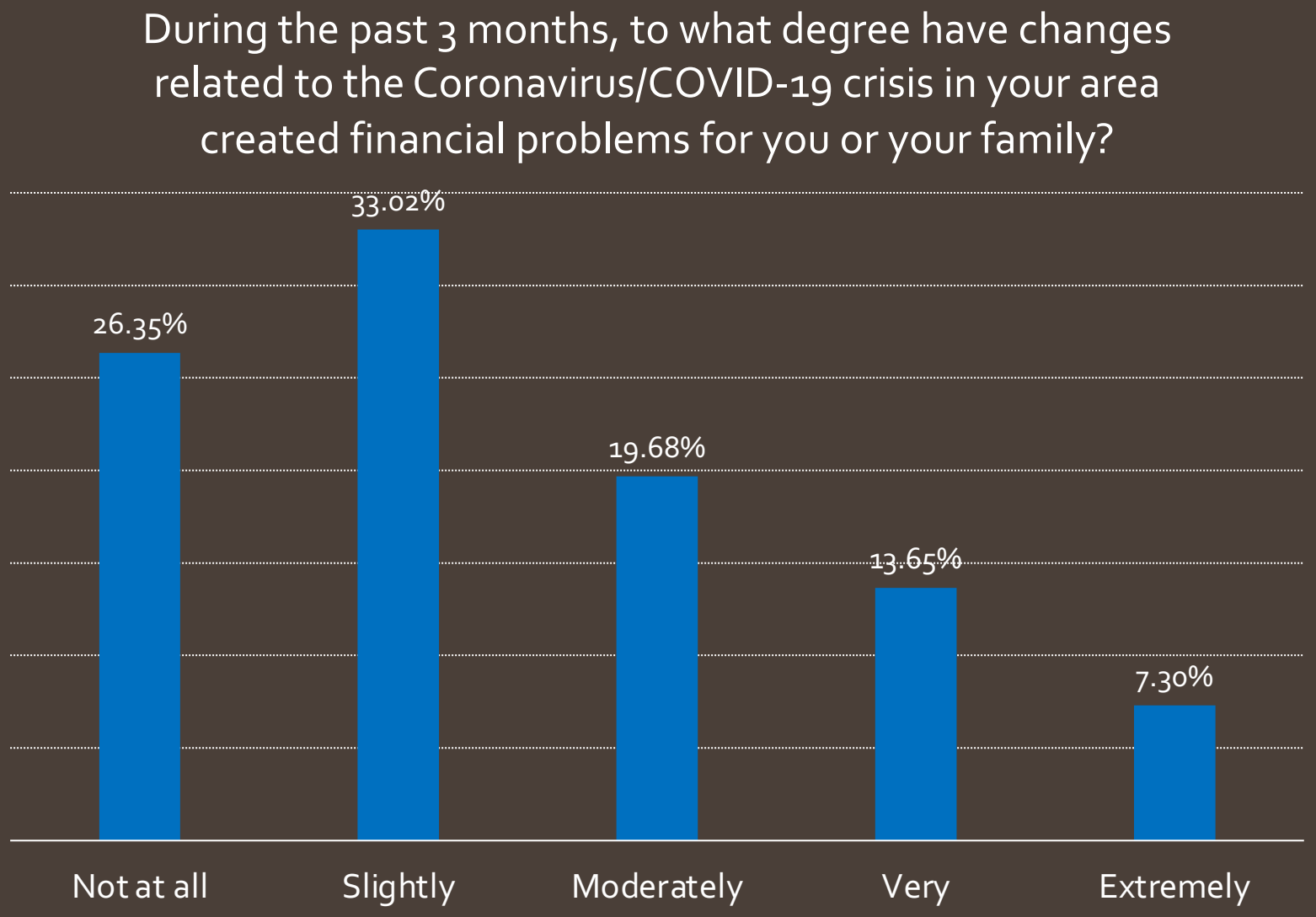
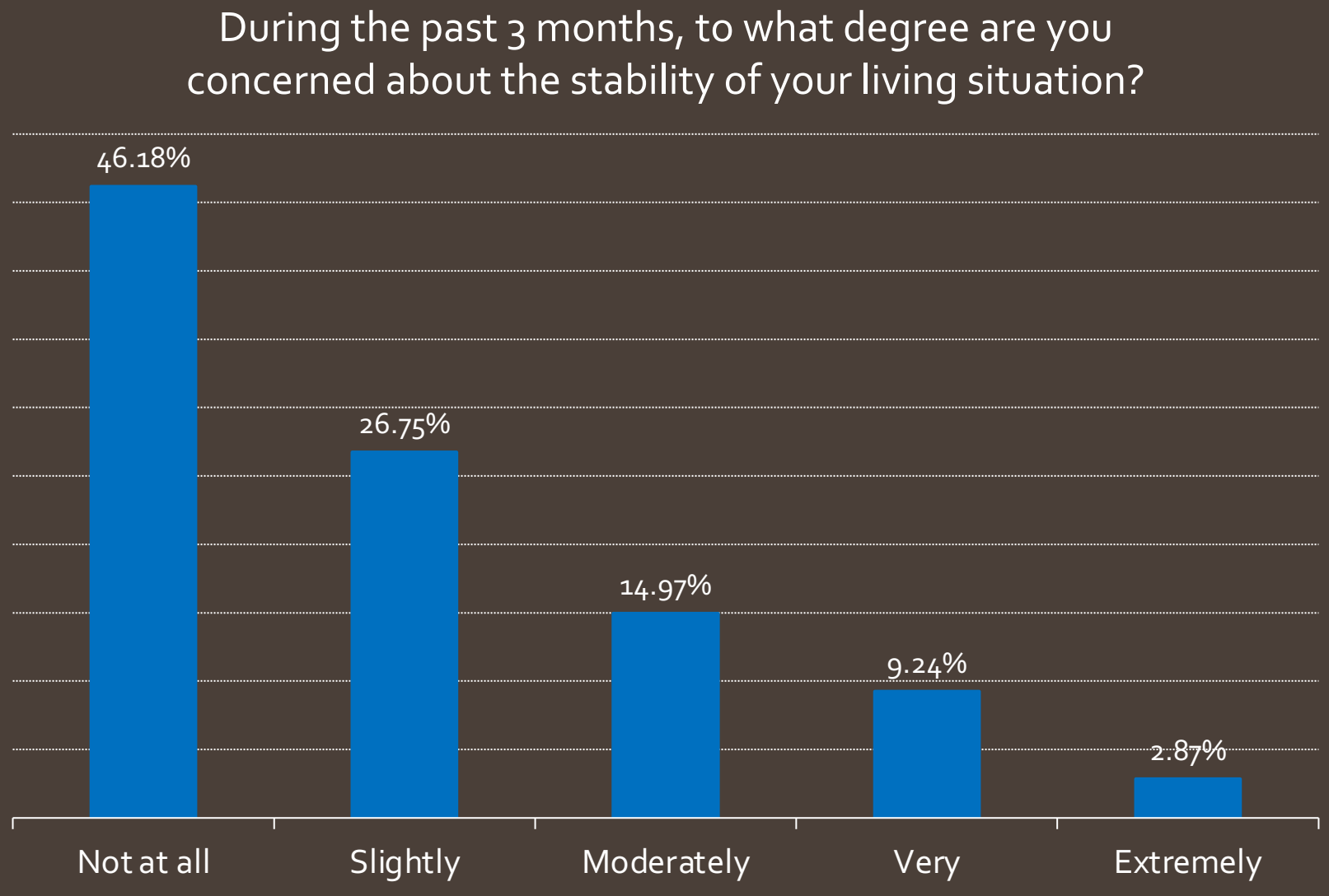
During the past 3 months, has the quality of the relationships with your friends changed?



Pandemic Stress



Concern About Living Situation



School Support

Faith-based Community Support

	Yes	No	Not sure
Someone from school has reached out, not about school work	60.8%	31.3%	7.9%
Involved in GSA, pre-COVID	22.6%	41.3%	36.1%
GSA still active	9.1%	36.7%	54.2%
Support from faith-based community, pre-COVID	16.0%	80.6%	3.5%
Support from faith-based community, during COVID	11.1%	84.4%	4.5%

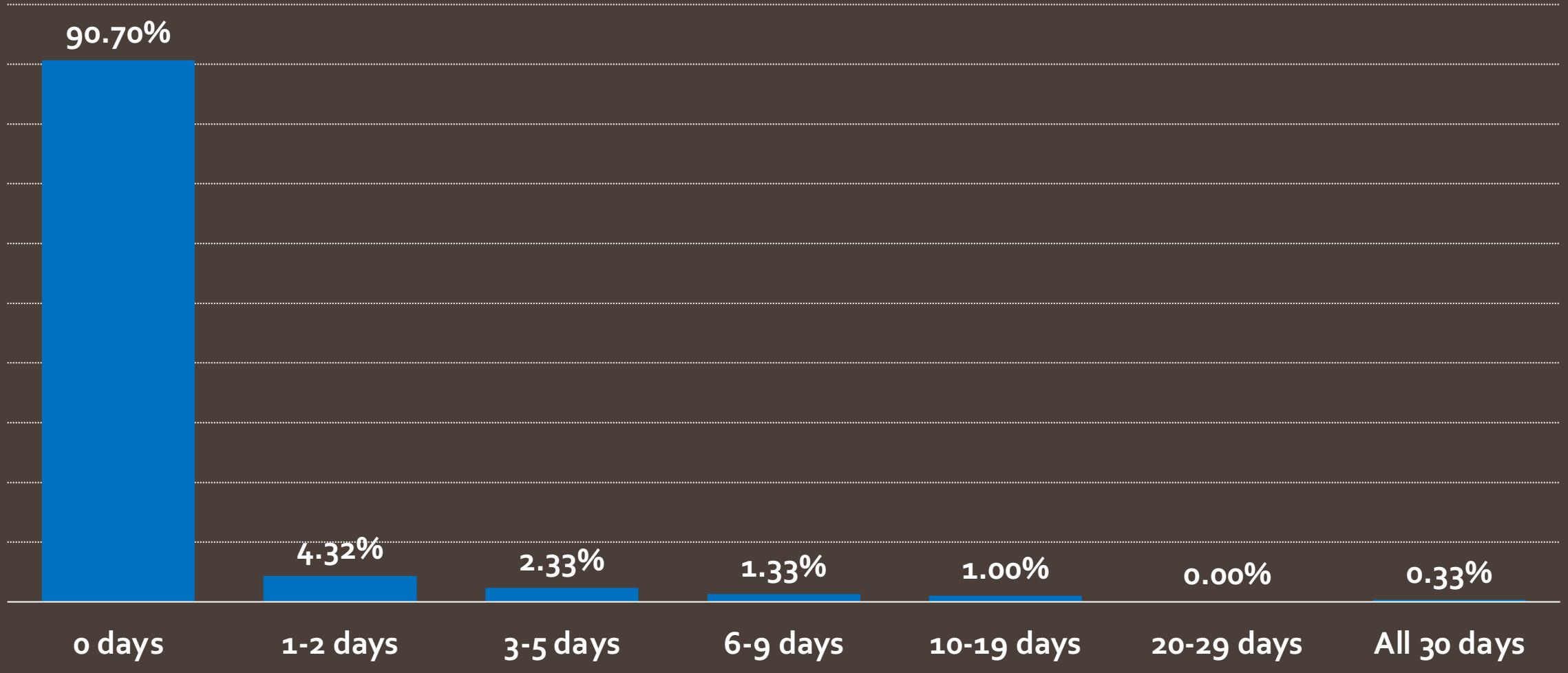
Online Community

Mental Health Provider Support

	Yes	No	Not sure
Support from online community, pre-COVID	54.9%	37.8%	7.3%
Support from online community, during COVID	46.7%	43.5%	9.8%
Support from mental health provider, pre-COVID	59.6%	37.5%	2.9%
Support from mental health provider, during COVID	36.7%	60.9%	2.5%

Tobacco Use

During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?



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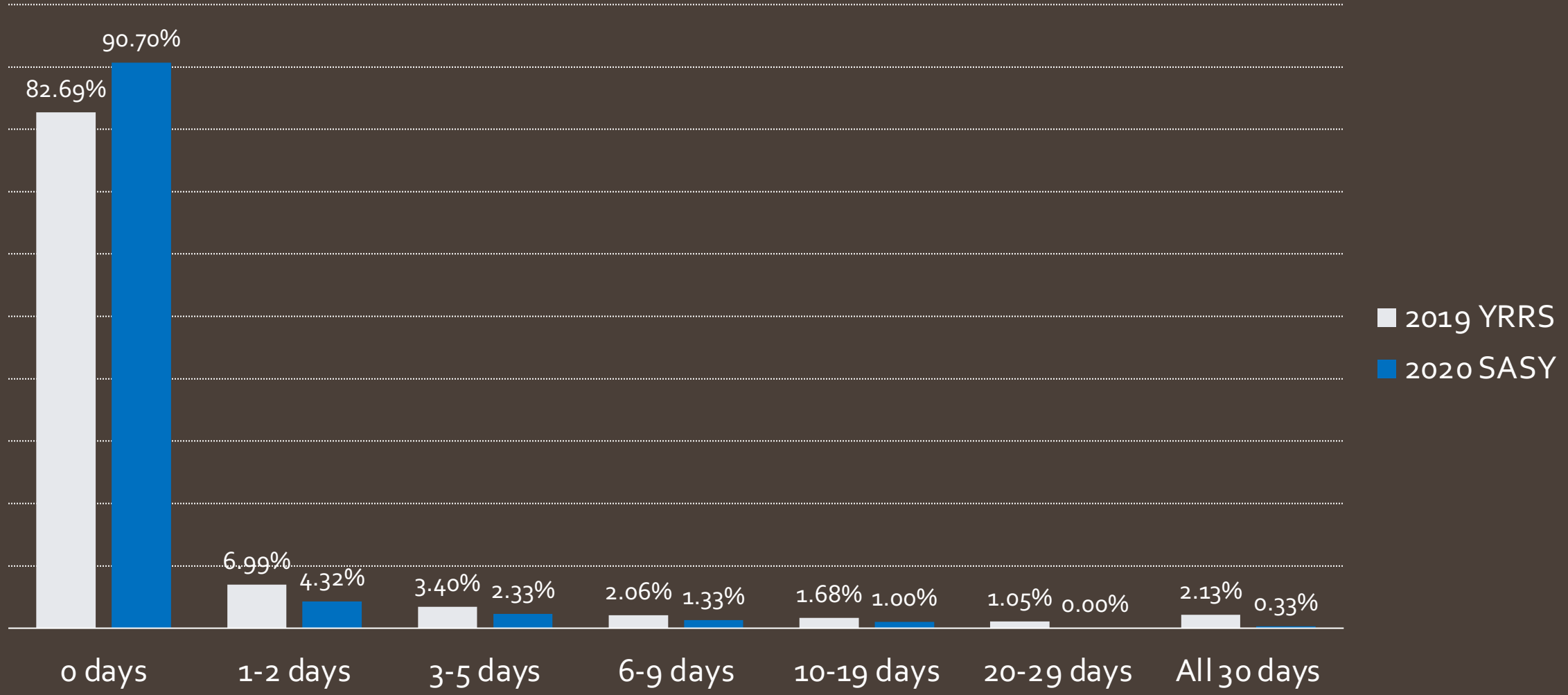
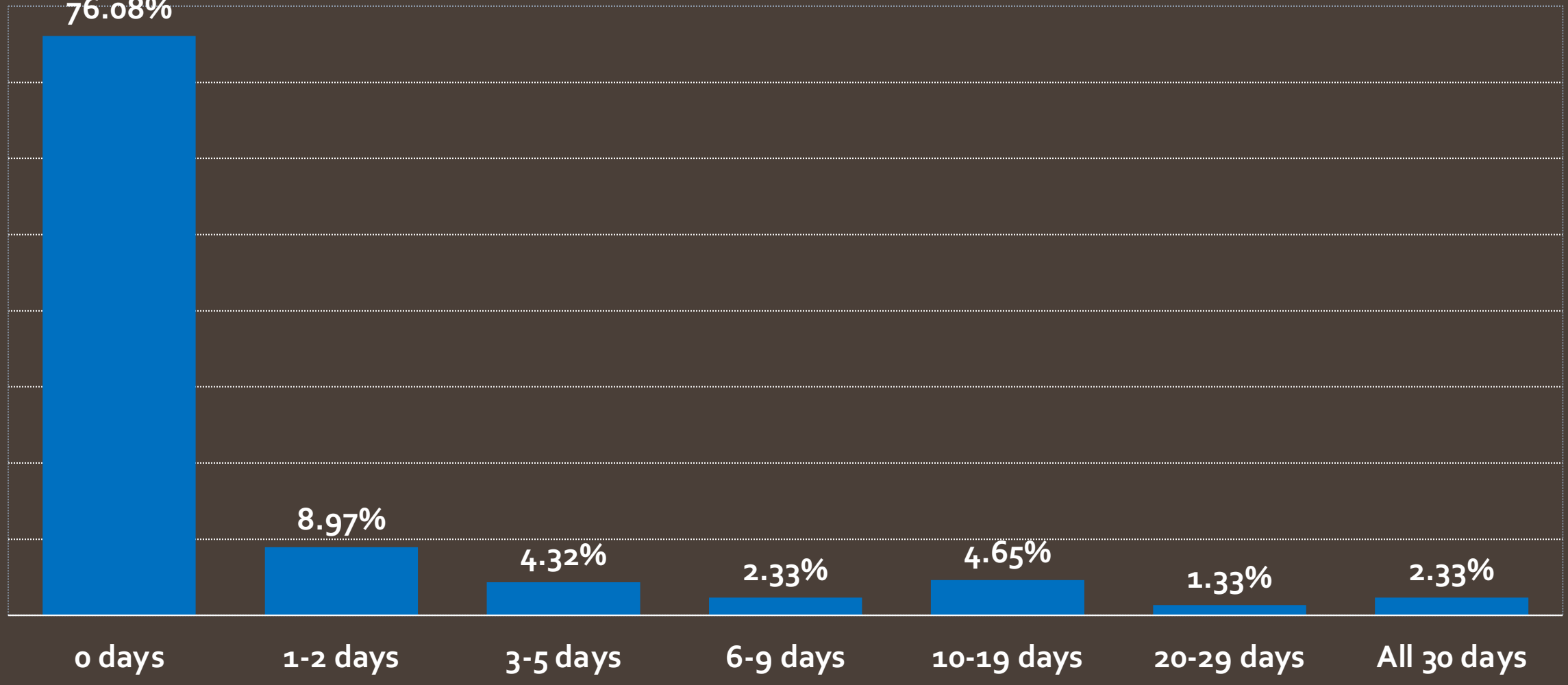


During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use an electronic vapor product?



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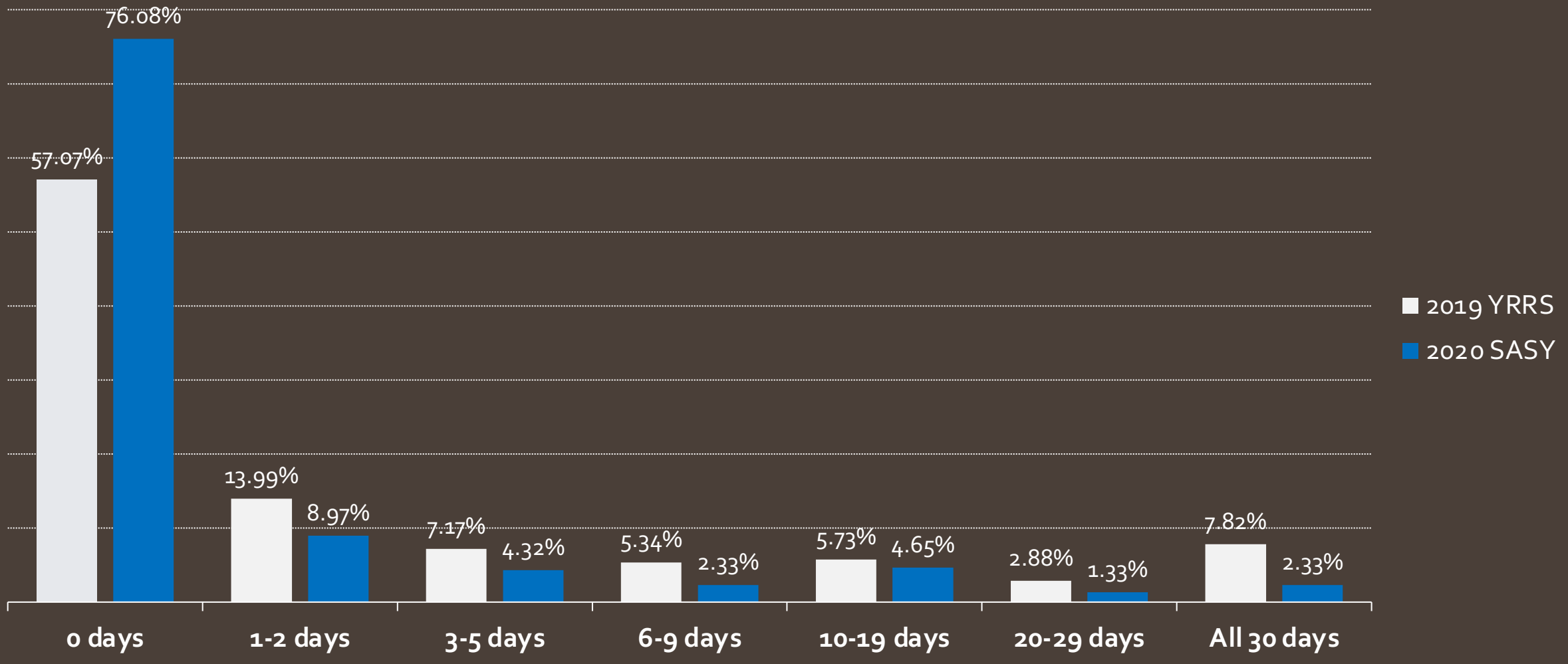
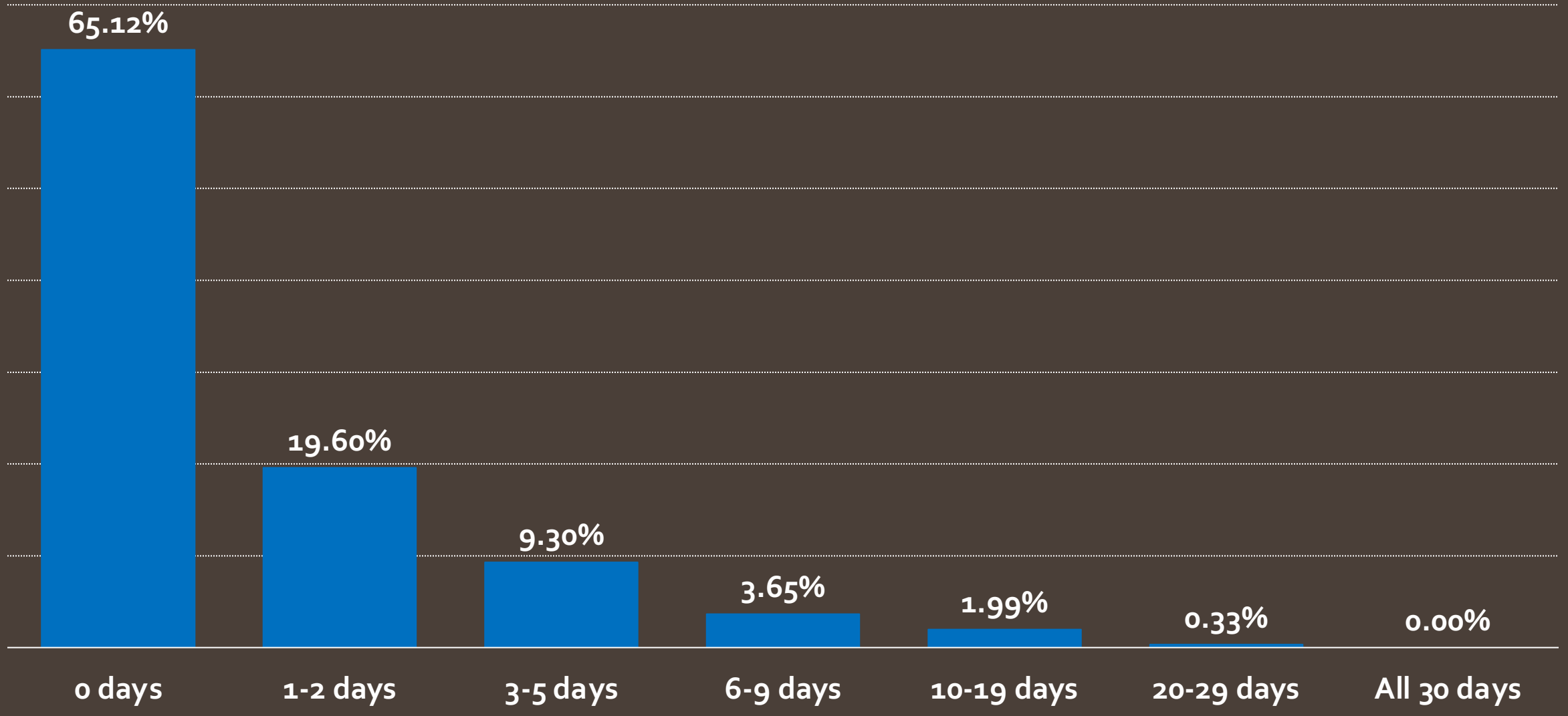


Alcohol Use

During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol?



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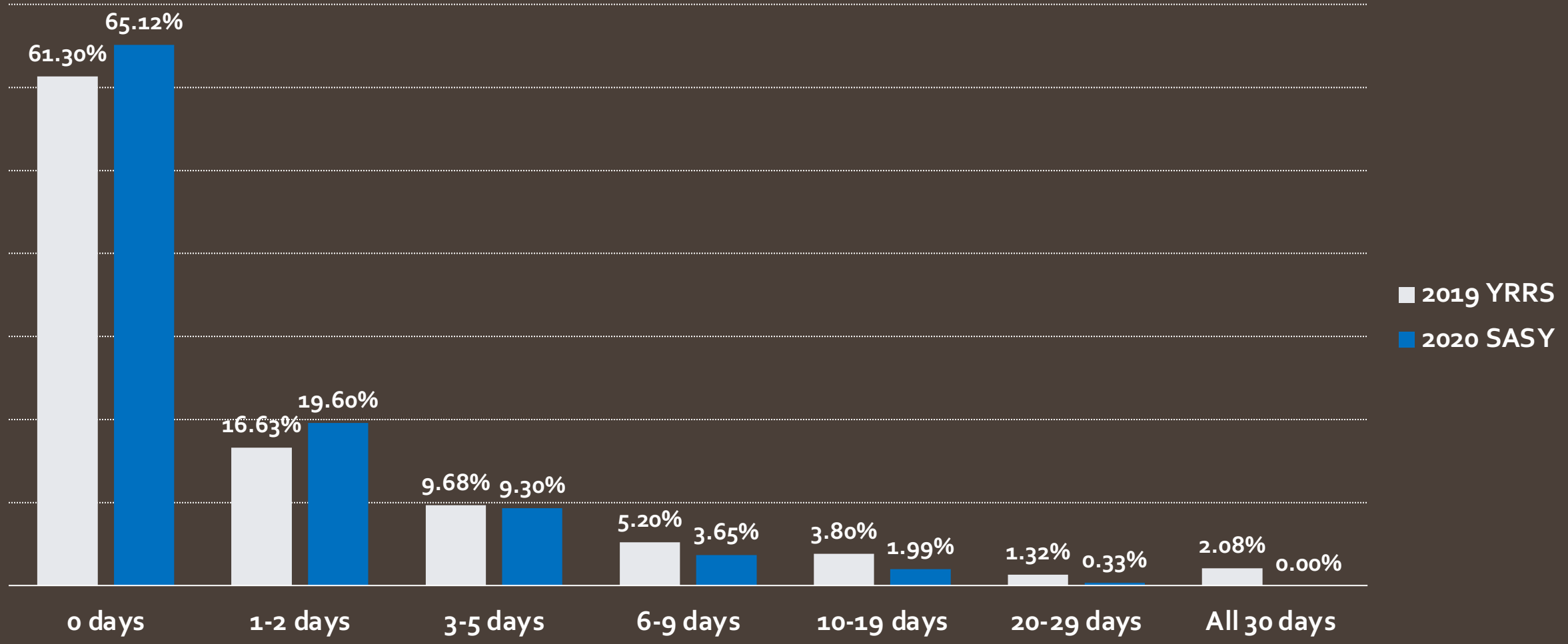
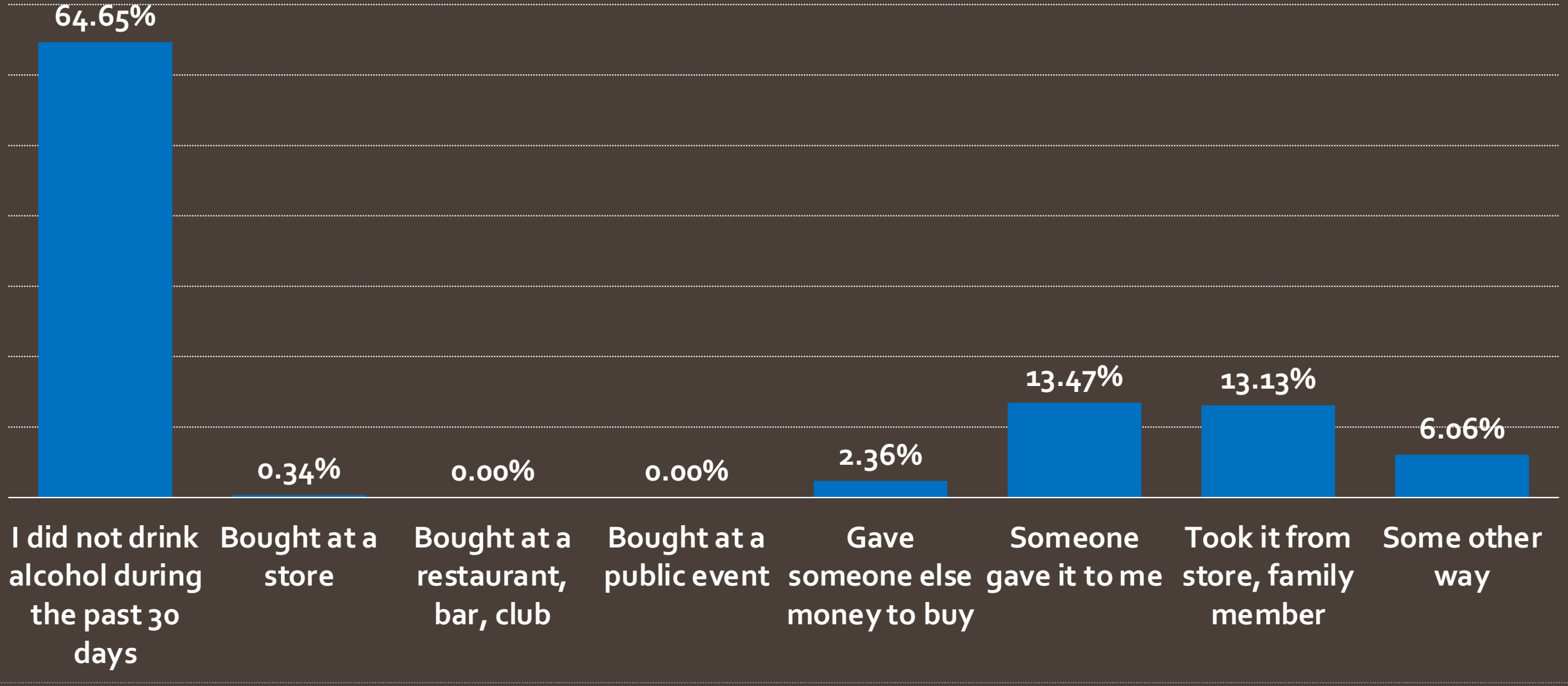


During the past 30 days, how did you usually get the alcohol you drank?



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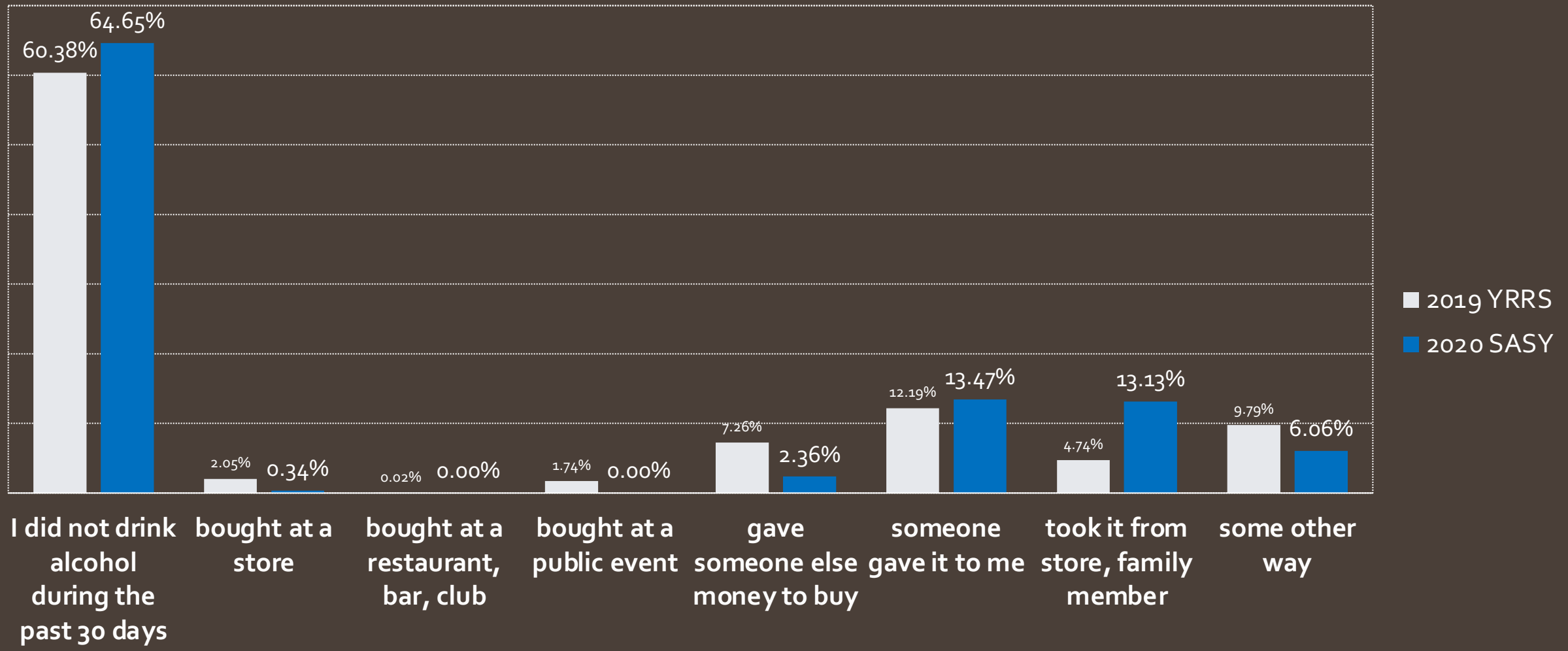
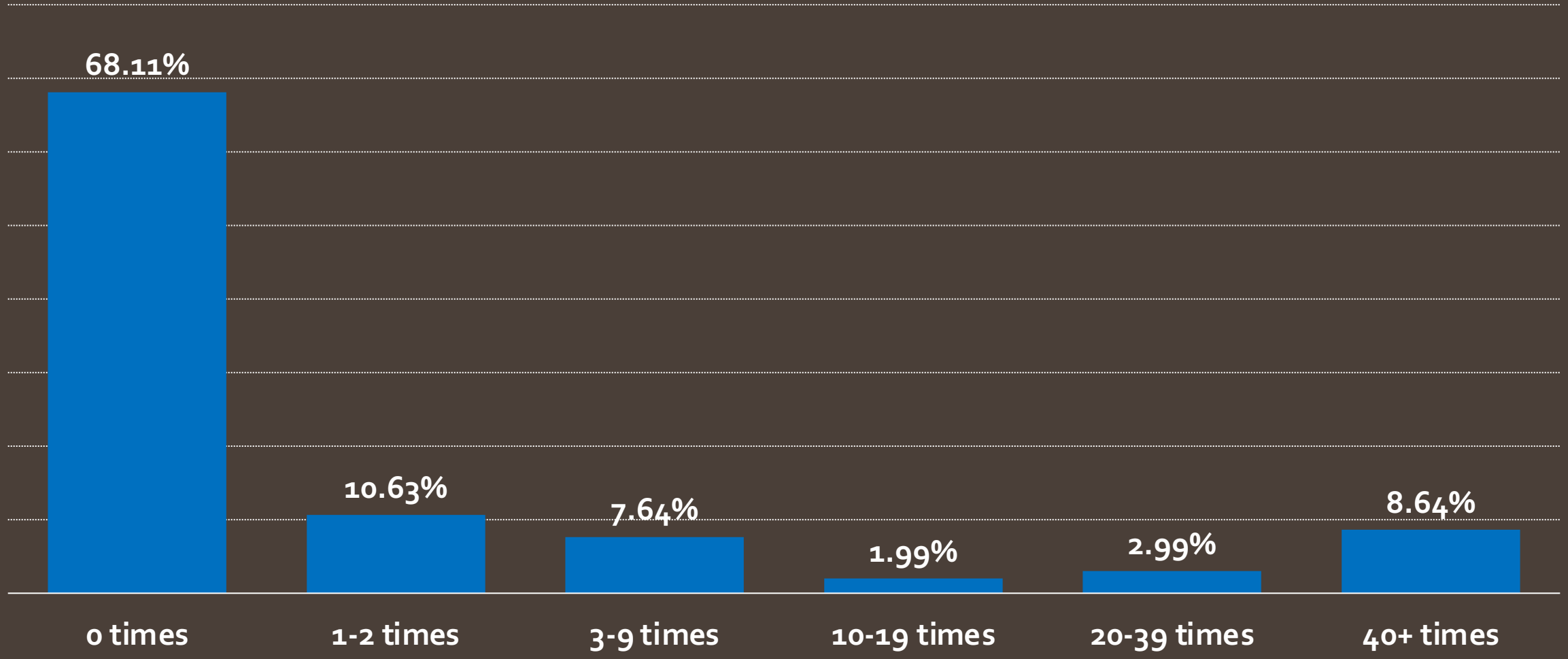
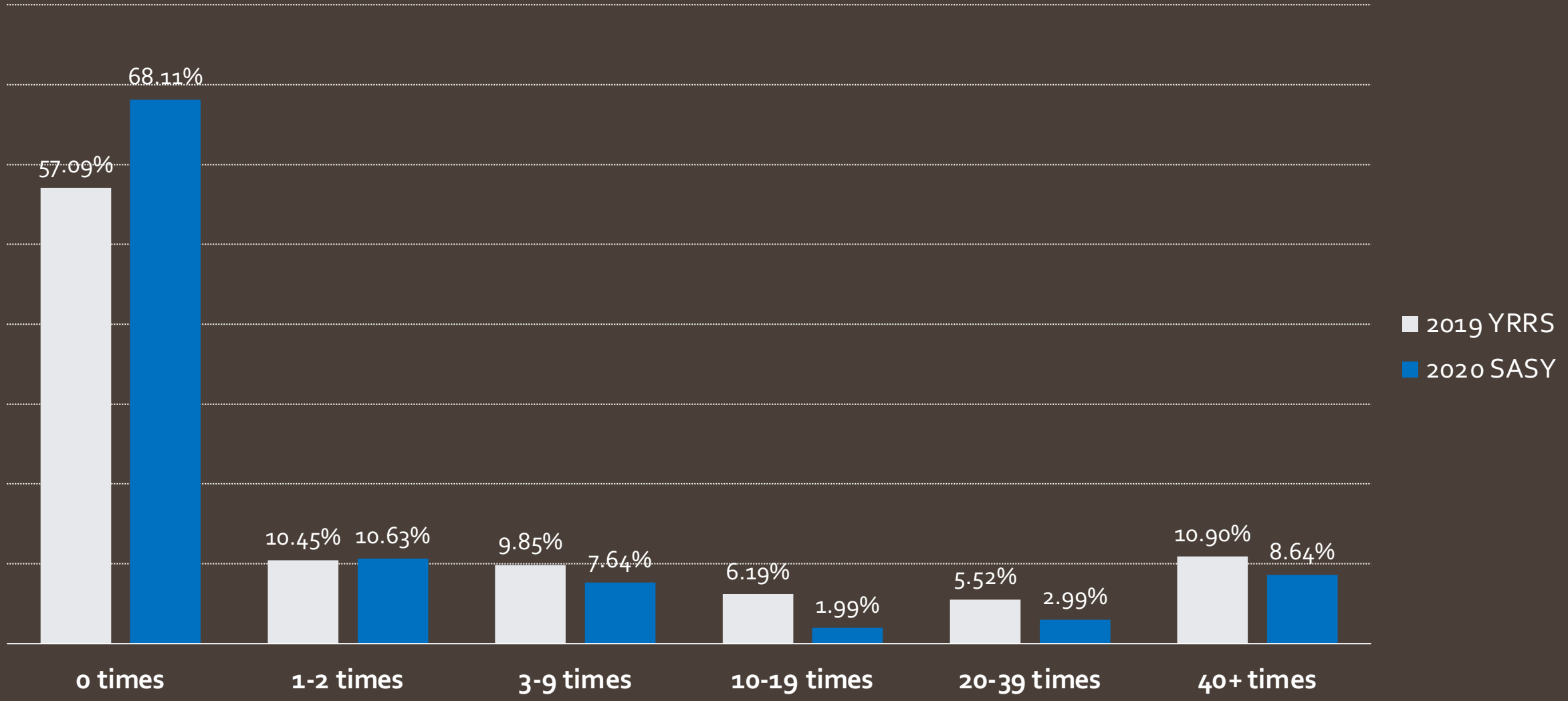


Marijuana Use

During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana?

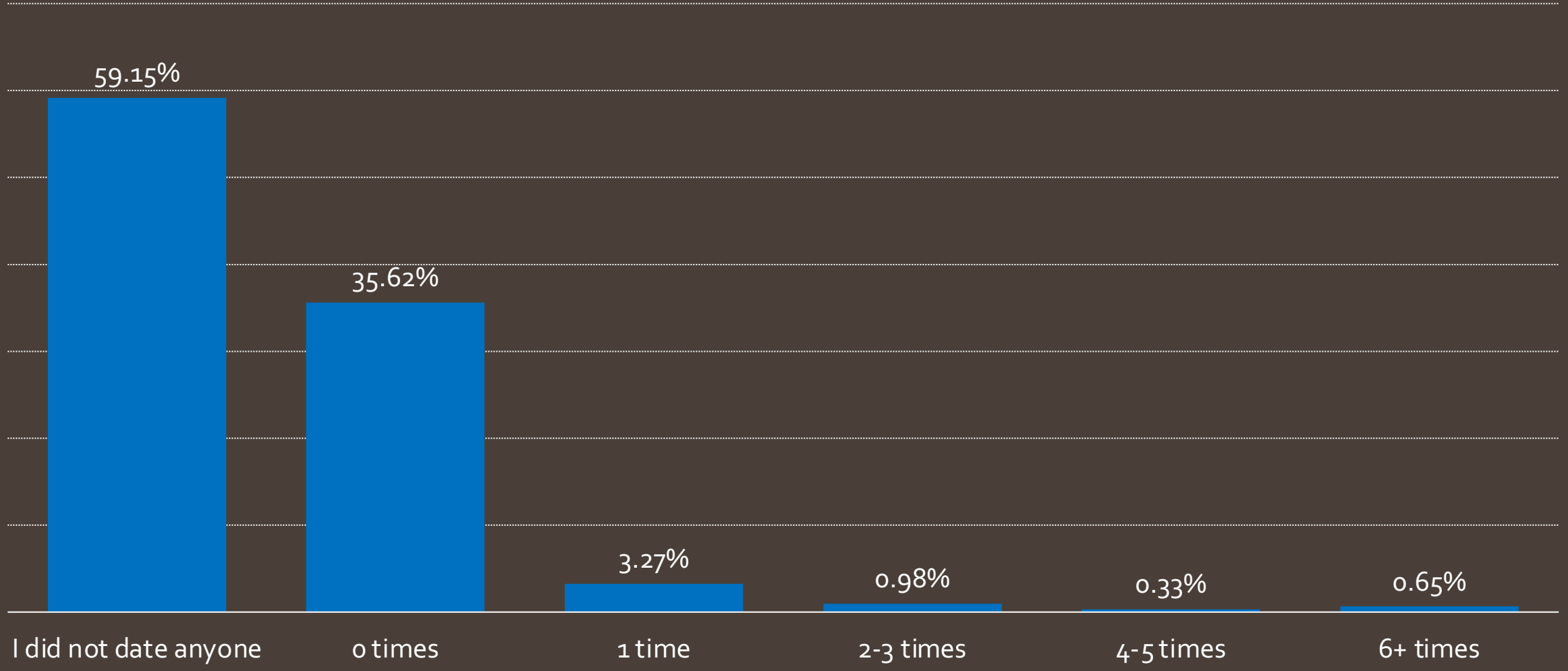


During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana?



Violence and Bullying

During the past three months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose?



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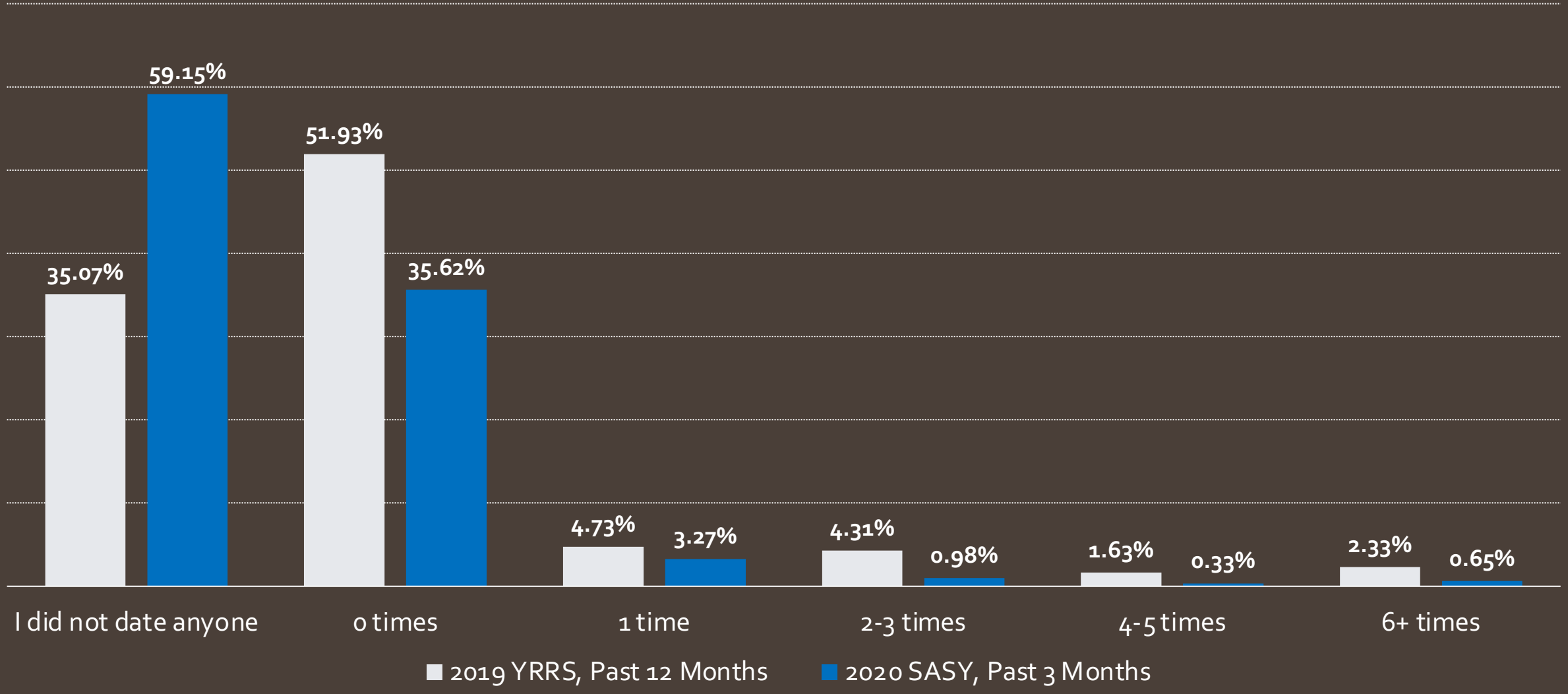
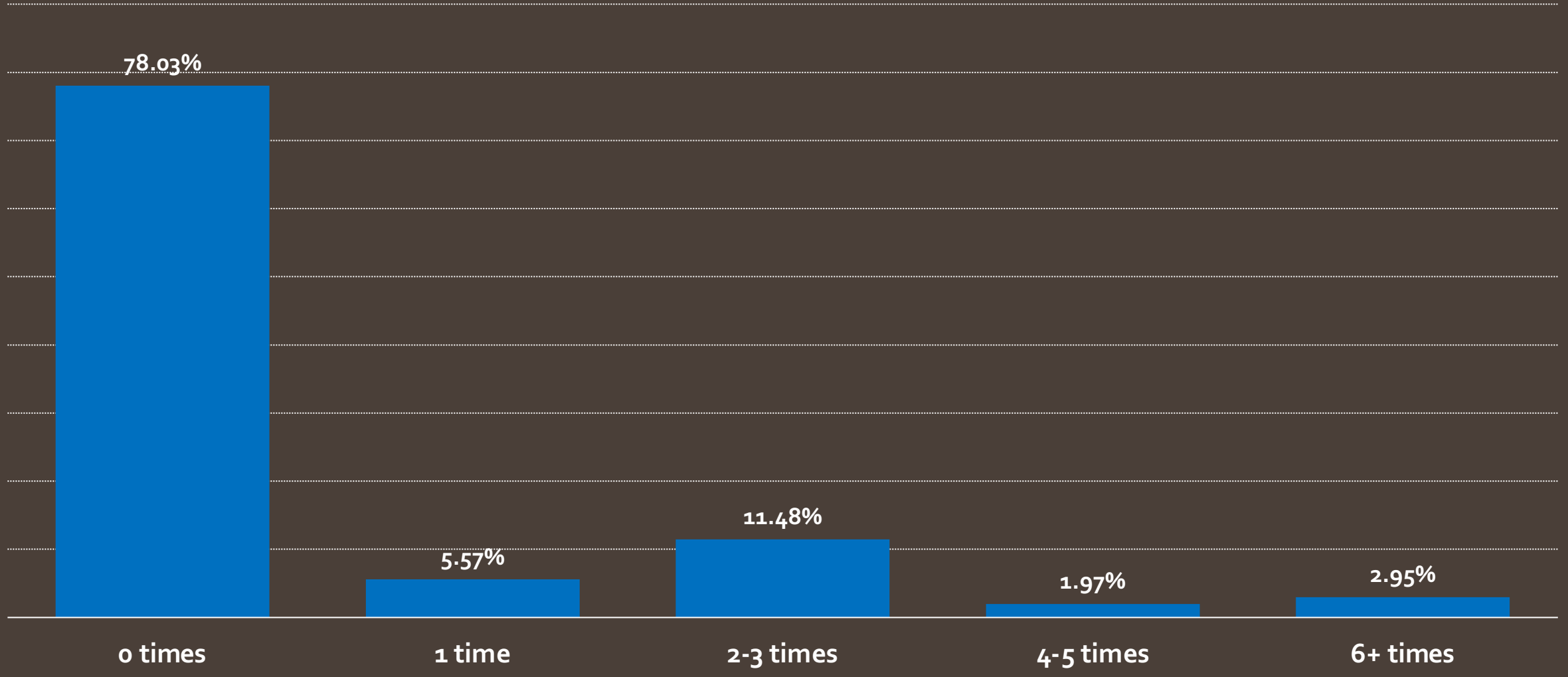
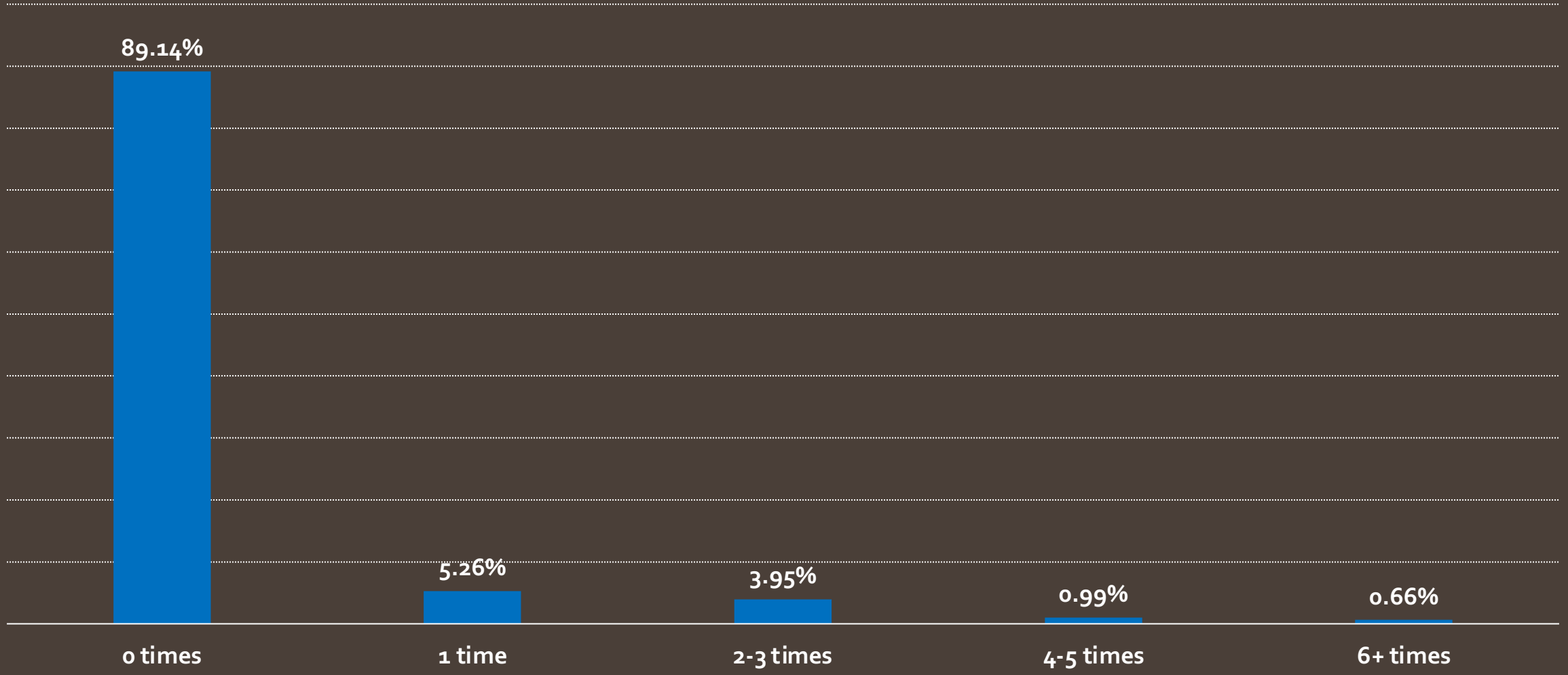


During the past three months, how many times did someone in your family physically hurt you on purpose?



During the past three months, how many times did anyone force you to do sexual things that you did not want to do?



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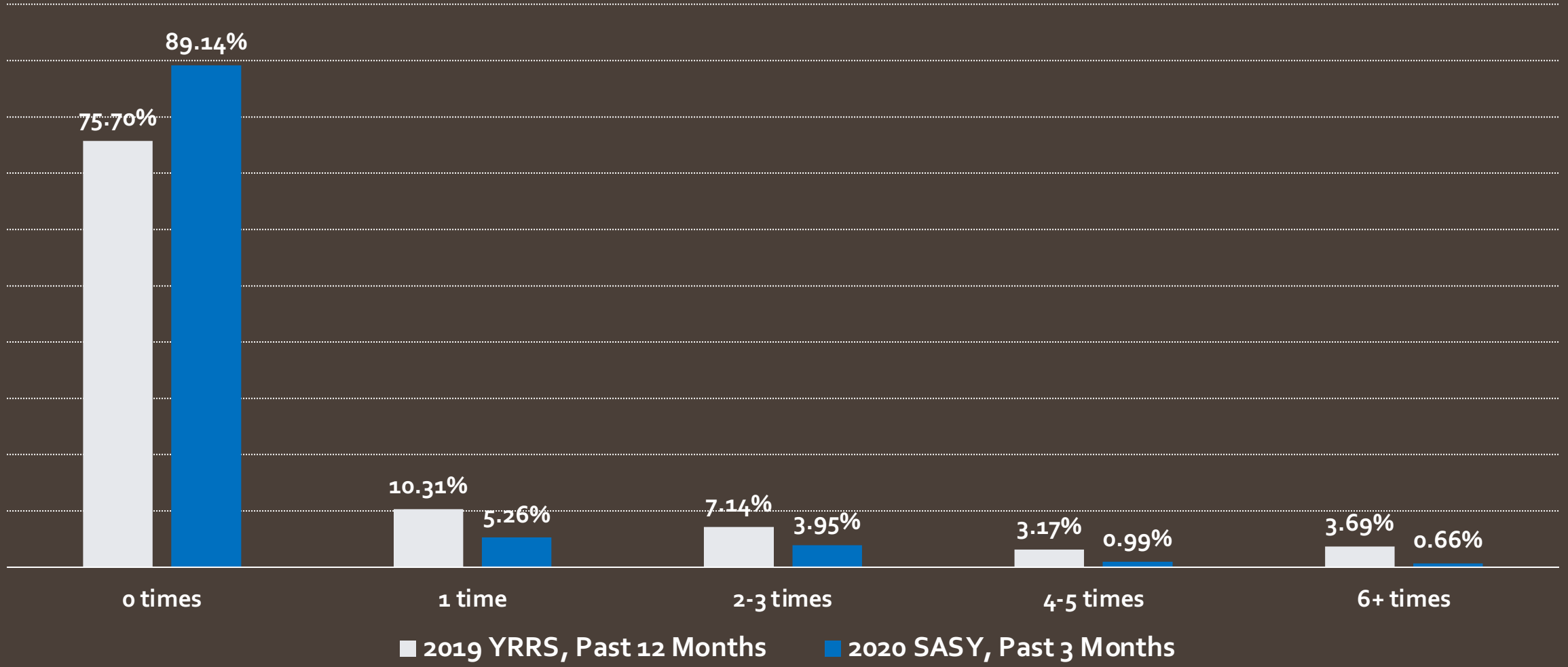
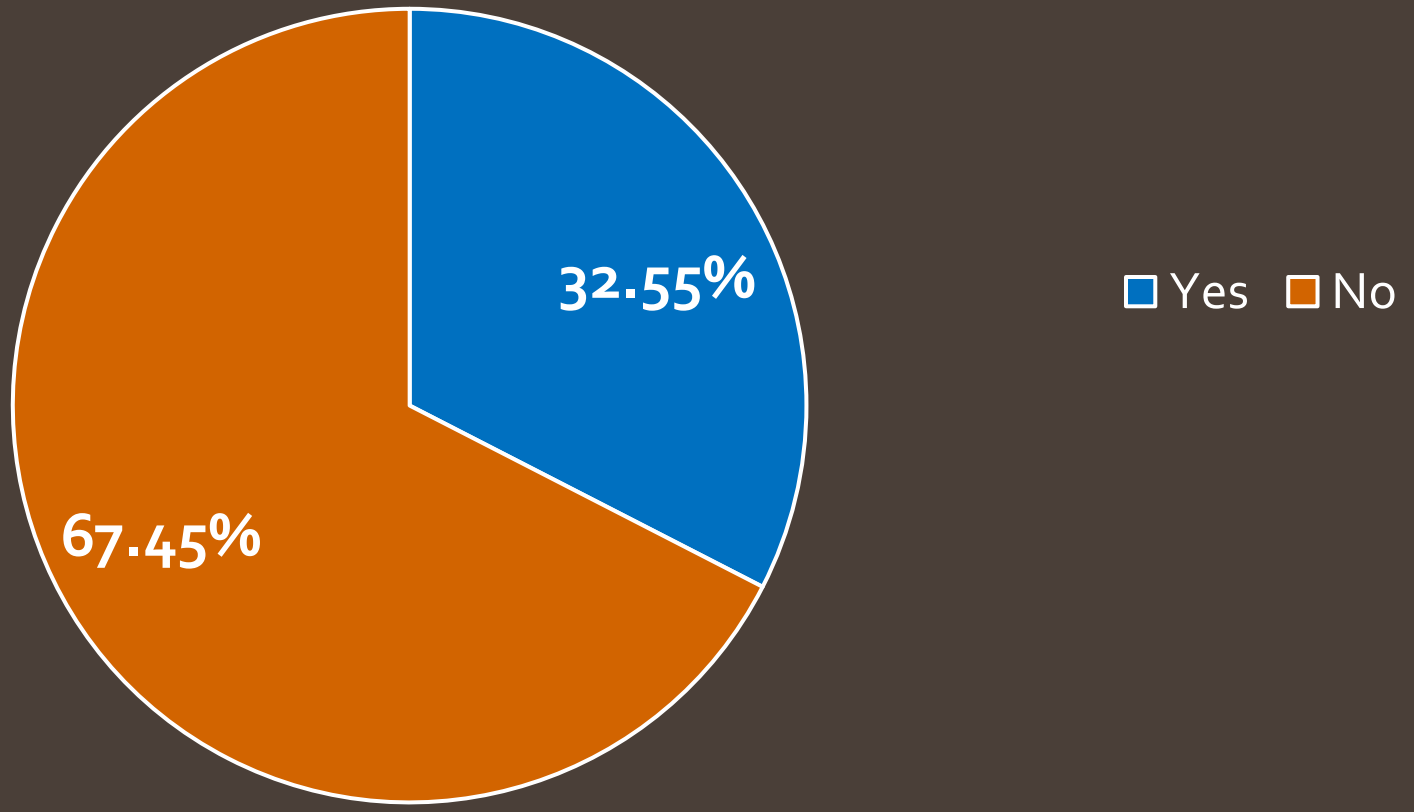


During the past three months, have you ever been electronically bullied?



2019 YRRS
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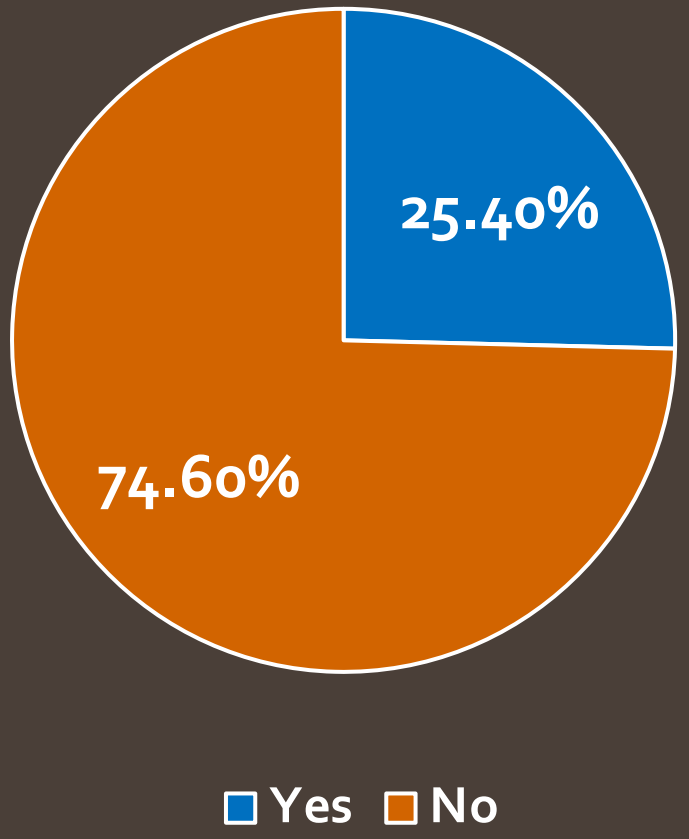

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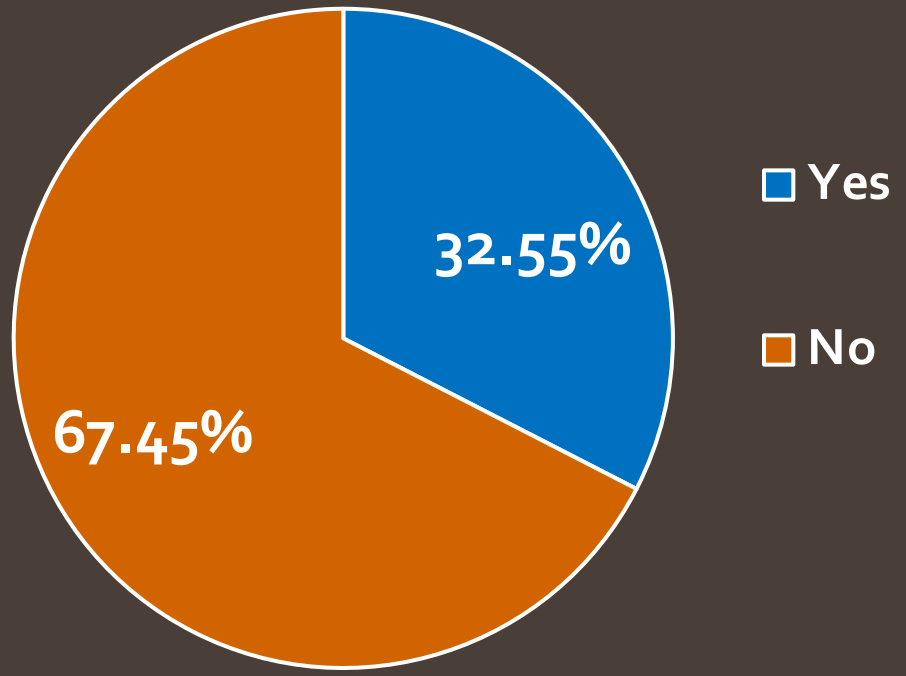
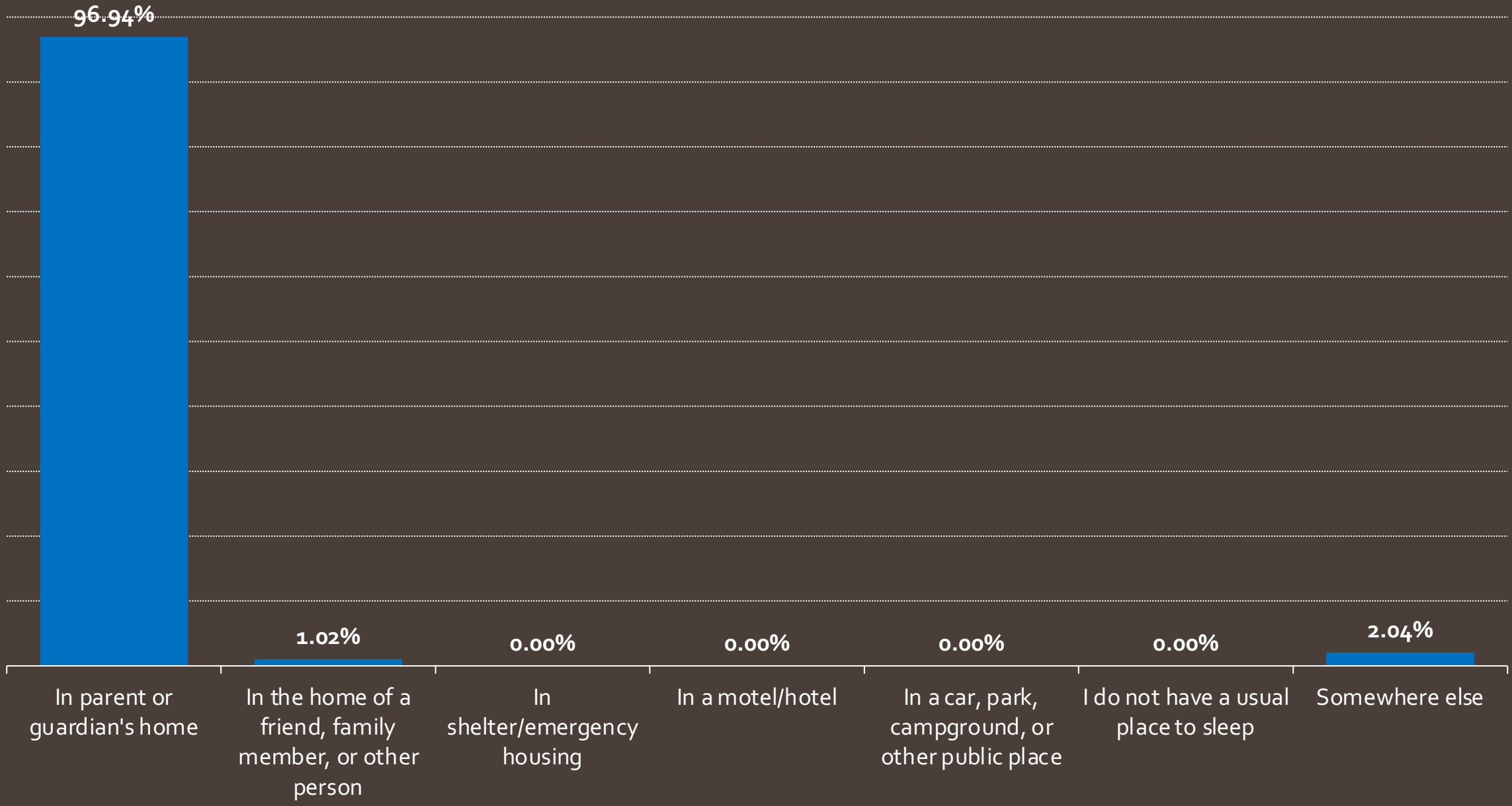


Housing

During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep?



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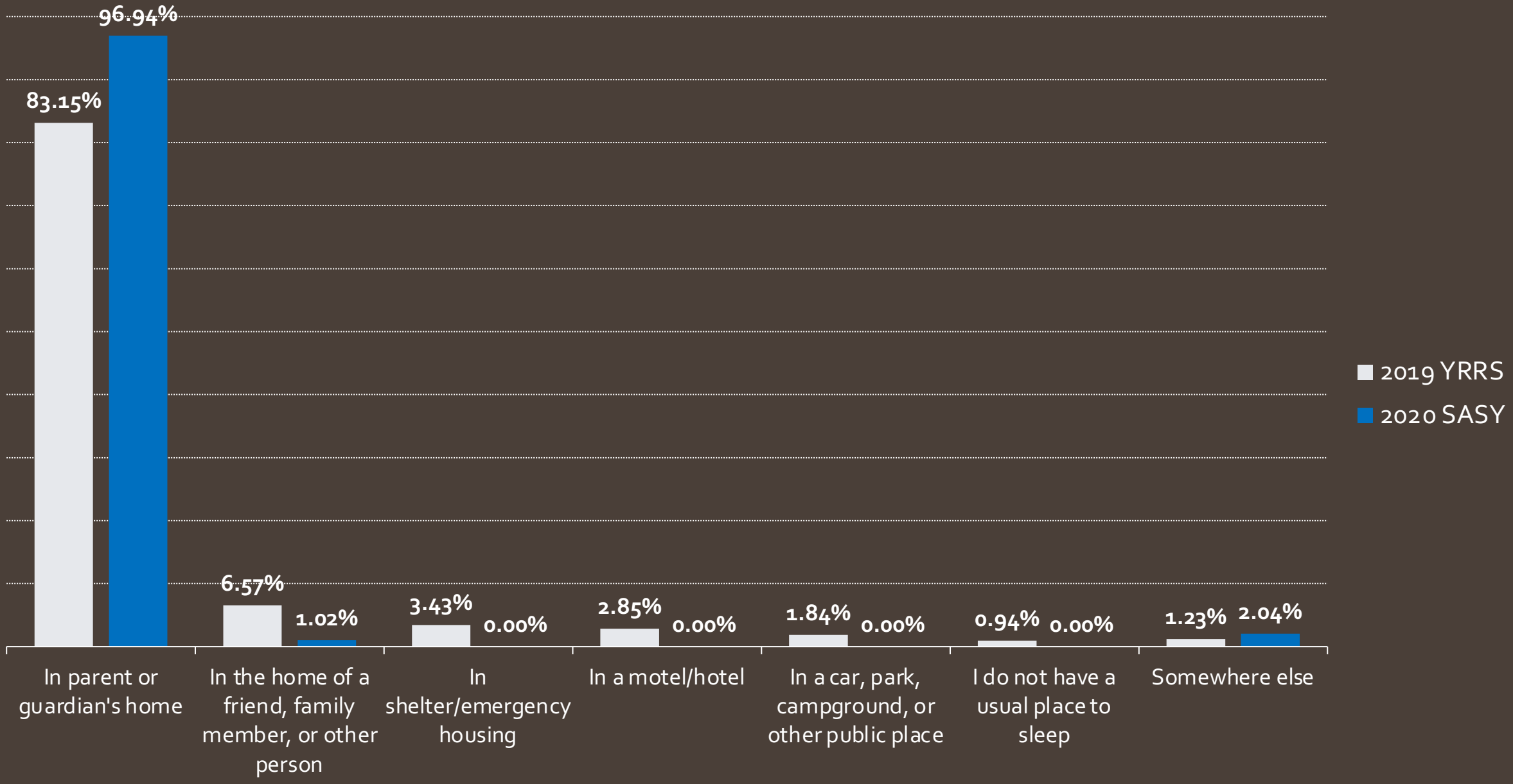
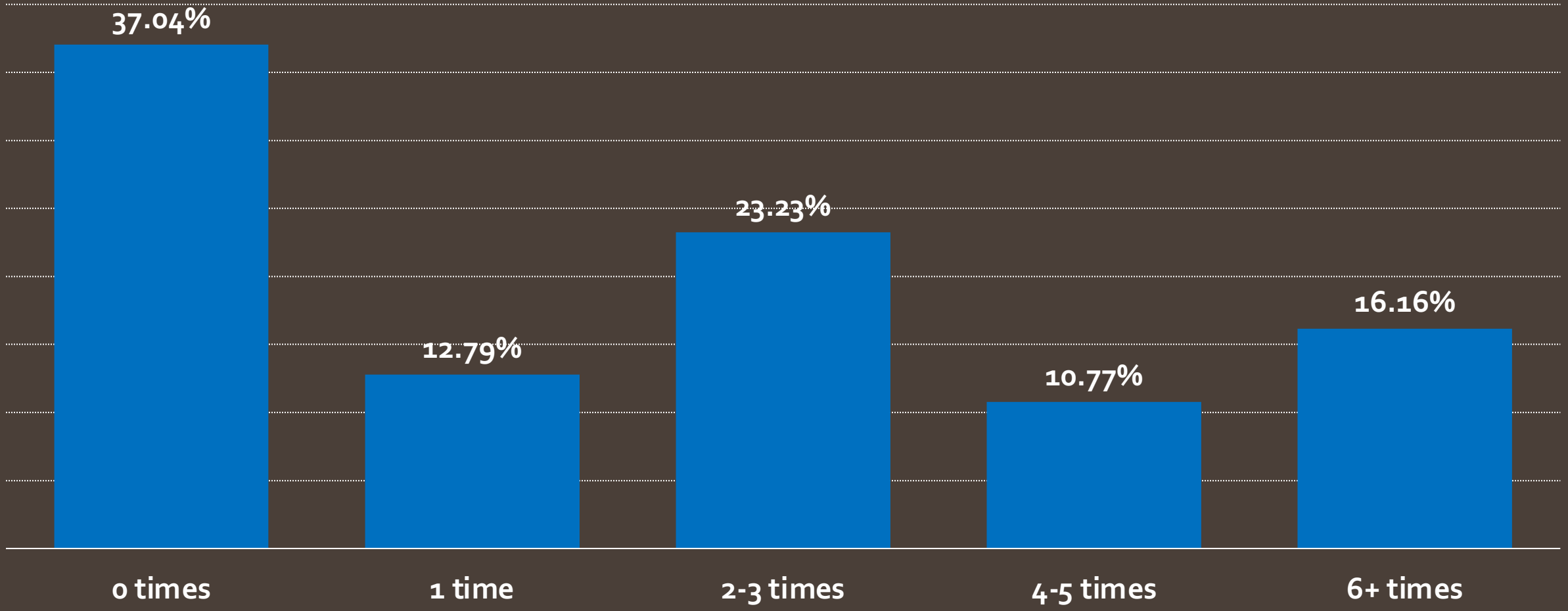


Sadness and Suicidality

During the past three months, how many times did you do something to purposely hurt yourself without wanting to die, such as cutting or burning yourself on purpose?



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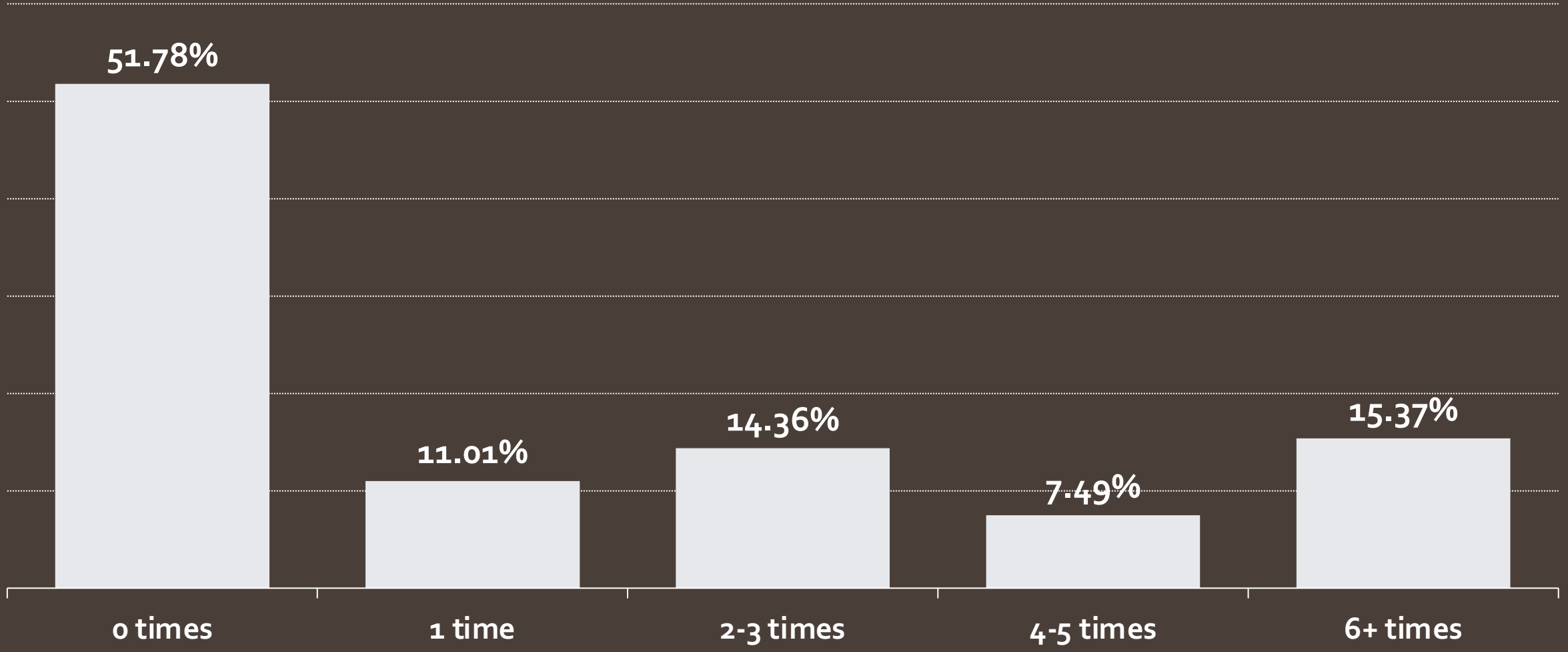
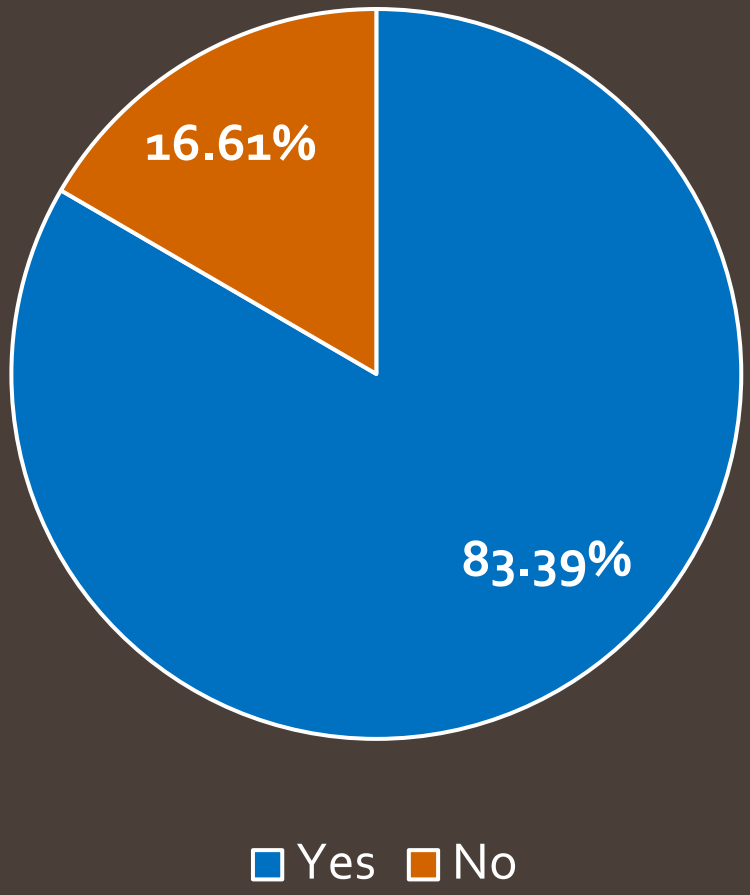


During the past <u>three months</u>, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?



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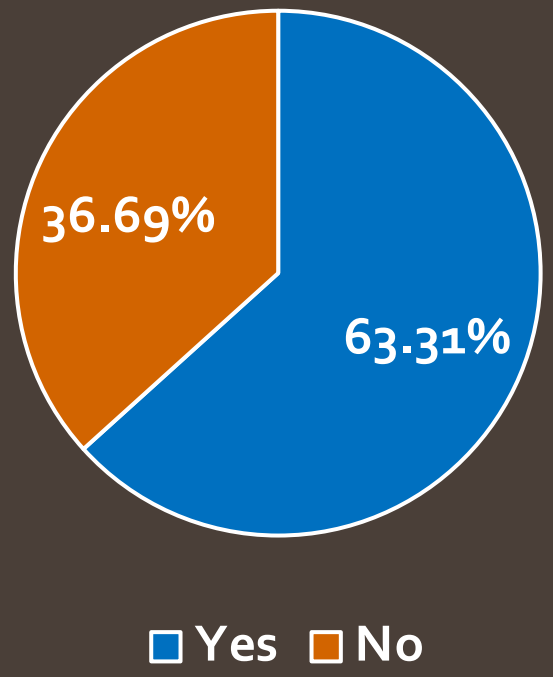

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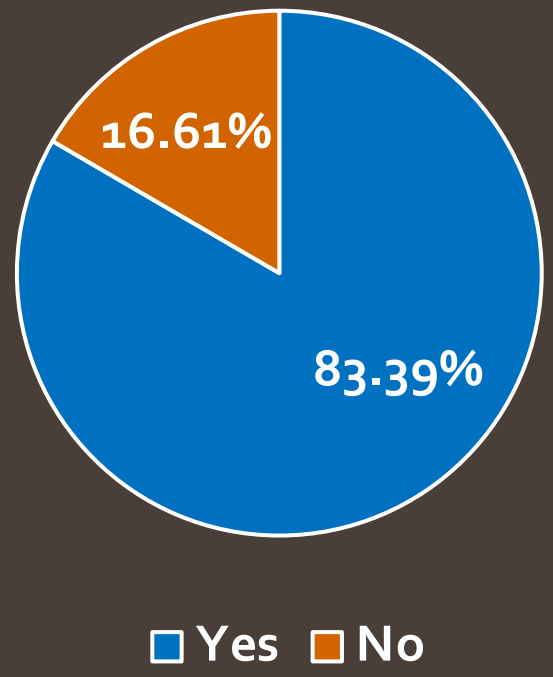
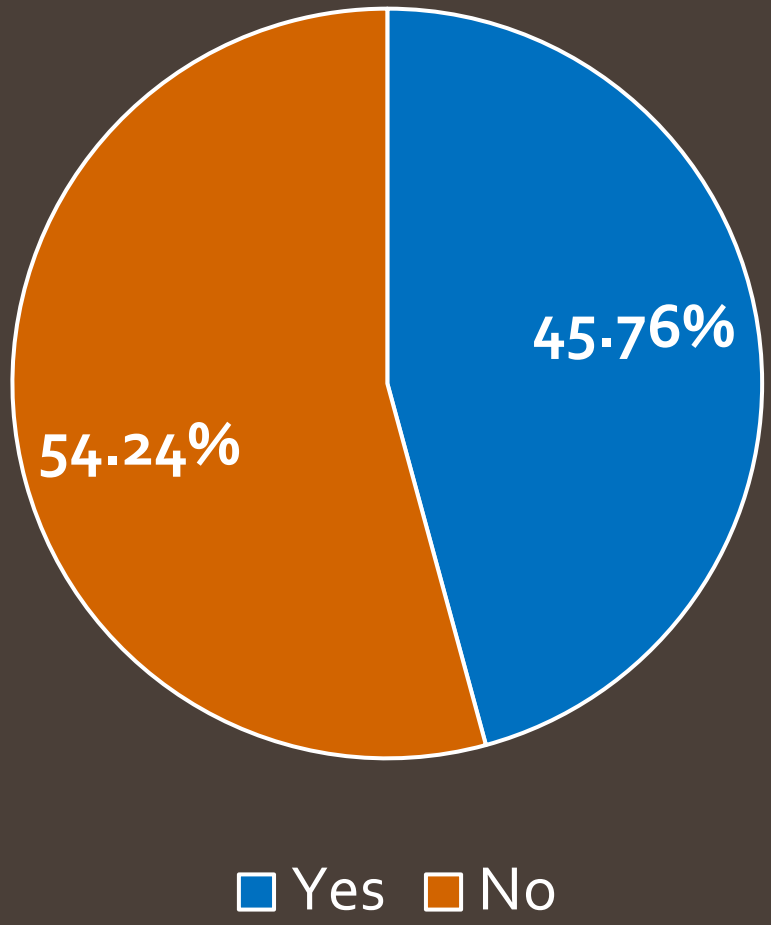


During the past three months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?



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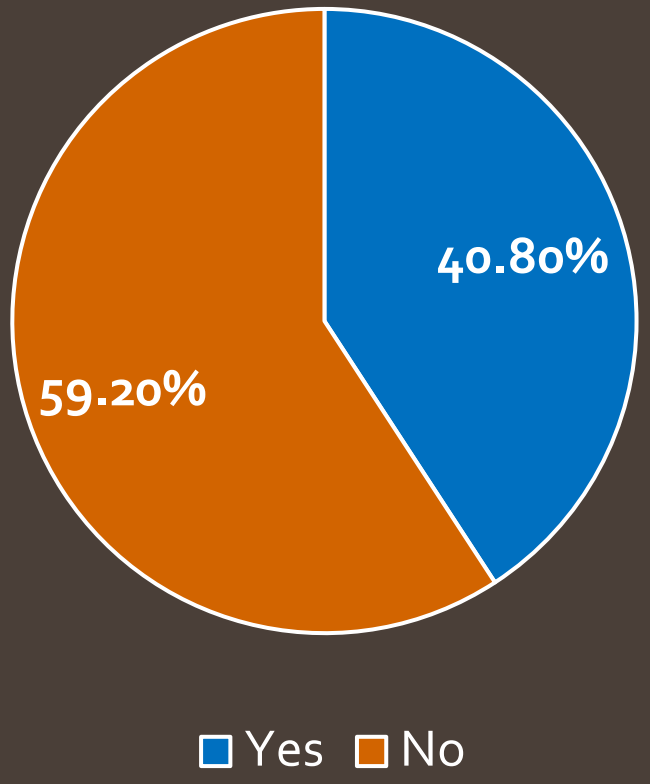

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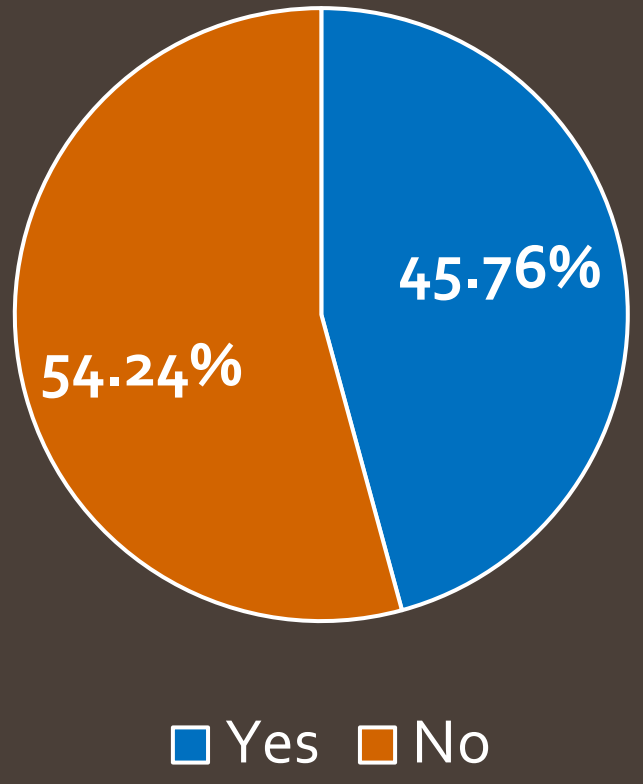
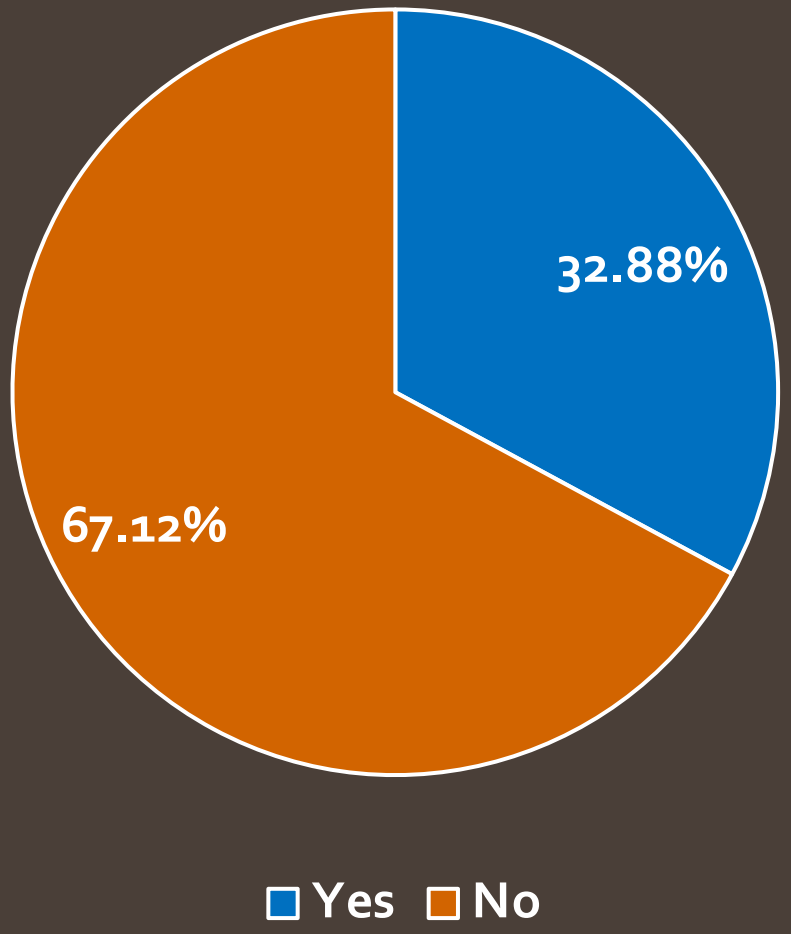
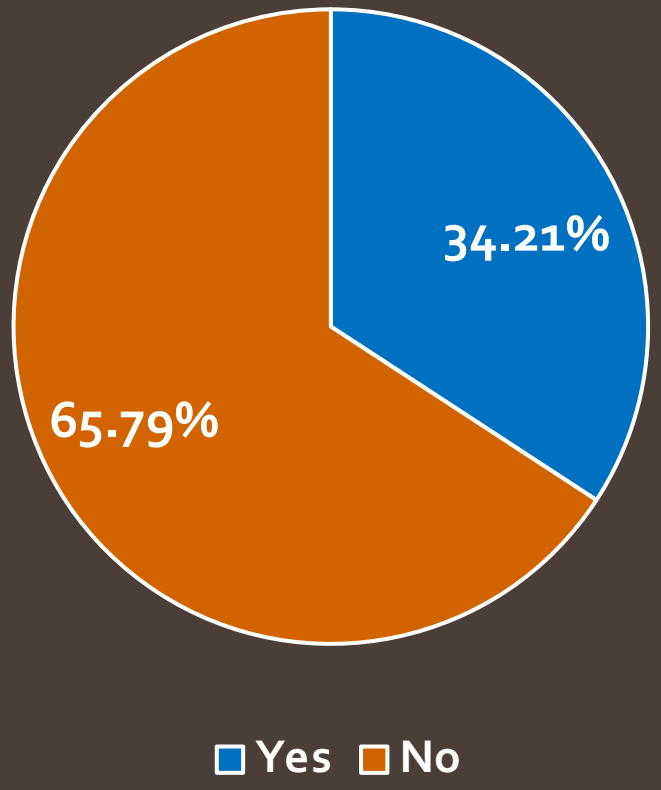


During the past three months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?



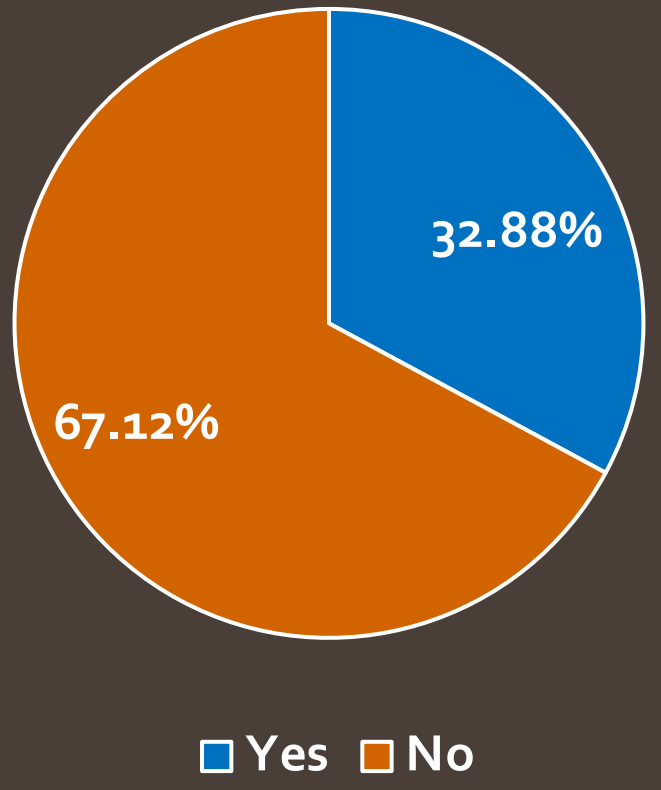
2019 YRRS

During the past 12 months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?

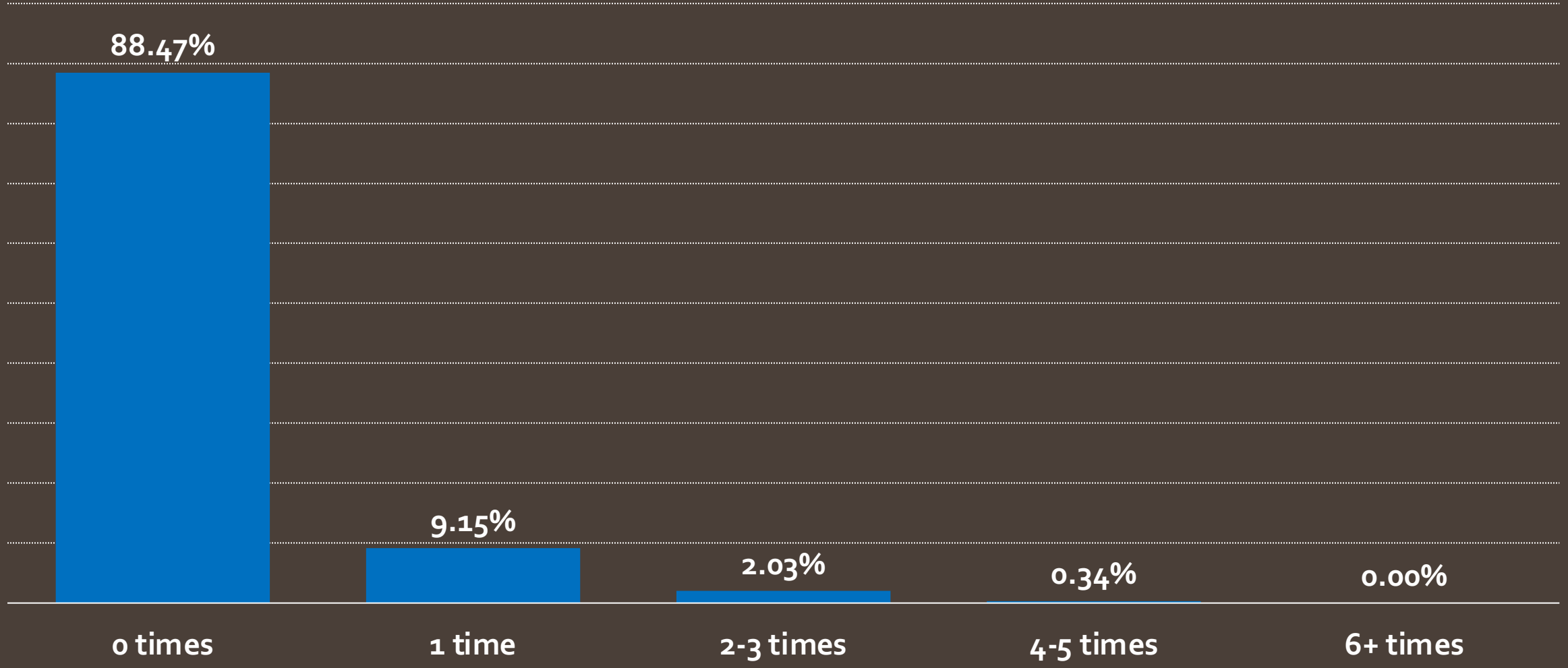


2020 SASY

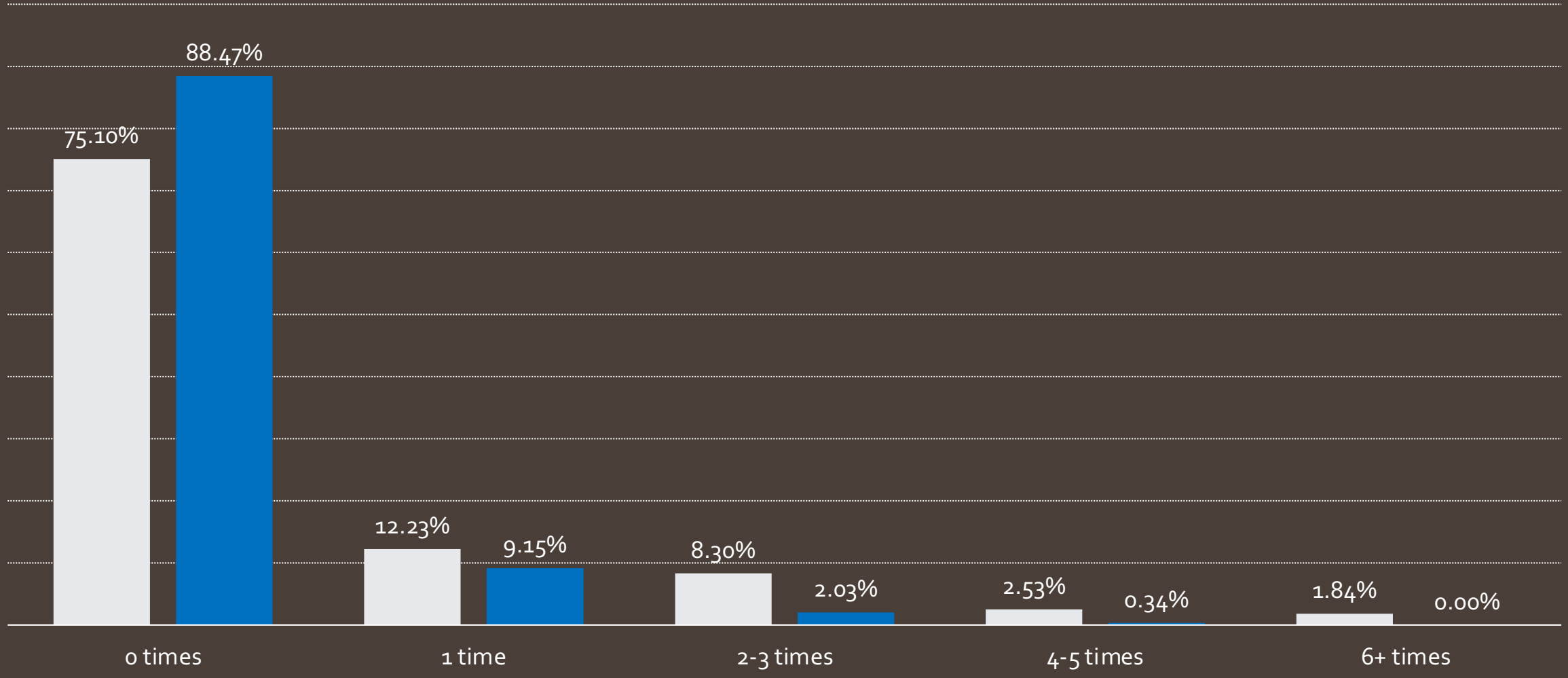
During the past three months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?



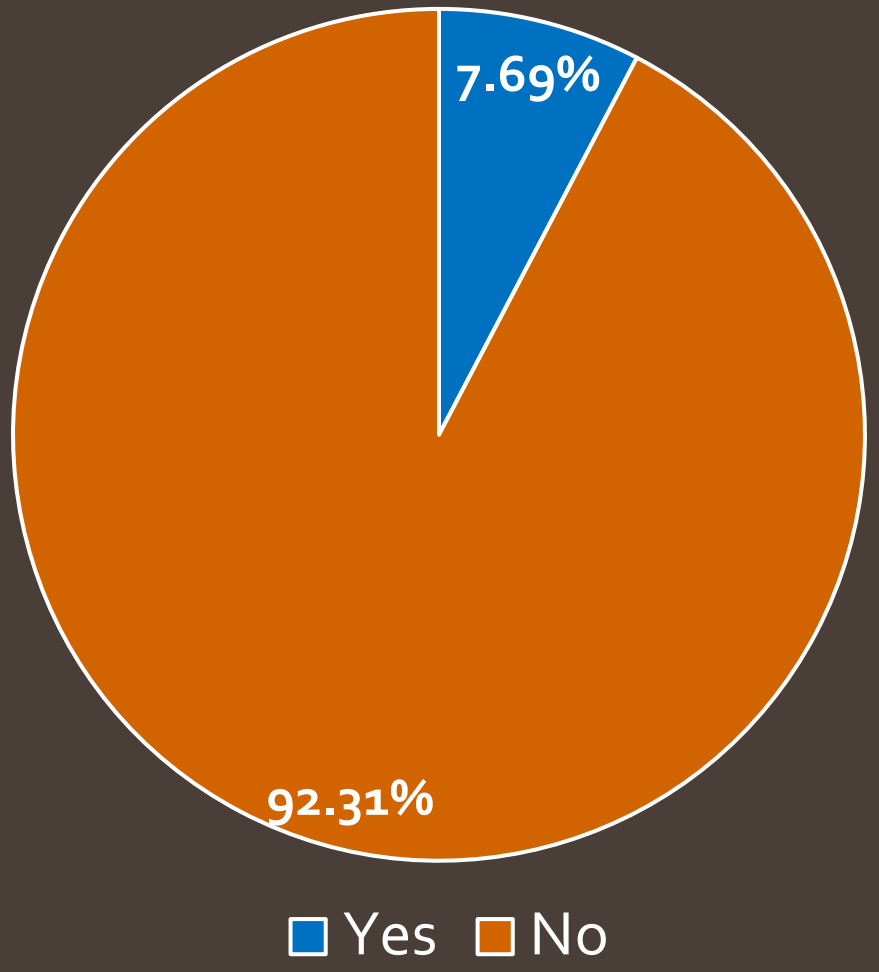
During the past three months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?



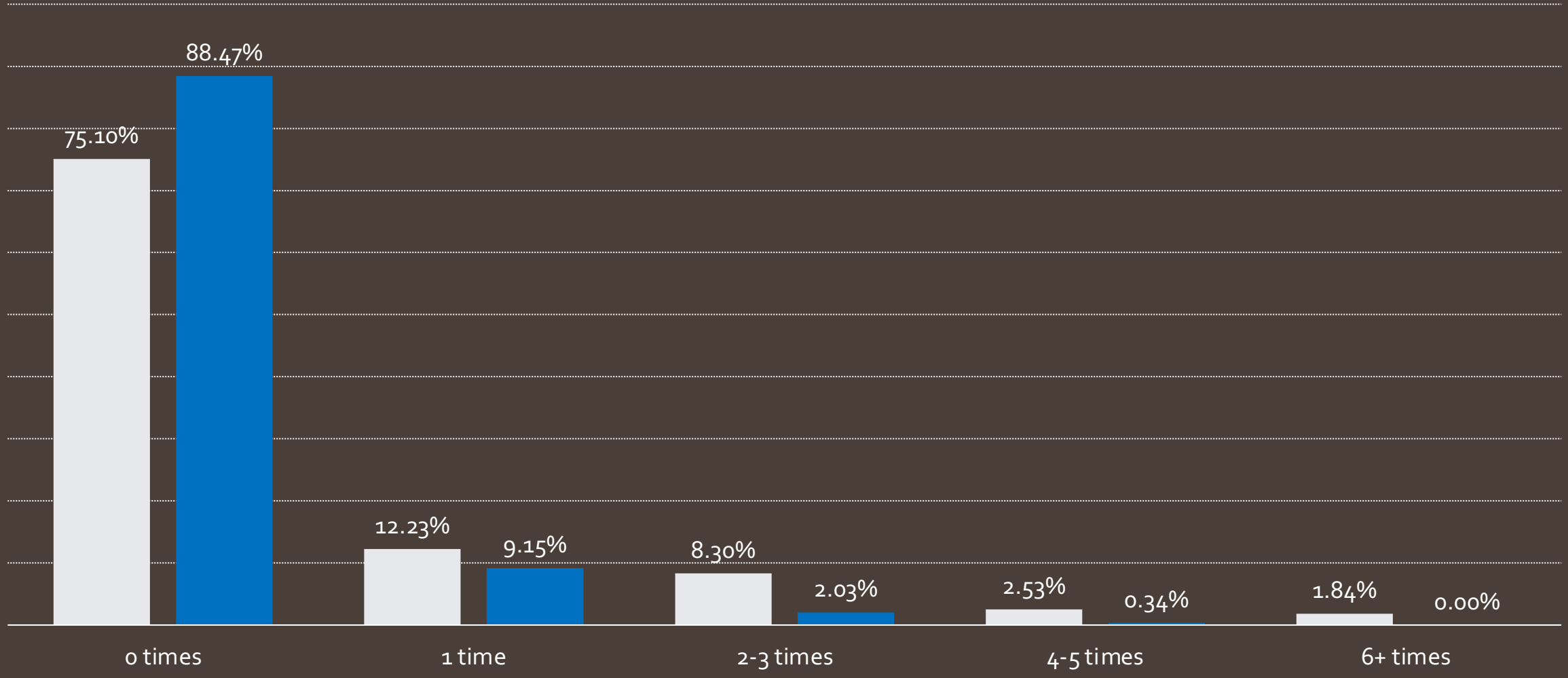
How many times did you actually attempt suicide?



Did any suicide attempt result in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse?



How many times did you actually attempt suicide?



Outcomes	Overall (n=379)	Large City/Suburb (n=118)	Small City (n=135)	Rural (n=110)
Alcohol	105 (34.9)	32 (33.7)	43 (36.8)	30 (34.1)
Marijuana	96 (31.9)	26 (27.4)	40 (34.1)	30 (34.1)
Sad/Hopeless	246 (83.4)	72 (77.4)	98 (85.2)	75 (87.2)
NSSI	187 (63.0)	55 (59.1)	71 (60.7)	60 (69.8)
Consider	135 (45.8)	33 (35.5)	50 (43.5)	51 (59.3)
Plan	97 (32.9)	30 (32.3)	39 (33.9)	27 (31.4)
Suicide Attempt	34 (11.5)	5 (5.4)	12 (10.4)	17 (19.8)
Cyber bullying	97 (32.6)	27 (28.7)	39 (33.3)	30 (34.9)

Suicide and Rural SGM Youth

- Differences across rural and urban contexts
- Large city and suburbs, Small city, Town and rural area
- Rural youth had significantly higher likelihood of:
  - Considered suicide (OR=2.45, $p<0.05$)
  - Attempted suicide (OR=3.82, $p<0.05$)
- Feeling unsafe at home associated with higher likelihood of:
  - Considered suicide (OR=1.72, $p<0.05$)
  - Planned suicide (OR=1.57, $p<0.10$)
  - Attempted suicide (OR=2.63, $p<0.05$)

Suicide and Rural SGM Youth

- SGM youth living in rural areas who felt unsafe at home at higher risk of suicidality than urban peers who felt unsafe at home.
  - Considered suicide (OR=3.47, p<0.10)
  - Planned suicide (OR=3.74, p<0.10)
  - Attempted suicide (OR=8.90, p<0.10)

Virtual Support

- Correlational analysis of mental health outcomes & virtual support
  - Sadness/hopelessness correlated with seeking out/receiving support from virtual platform before the pandemic ($p<0.05$) and during the pandemic ($p<0.001$)
  - Attempting suicide correlated with seeking out/receiving support from virtual platform during the pandemic ($p<0.05$)
- Logistic regression analyses of association between virtual support during pandemic and negative mental health
  - Youth who reported seeking support online during the pandemic had 223% increased odds of reporting feeling sad or hopeless ($p<.01$).
  - Youth who reported seeking/receiving support online during the pandemic had a 148% increased odds of having attempted suicide in the three months of the pandemic ($p<.05$).

Other Survey Findings

- Youth reporting worsened relationships with family were 2.7 times as likely to feel sad or hopeless
- Respondents felt generally safer at home than they did in schools.
- Youth were less likely to report continued school-based supports after the pandemic
- Sixty percent supported by a mental health provider pre-pandemic, dropping to 37%
- Fifty-five percent turned to virtual support prior to pandemic, dropping to 47%

Interviews

- Youth reported having more time to work on their own mental health and more time to "figure out who they are." Behavioral health providers and school staff echoed some of the same observations.
- Youth and families are reaching out and many were able to access support virtually.
- Those that were engaged in receiving support were less likely to miss appointments.
- Complicated relationships at home with youth concealing their LGBTQ+ identities and varying willingness of families to facilitate access to formalized support
- Young people are finding creative ways to stay connected.
- Majority of youth in interviews indicated that "community" was a source of pride for them in their identity as an LGBTQ+ person. For many, this community was found in virtual spaces – socialization, support, or education.

Concerning Outreach

- Some youth interviewees were unsure of what their schools or other supports were able to still offer
- Those that were connected were connected, those were not were not… Not much middle ground.
- Outreach and support has to be tailored to youth population
  - Instagram, TikTok, Discord, etc
  - NOT FACEBOOK
  - Chat or Non-audio/visual forms of communication
- Need for privacy

"Before the pandemic, stuff was a lot easier for us because we knew where we could get support. Now it's a lot more different because you're stuck with your family and it's very hard, but from my experience, it gets worse before it gets better. And right now we're at the worst. So, it's about to get better because before this, we were dealing with like the threat of World War III and Kobe dying, but now it's one of global pandemic…. **Everything is not great right now. So we're at the worst. Everything is going to get better after this…. It's the rainbow after the storm**."

-Rural Transgender/Gender Diverse Youth

Questions?

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