

Knowledge, Attitudes, & Comfort Levels toward People with Disabilities in Youth & Adult Extension Settings



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Objectives

- To share research on extension professionals perceived knowledge and comfort levels towards people with disabilities
- To share research on 4-H youth and their attitudes toward people with disabilities
- To understand how knowledge, attitudes, and comfort can inform the extension community working with people with disabilities

Definitions

Knowledge

Attitudes

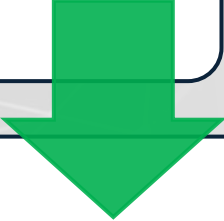
Comfort

Importance of Knowledge, Attitudes & Comfort


- Studies have found that students have positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in school settings (Shalev et al., 2016).
- Research has identified that people report they have the most experience with physical disabilities (Barr & Bracchitta, 2015).
- Attitudes toward people with physical disabilities tends to be the most positive as compared to intellectual disabilities (Barr & Bracchitta, 2015; Scior, 2011), genetic disabilities (Wainstein et al., 2024), or developmental disabilities (Barr & Bracchitta, 2015).

Research says...

The research on Extension professionals' attitudes about disability is relatively limited and has primarily been studied in the 4-H context.



A study of Pennsylvania Extension professionals (Ingram, 1999) found that professionals believed that working with youth with disabilities was important, but that support was stronger for physical limitations than for mental challenges.

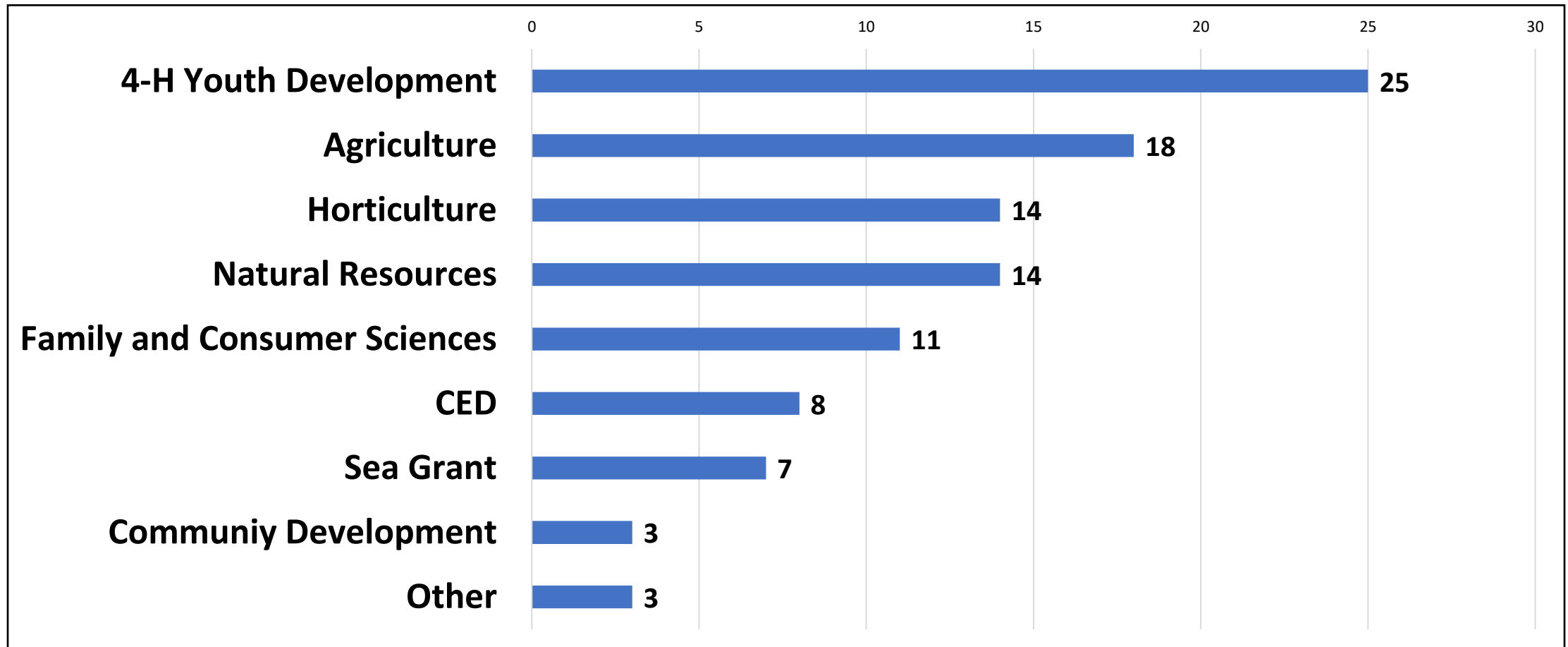


In a West Virginia study, LaVergne (2013) found very strong support for the value of including youth with disabilities in 4-H and concluded that lack of information about 4-H programs was the primary challenge to having more inclusive programs.

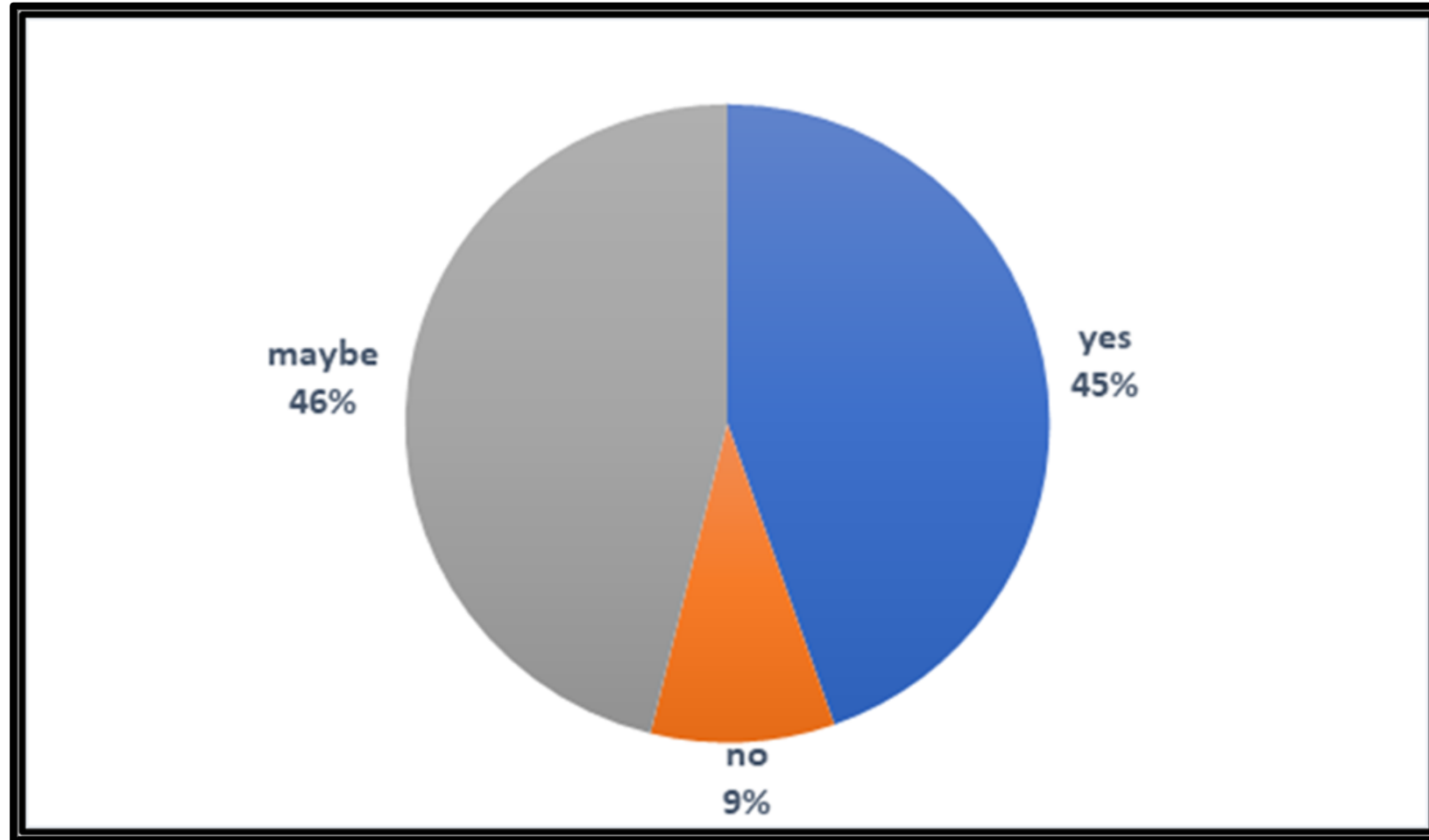
Purpose: To inform program and training needs related to people with disabilities in Florida.

- Surveyed 103 **Extension professionals** about their attitudes and comfort with issue related to disability
- Created and used a needs assessment tool
- Conducted simple descriptive analyses and statistical comparisons

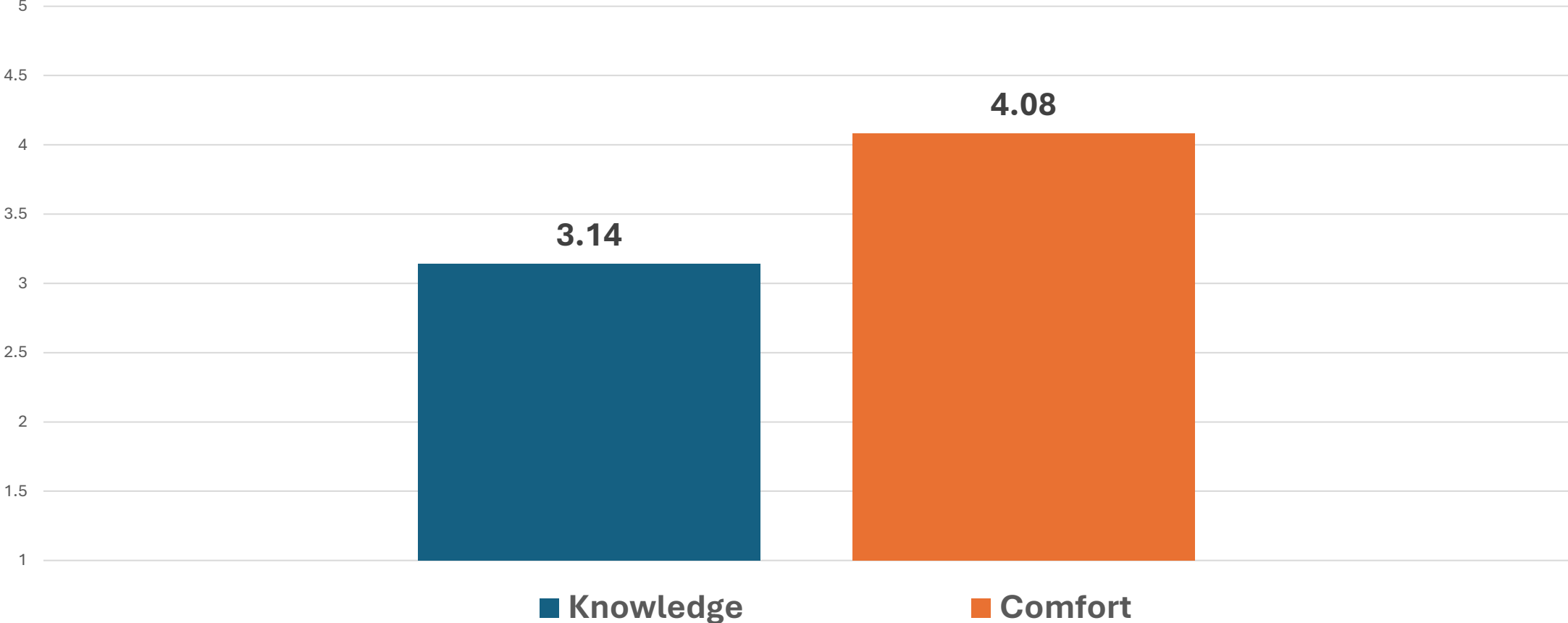
Respondent Roles (n = 103)



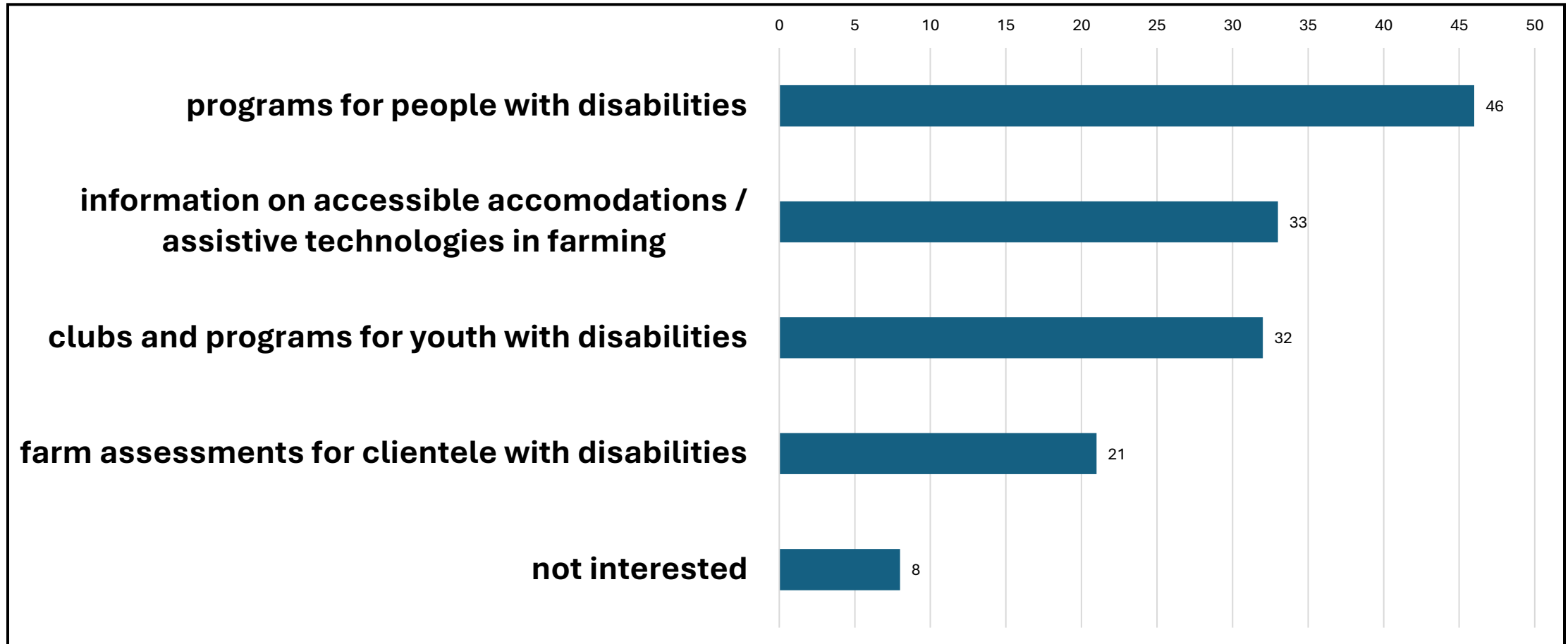
Do you have clientele with a disability?



Knowledge and Comfort Working with People with Disabilities (means)



Are you interested in receiving information on the following topics?



Discussion

- Knowledge/comfort contrast
- Overall interest in disability issues
- Need for more training and support

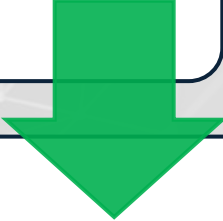


Youth Study




Research says for youth...

The benefits of inclusion for youth with disabilities are seen in academic achievements and socialization (Kart & Kart, 2021)



Studies found that students have positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in school settings (Shalev et al., 2016)



Neurotypical youth benefit from inclusive practices through an increase in tolerance for people with disabilities and a decrease in negative bias towards people with disabilities (Kart & Kart, 2021)

Purpose: To address the gap in information about youth perceptions of disabilities and to use this information as a foundation for youth programming.

- **Surveyed 90 youth**
- Aged 12-18 in UF/IFAS and 4-H settings
- Used the “Brief Questionnaire for Adolescents on Attitudes towards Persons with a Disability” (Álvarez-Delgado et al., 2020)
- Conducted simple descriptive analyses and statistical comparisons across groups based on gender and age

Research Questions

1) Do youth who report knowing somebody with a disability have more positive attitudes about disability than those who do not?

2) Do adolescent attitudes about disability differ according to gender

3) Do adolescent attitudes differ according to the age of the respondents?

Survey Items - Subscales

Acceptance/Rejection

1. I feel uncomfortable when I am beside a person with a disability.
2. I would not go to a place where they knew me with a person with a disability.
3. If I had a close family member with a disability, I would avoid mentioning it to other people.
4. When I am with a person with a disability, I do not know how to treat them.

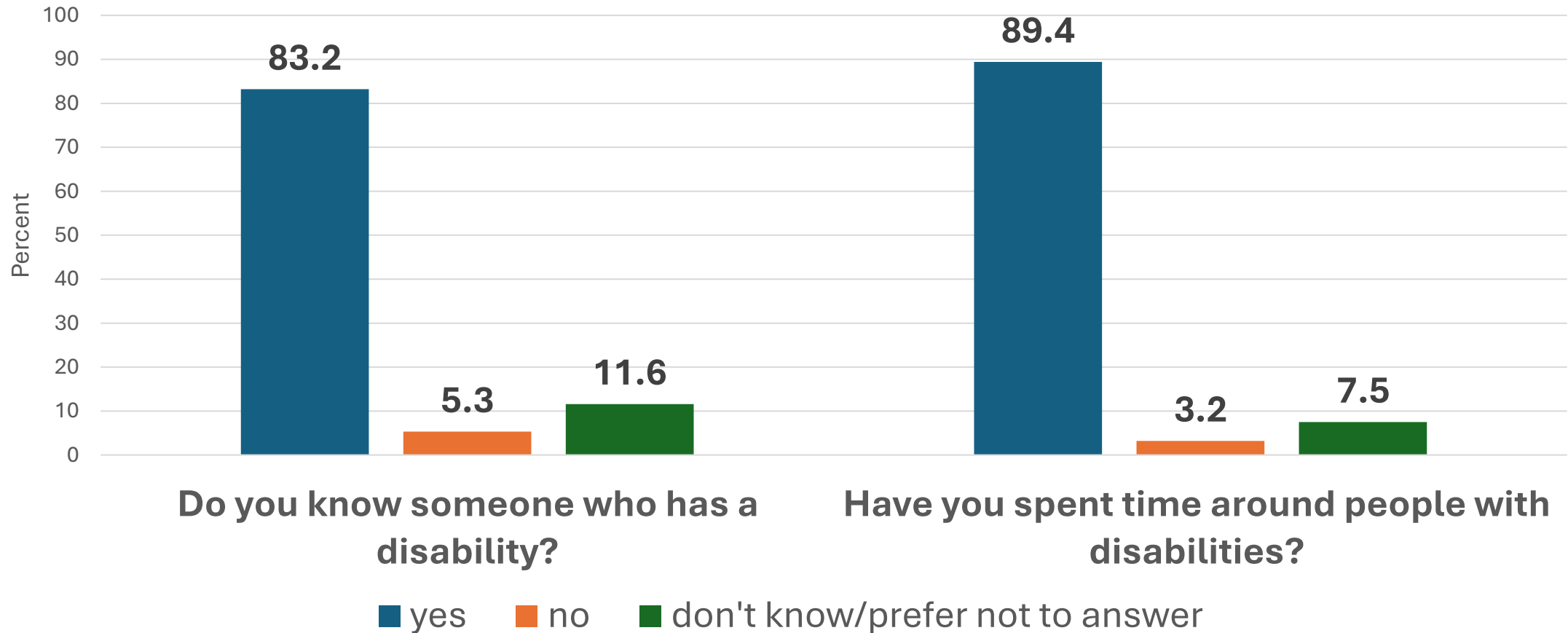
Competence/Limitation

5. Persons with a disability function like children in many aspects.
6. The most appropriate job for a person with a disability is a simple, repetitive one.
7. Persons with a disability should study in Special Educational Centers.
8. Persons with a disability have a more closed circle of friends.

Equal Opportunities

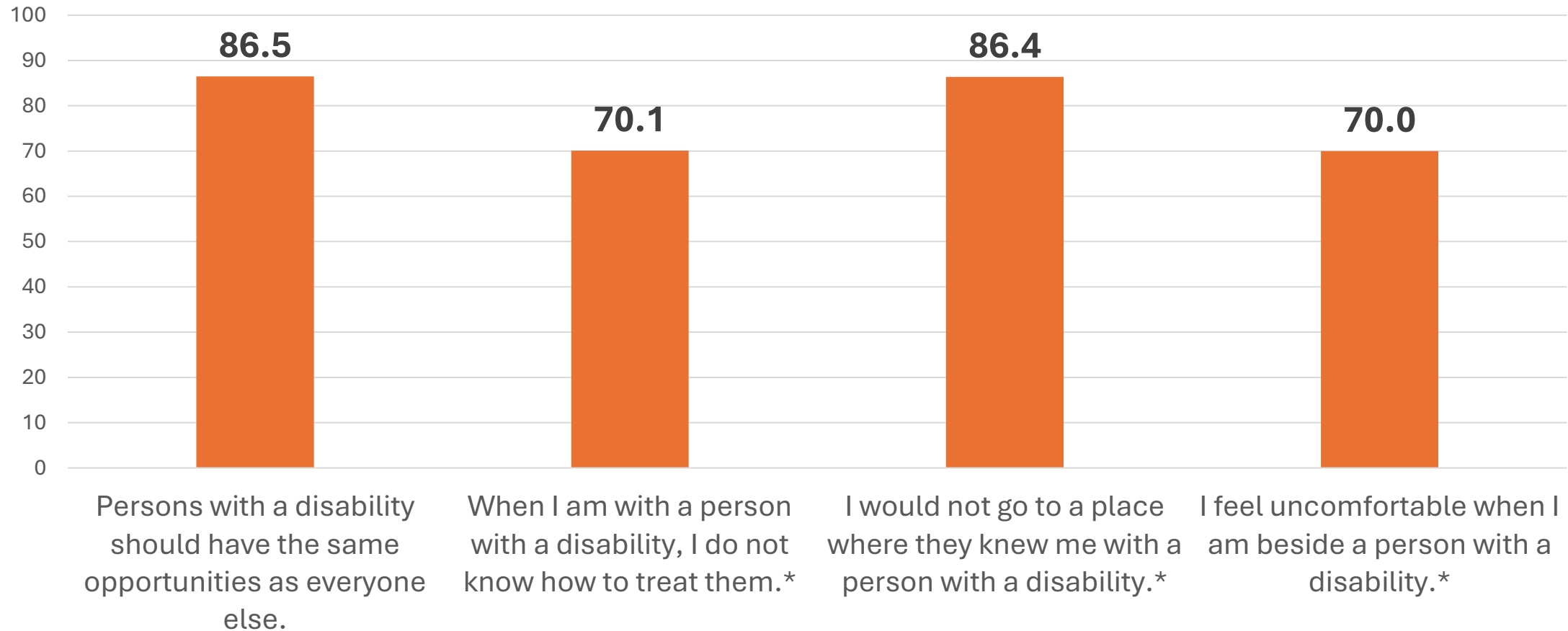
9. Persons with a disability should have the same opportunities as everyone else.*
10. Persons with a disability can practice both individual and team sports.*
11. Persons with a disability should live with others who have the same problem.
12. An unemployed person with no disability should be hired before another unemployed person with a disability.

Experience with Disability



Sample Questions – “Clean”

% who ‘totally agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’



Sample Questions – “It Depends...”

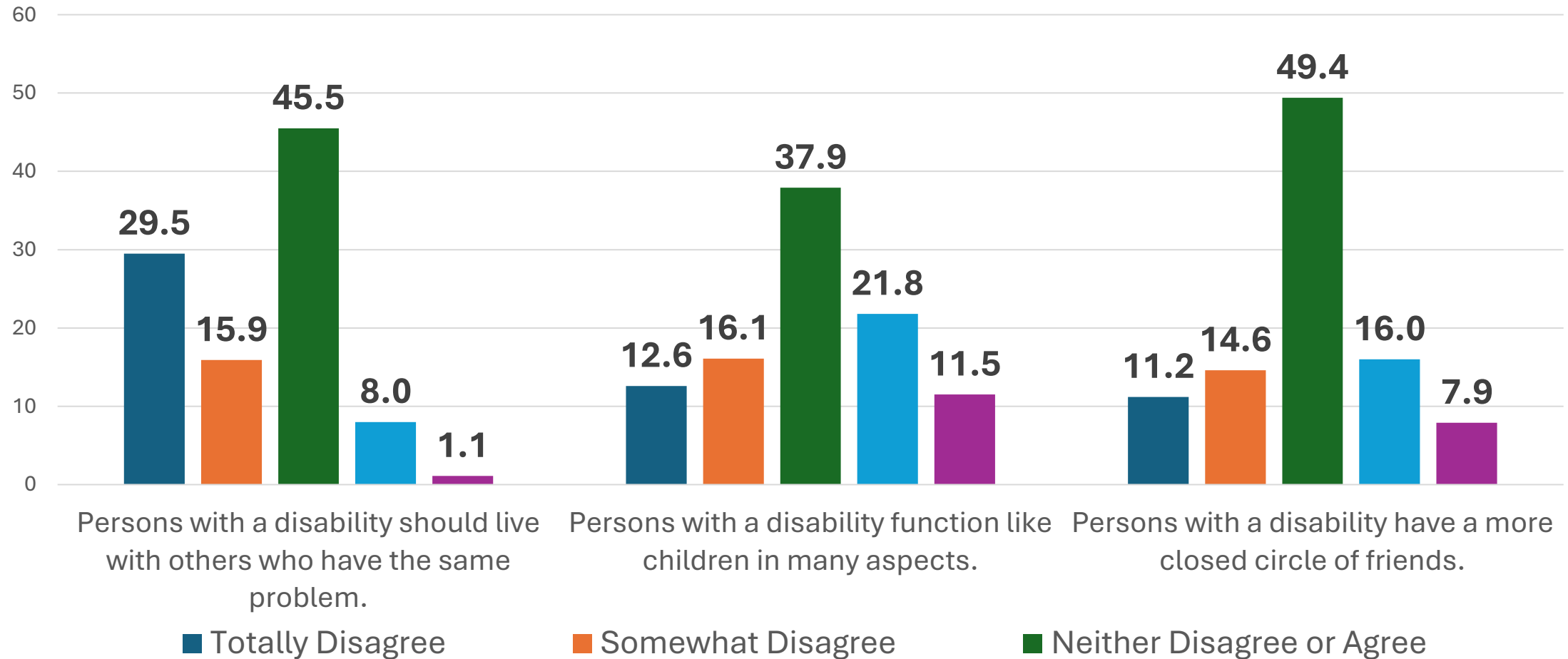



Table 2. Results for Analysis of Difference by Knowing/Not Knowing Somebody with a Disability

Subscale	Means (SD)	Statistical Test
Acceptance/Rejection	Know Somebody. Mean = 1.75 (SD=.828) Do Not Know. Mean = 2.13 (SD=.689)	t(84) = 1.583, p = .059
Competence/Limitation	Know Somebody. Mean = 2.78 (SD=.733) Do Not Know. Mean = 2.45 (SD=.916)	t(84) = -1.468 p = .073
Equal Opportunities	Know Somebody. Mean = 1.87 (SD=.732) Do Not Know. Mean = 1.90 (SD=.617)	t(83) = 0.155 p = .439

Those who knew somebody with a disability had somewhat **more positive** attitudes about disability on the Acceptance/Rejection subscale (p = .059), while those who knew somebody with a disability had somewhat **less positive** attitudes about disability on the Competence/Limitation subscale (p = .073).

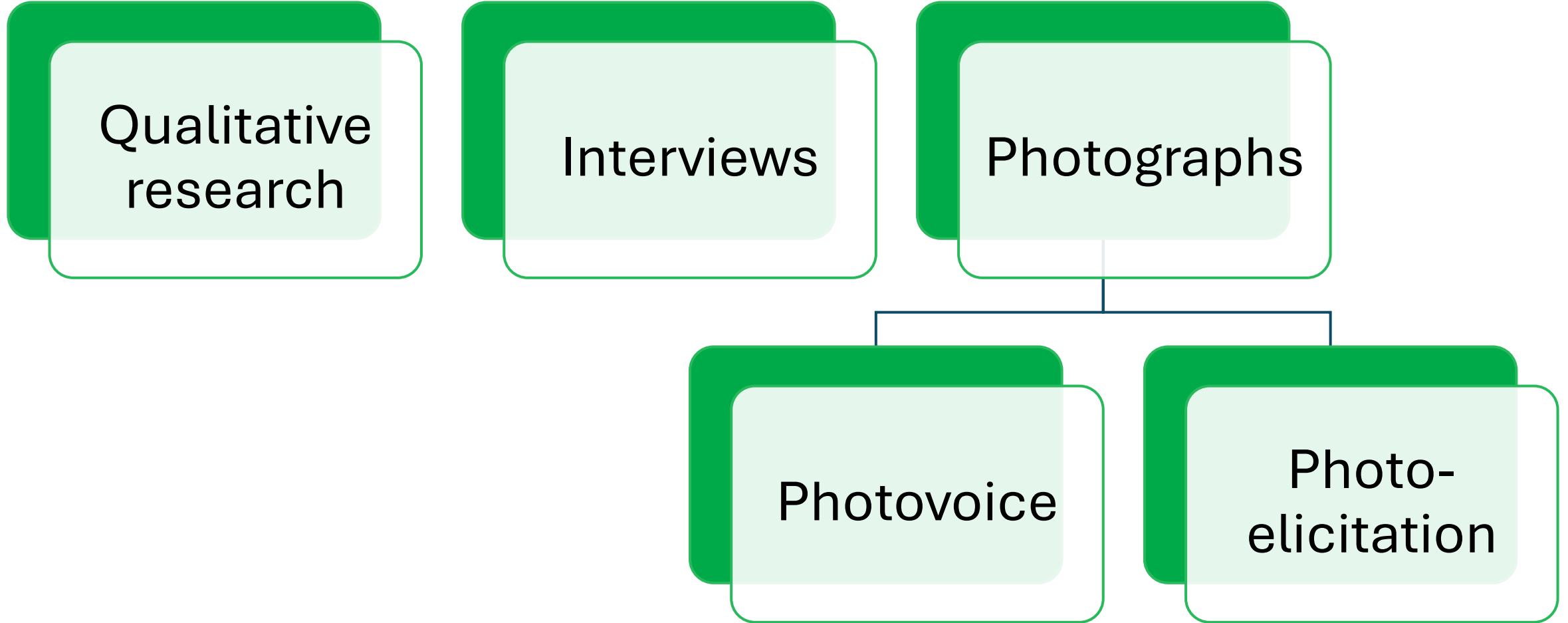
Research says for programming...

Components of information, awareness, and education in training opportunities, paired with positive experiences, are effective methods to increase knowledge (Fisher & Purcal, 2017)



Interactions and direct contact with people with disabilities help promote knowledge and experiences, which can also promote affirmative attitudes (Li & Wang, 2013; Seewooruttun & Scior, 2014; Wang et al., 2021)

Next Steps



Audience Discussion

- What research have you done?
- What methodology have you used?
- What kinds of research are you interested in?
- Questions?

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