

# The 8th Australian Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health SSASH 8

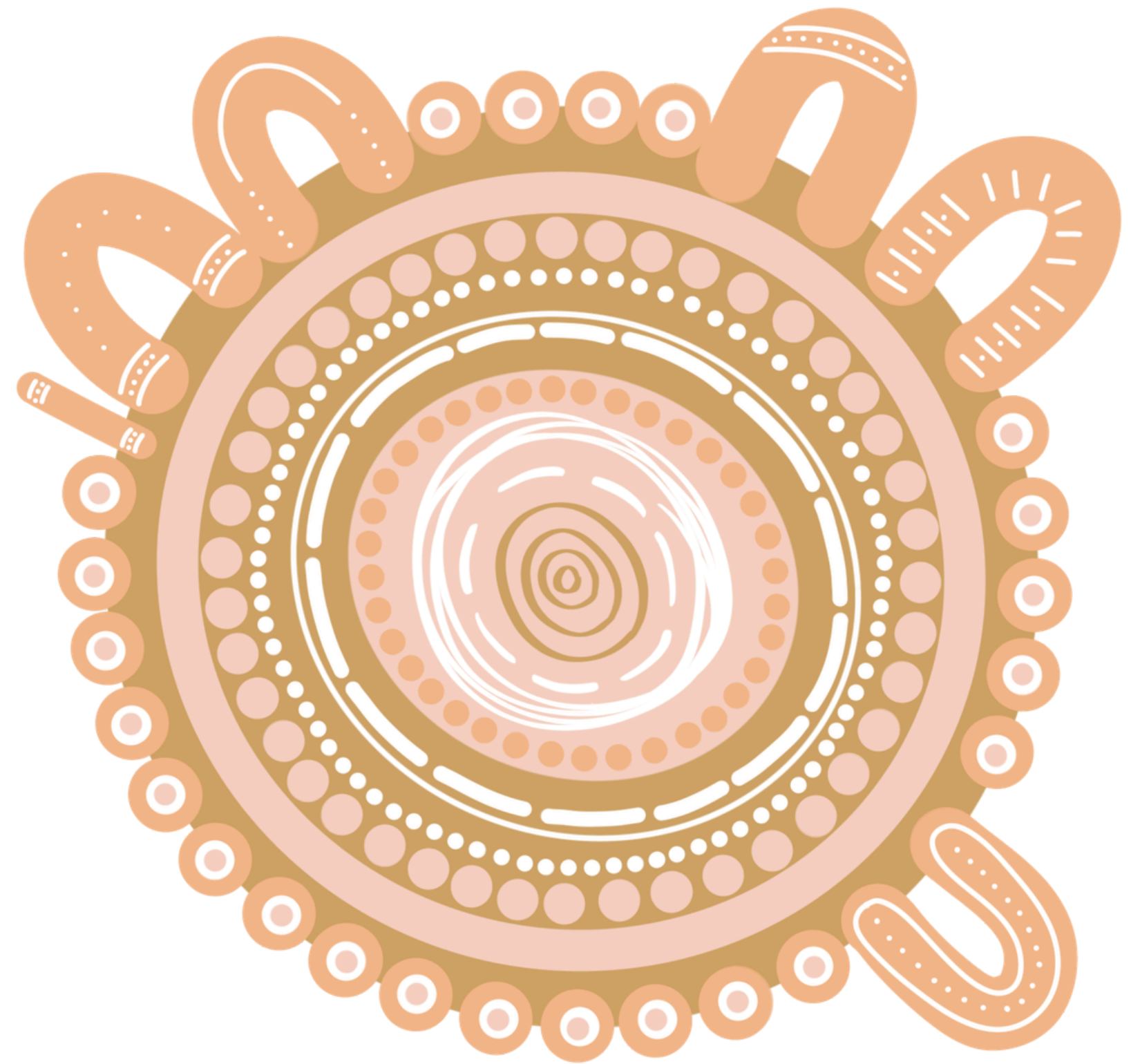
Sylvia Kauer, Jennifer Power, Bridie Duffus and Adam Bourne



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

La Trobe University acknowledges our campuses are located on the lands of many Traditional Custodians in Victoria and New South Wales. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society.

La Trobe University is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and communities, through teaching, learning, research and partnerships across all our campuses.



# HOW TO USE THIS SLIDE PACK

You are welcome to use these slides in your own work.

**Please ensure that the SSASH 8 report is cited.**

**Full report available here:**

<https://ssashsurvey.org.au/reports>

## **Suggested citation**

Power, J., Kauer, S., Duffus, B. & Bourne, A. (2026). *The 8th Australian Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University. Melbourne, Australia. <https://doi.org/10.26181/31958556>

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# SSASH 8

▶ Periodic cross-sectional survey of students aged 14-18 years

▶ Funded by the Australian Department of Health, Disability and Aging since 1992

## Topics covered in the survey:



About the individual



Access to Sexual Health Care



Intimate partner violence



Sex and relationships



Digital Sexual Experiences



Communication about sex and relationships



Condoms and contraception

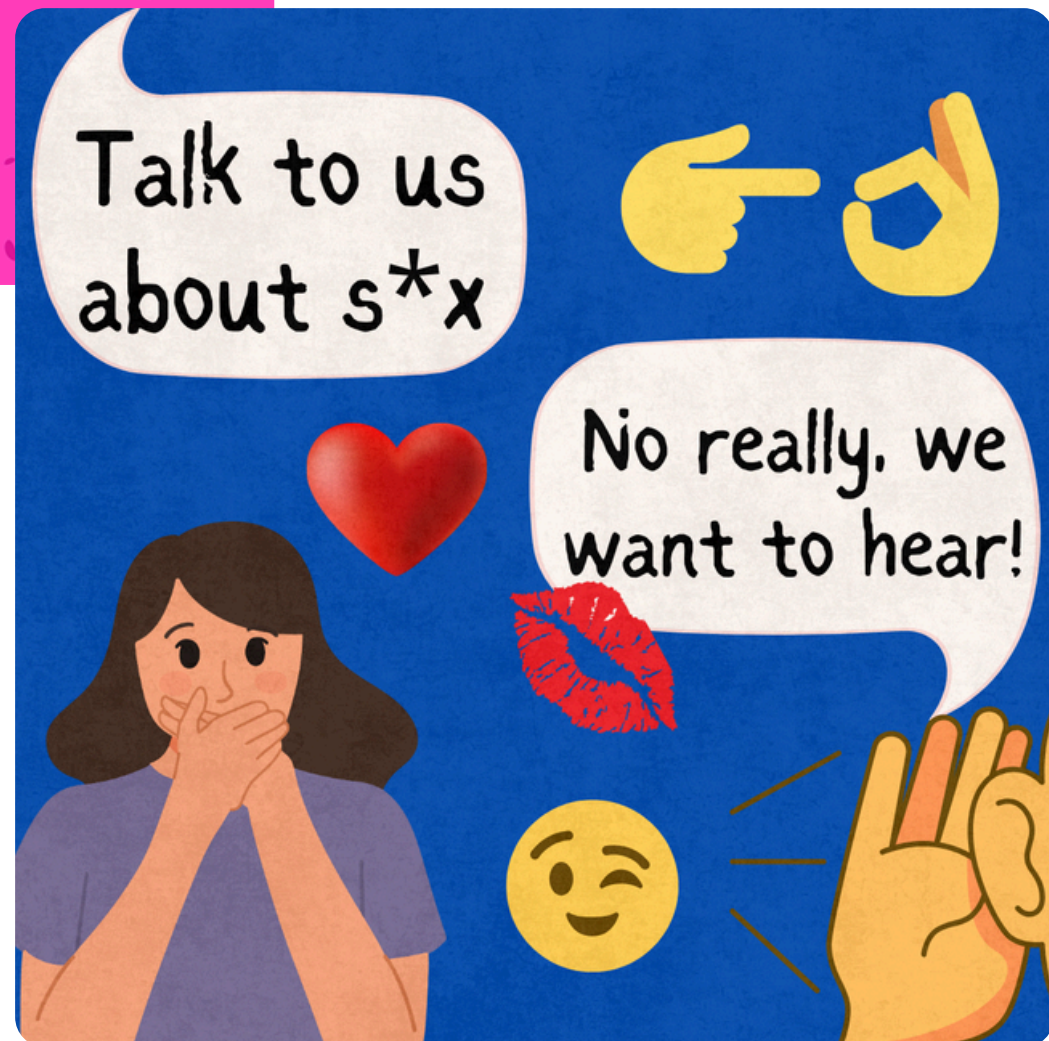


Unwanted sexual experiences



School-based sex education

# RECRUITMENT



Youth survey panel



Flyers in public places



For people aged 14 - 18 years



Anonymous Online survey



Approximately 30 minutes long

# PARTICIPANTS

61%

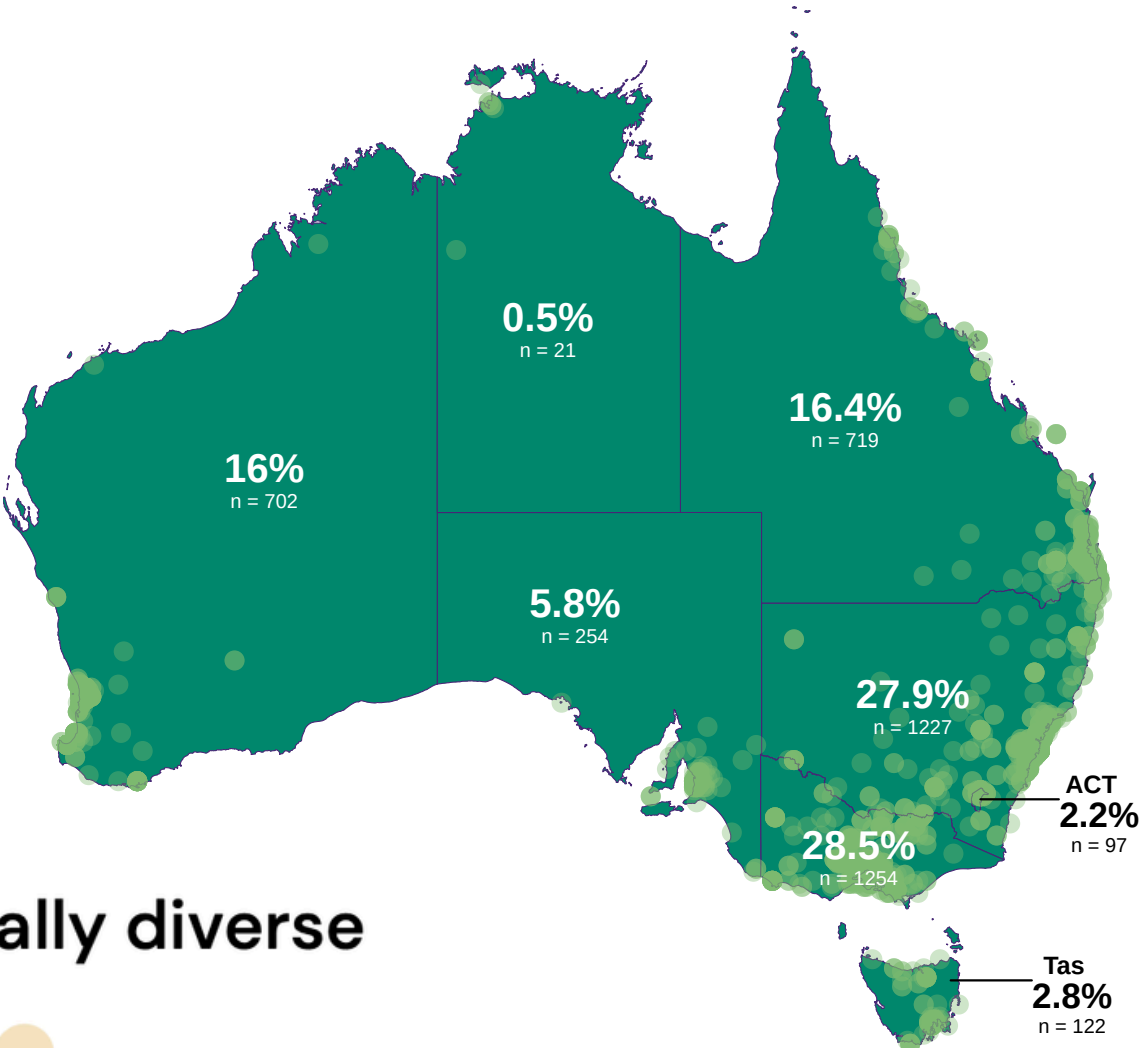
Young women

32%

Young men

24%

Culturally & linguistically diverse



7%

Trans young people

44%

LGBQ+

17 yrs

Average age of participants

n = 4,396



# SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS



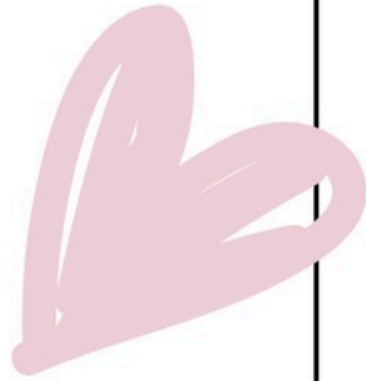
**50%**

Sexually active



Young people typically become sexually active after the age of:

**15yrs**



**75%**

Enjoyed last sexual experience

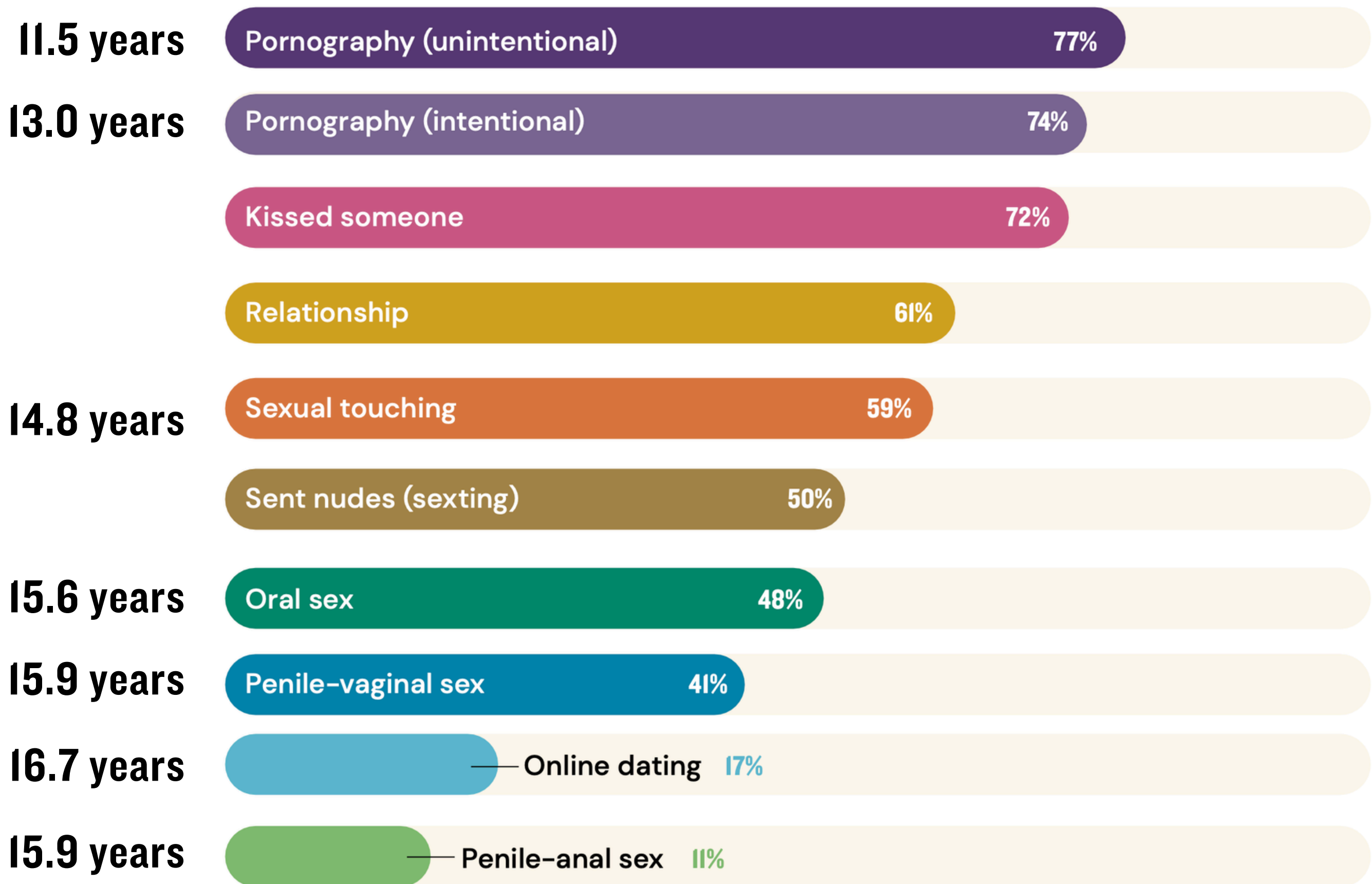
**85%**

Felt safe at last sexual experience



# MEAN AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE

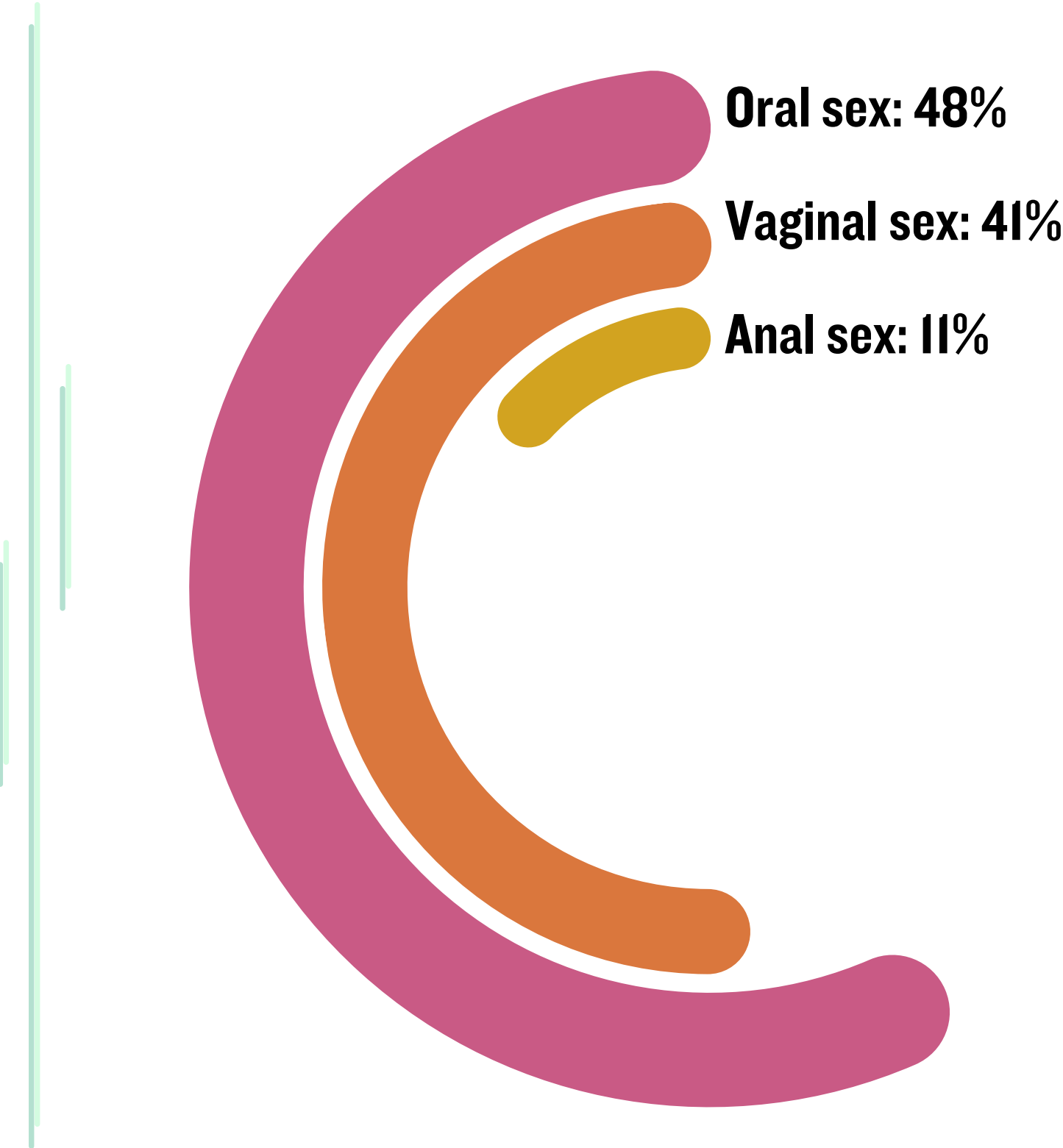
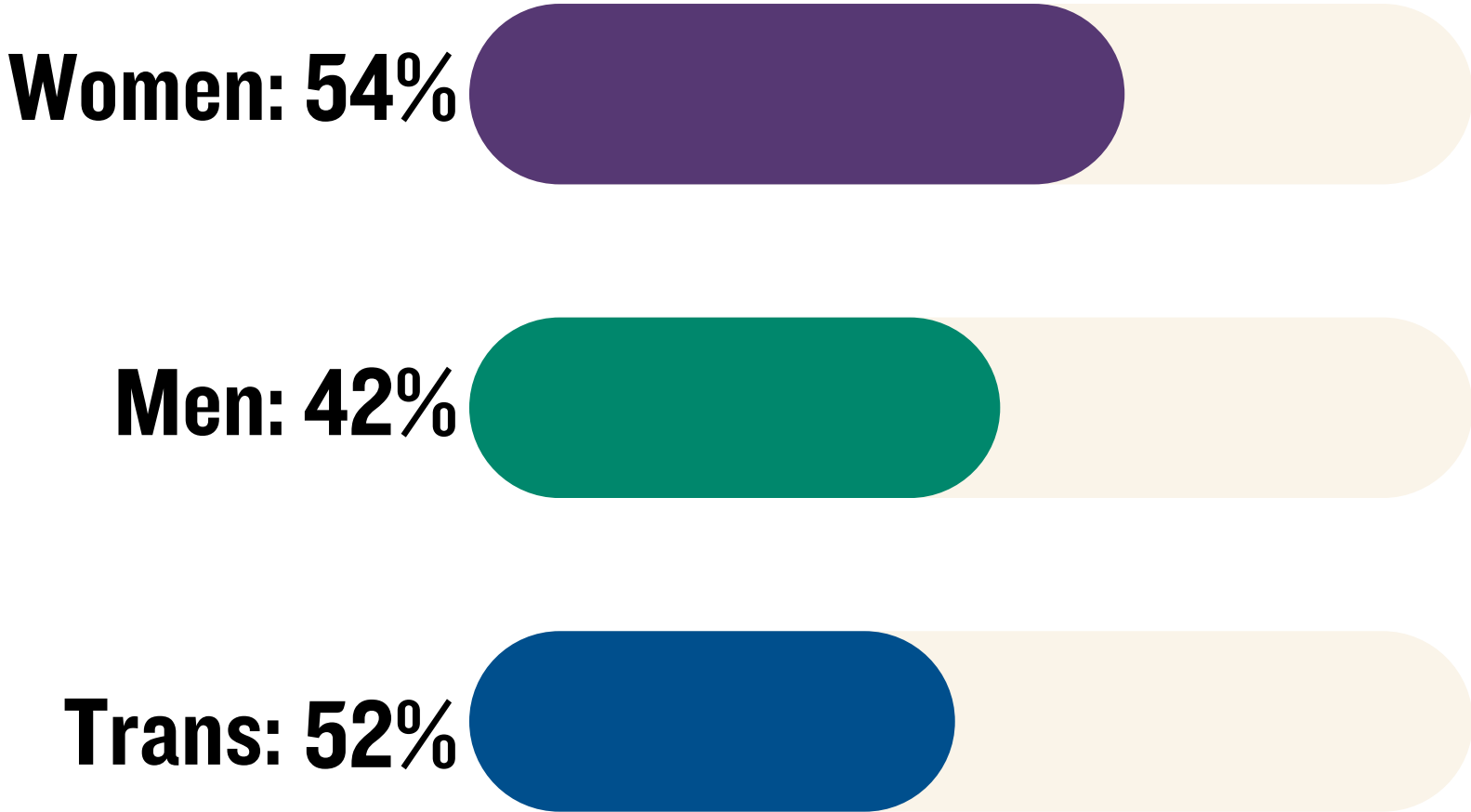
## Sexual practices



# 50% OF YOUNG PEOPLE WERE SEXUALLY ACTIVE

*(Defined as oral, vaginal or anal sex)*

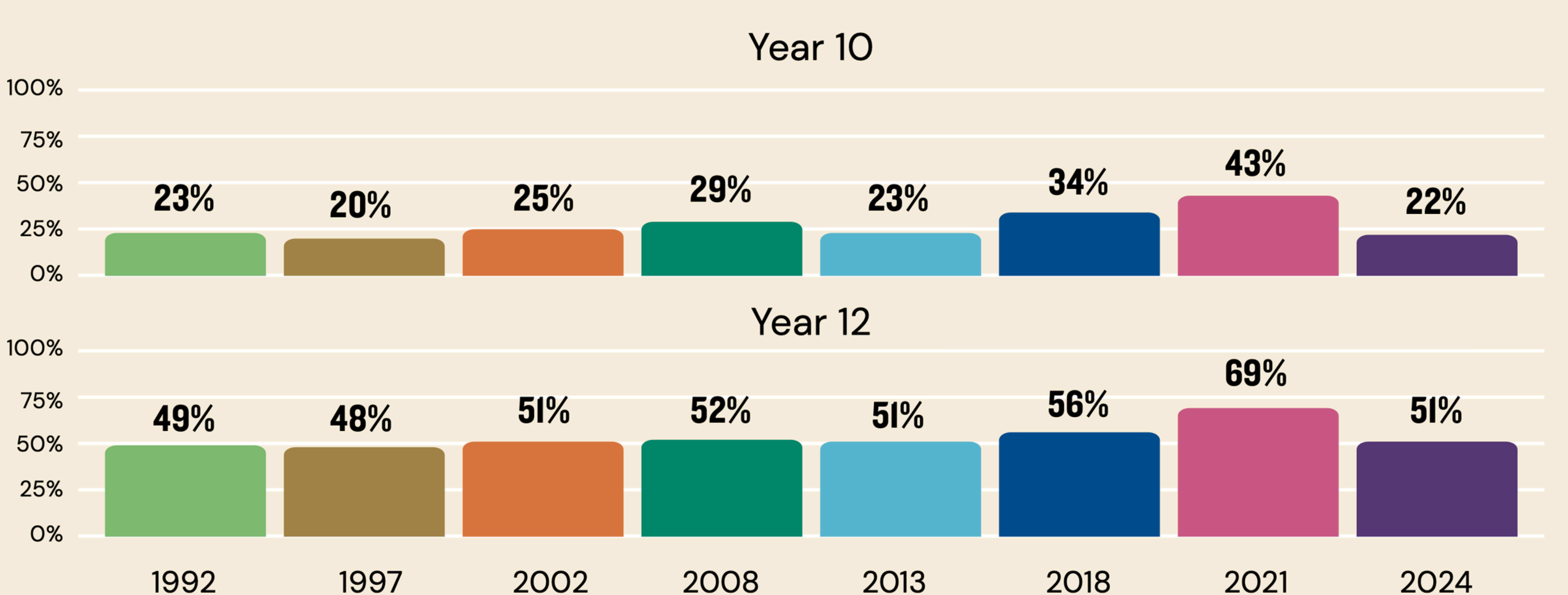
**% of young people  
who were sexually active**



# CHANGES OVER TIME

The number of young people reporting that they had vaginal or anal sex has increased over time.\*

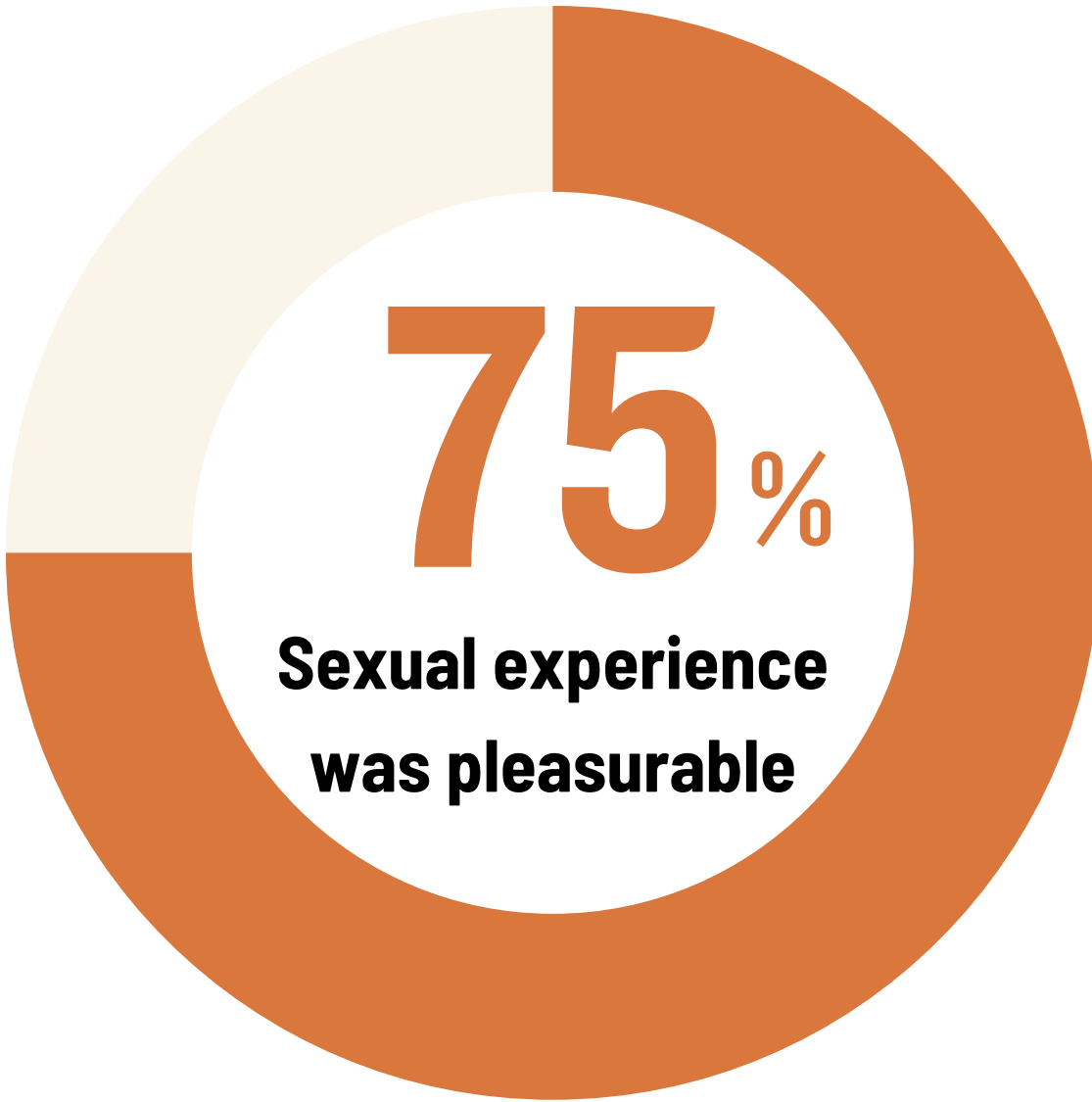
In 1992, 48.8% of Year 12 students reported being sexually active compared to 51% in 2024



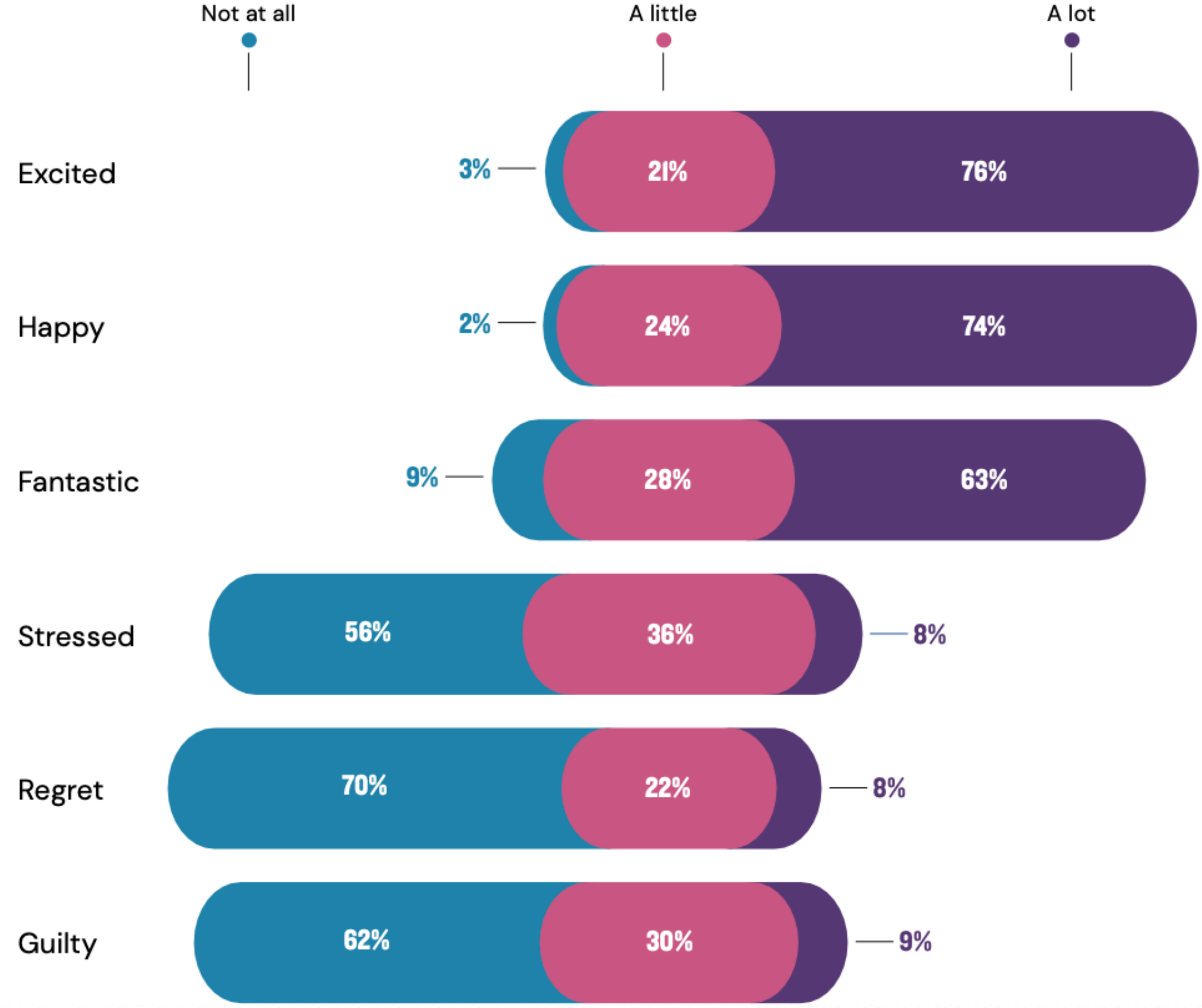
Of Year 10 and Year 12 students

\* May be due to sampling differences

# FEELINGS ABOUT MOST RECENT SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

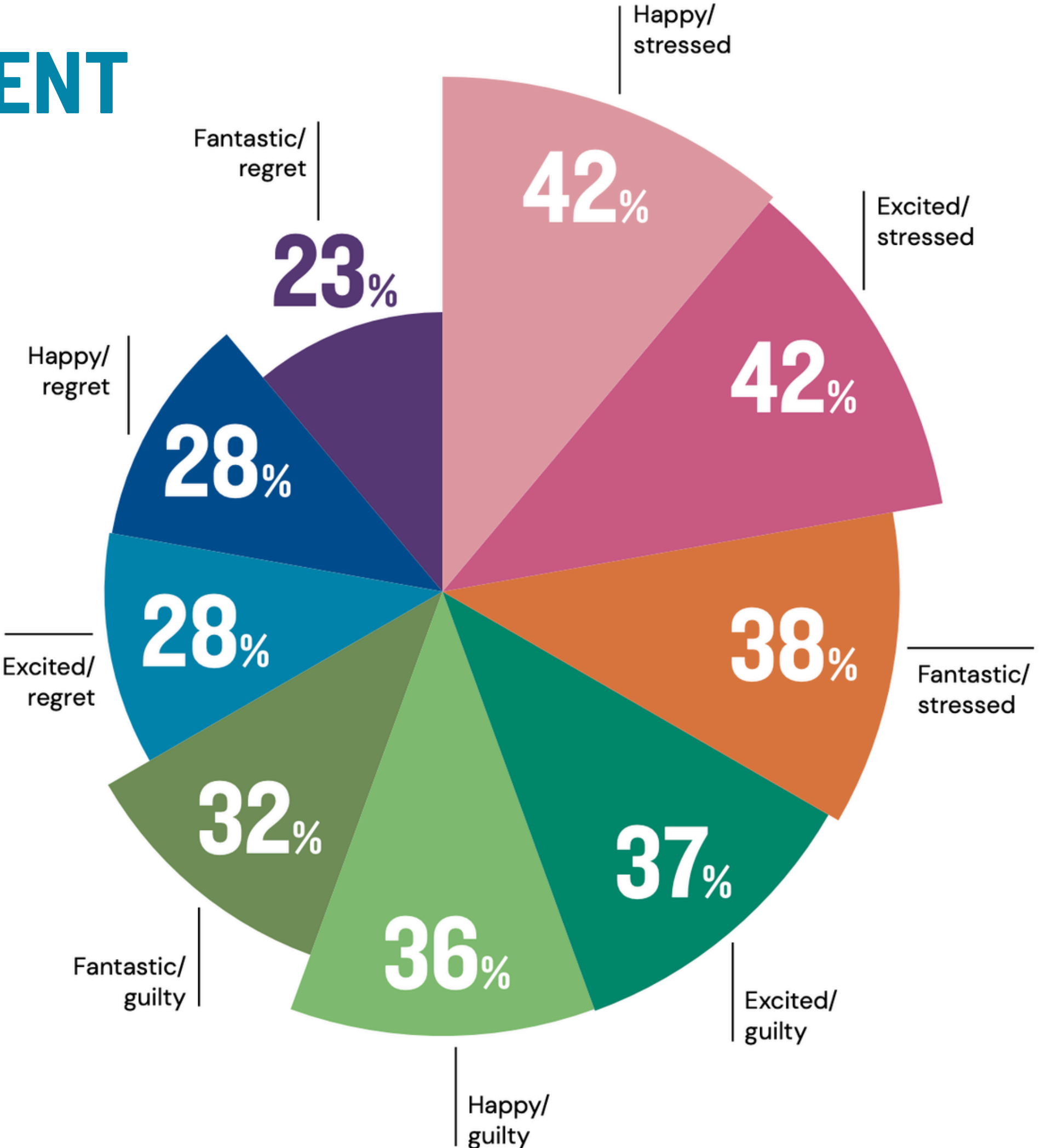


## DID YOU FEEL?



# FEELINGS ABOUT MOST RECENT SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Even though most participants leaned toward positive feelings, many young people reported both positive and negative feelings about their most recent sexual encounter





# CONDOMS & CONTRACEPTION

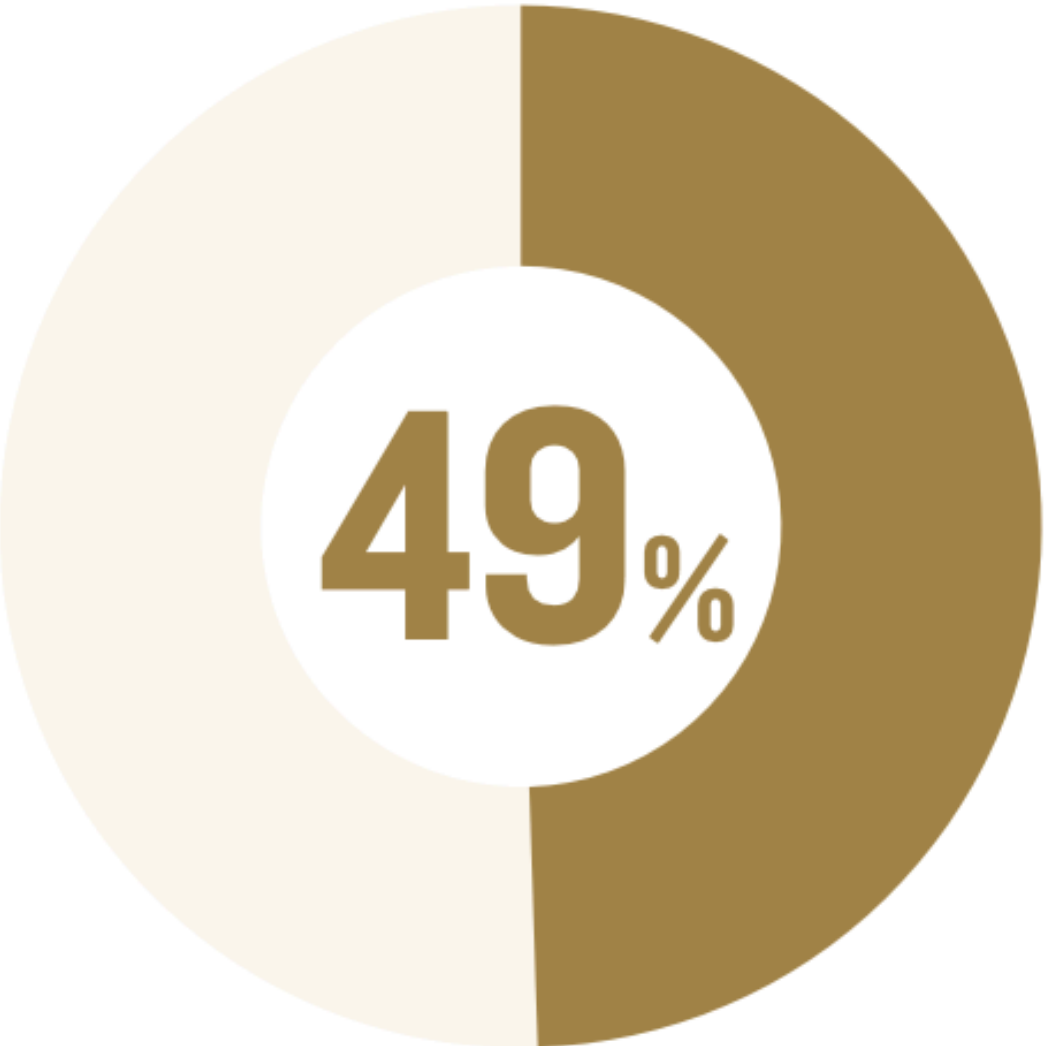
# CONDOM USE AND FREQUENCY



Condoms available



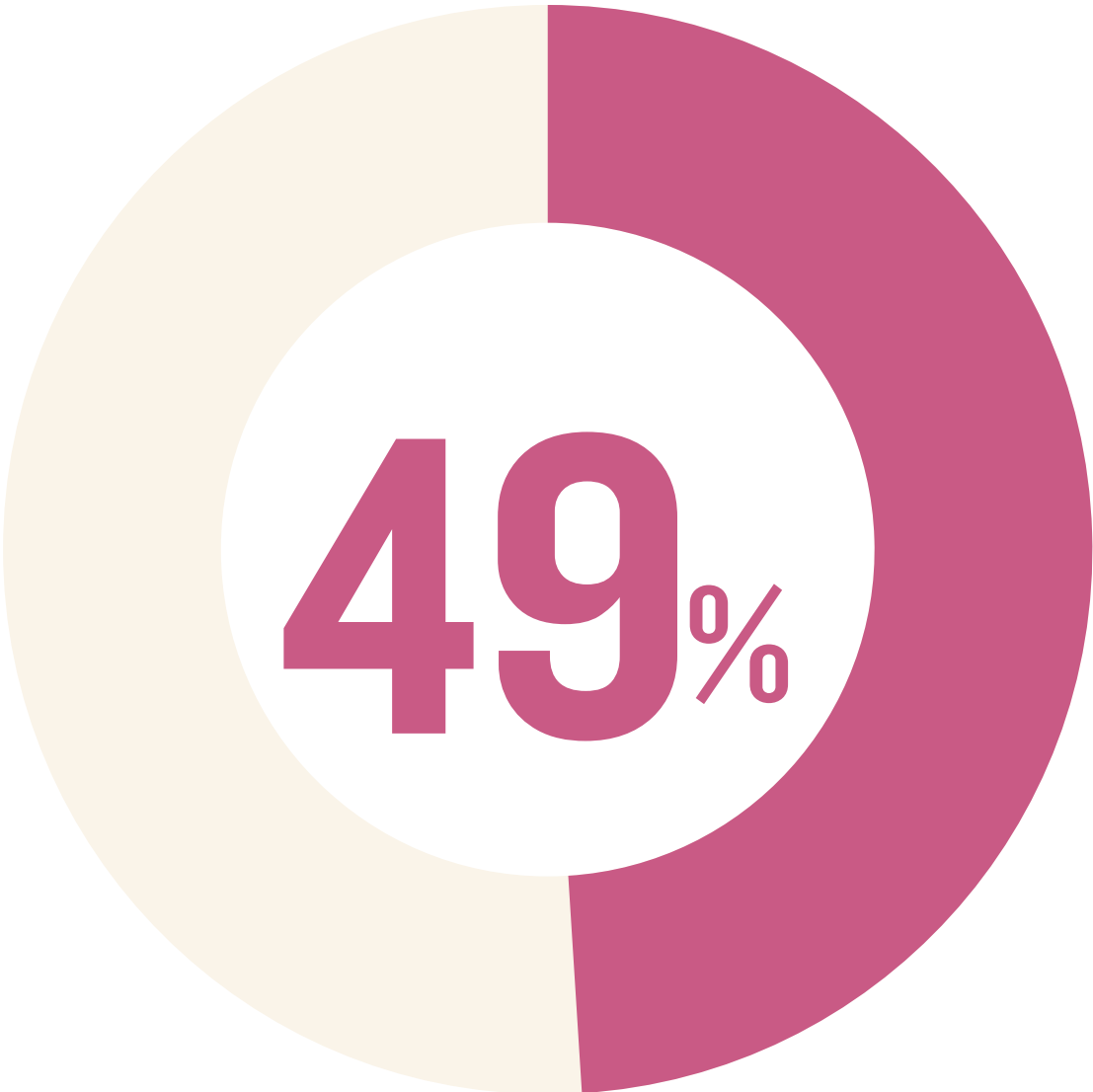
Condoms used



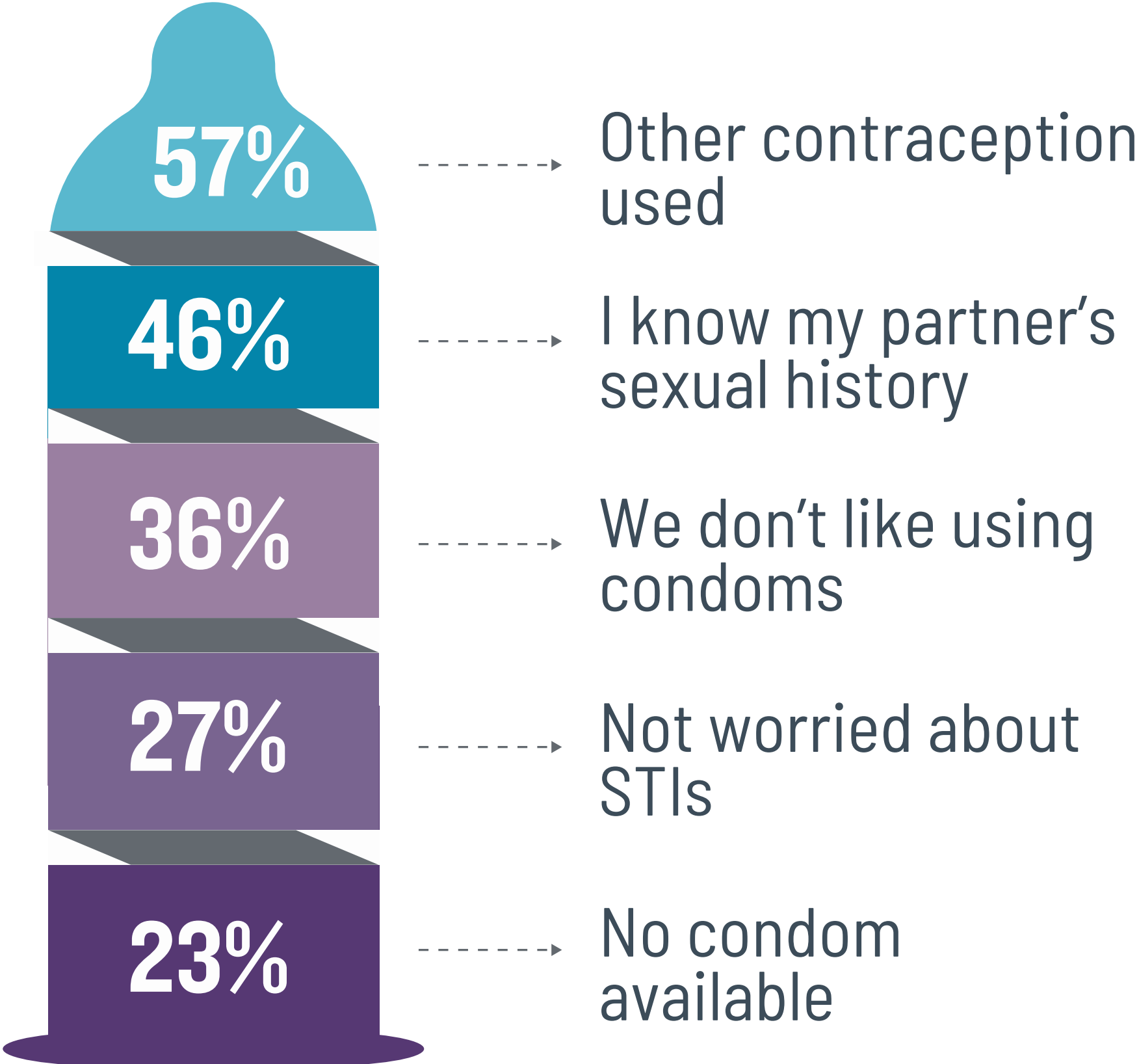
Condoms not used



# SOME REASONS FOR NOT USING A CONDOM



Did not use a condom during their most recent sexual experience



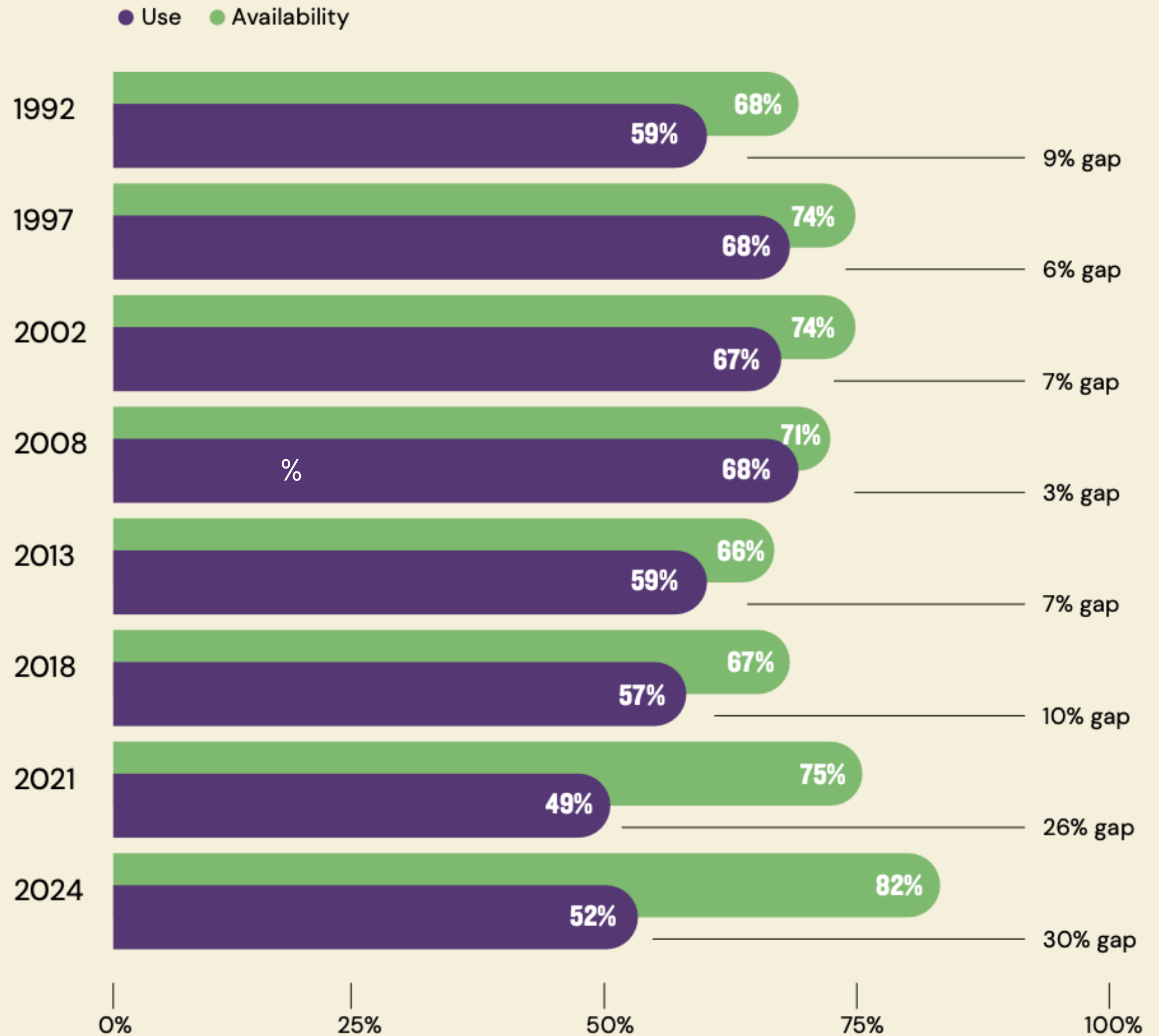
# CHANGES OVER TIME

Of Year 10 and Year 12 students

The number of students reporting that condoms were available was highest in 2024\*

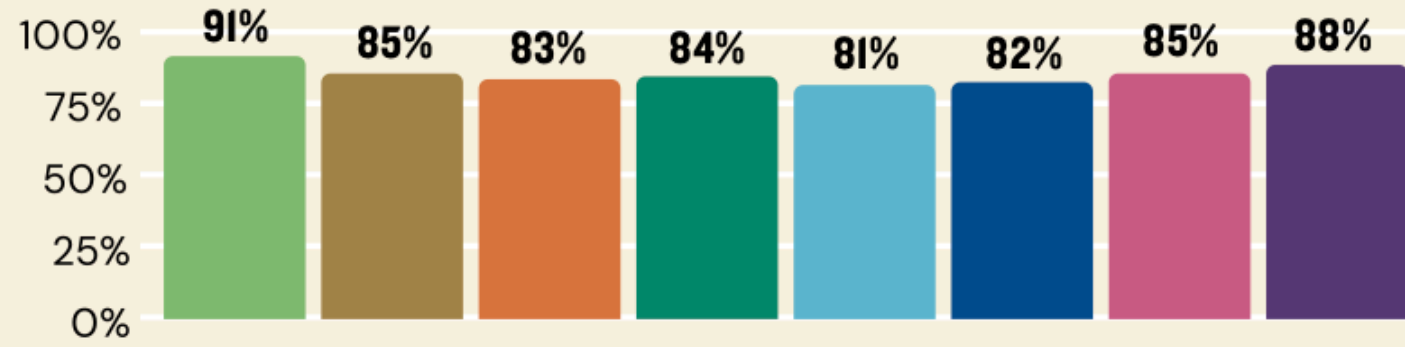
\* May be due to sampling differences

***MANY YOUNG PEOPLE  
ARE NOT USING  
CONDOMS EVEN THOUGH  
ONE WAS AVAILABLE***

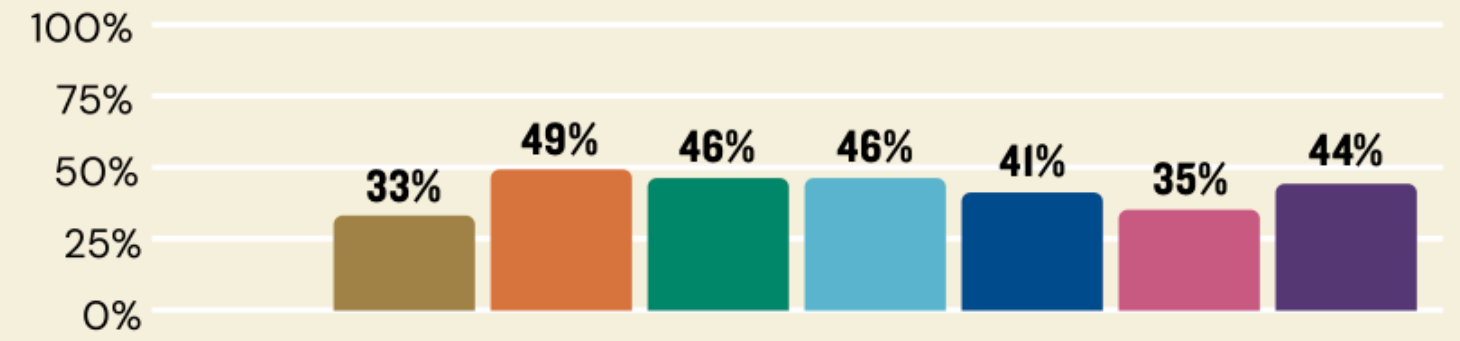


# CHANGES OVER TIME STI KNOWLEDGE

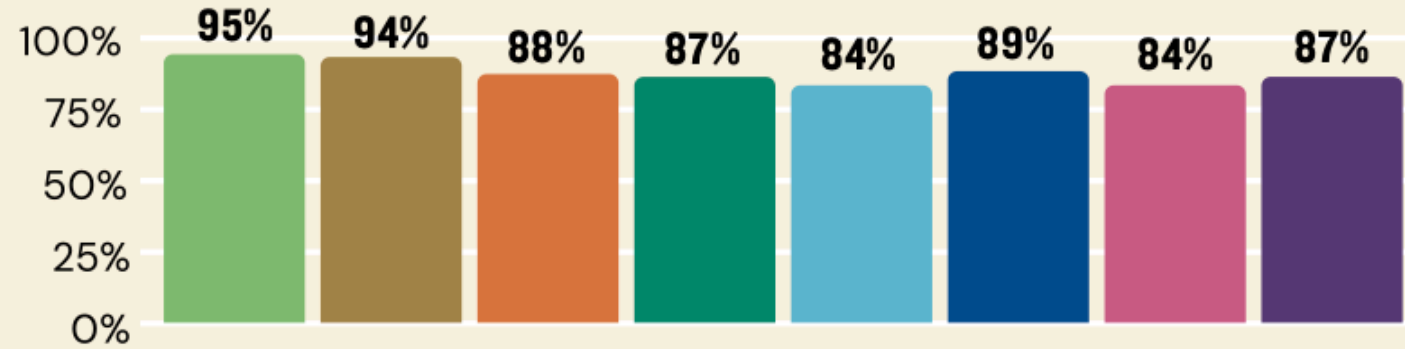
You can catch an STI from someone who doesn't have signs or symptoms of an STI (true)



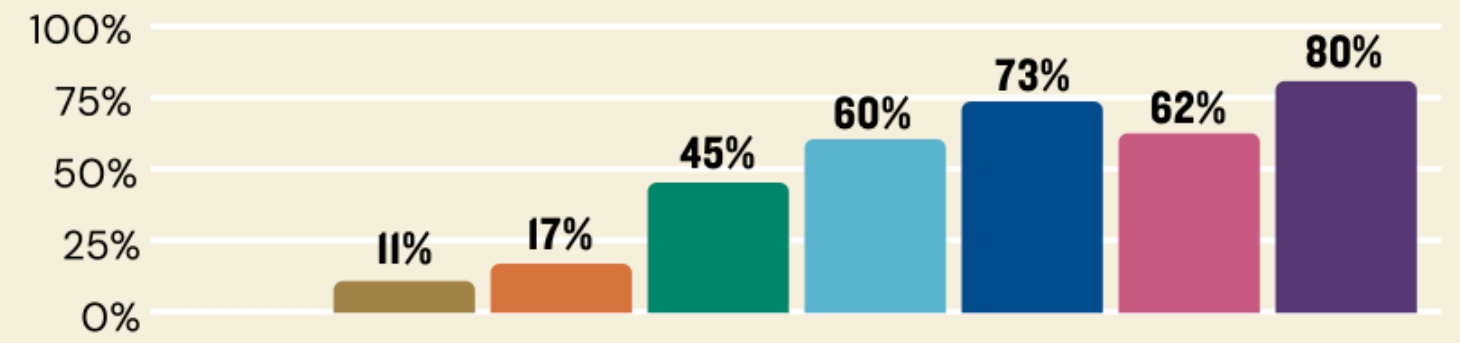
Once a person has caught genital herpes, they will always have the virus (true)\*



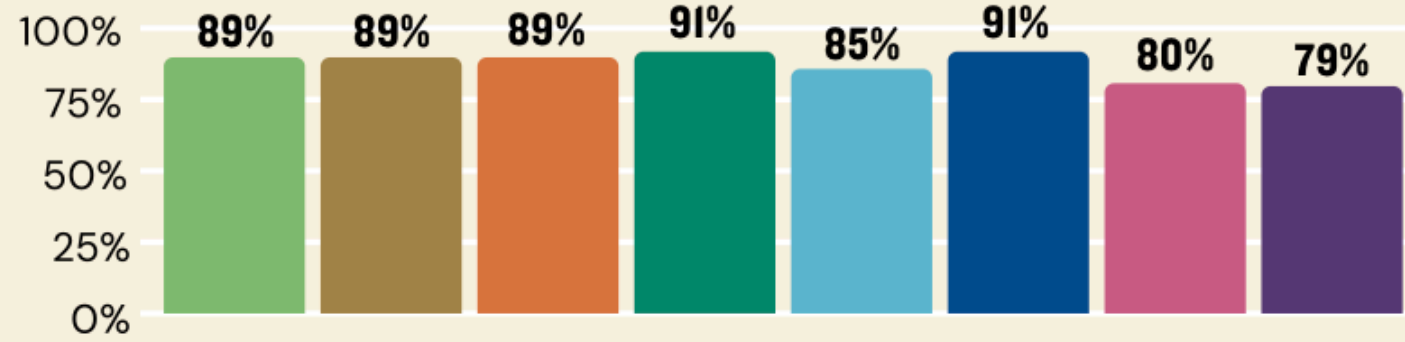
Condoms help prevent people from getting HIV (true)



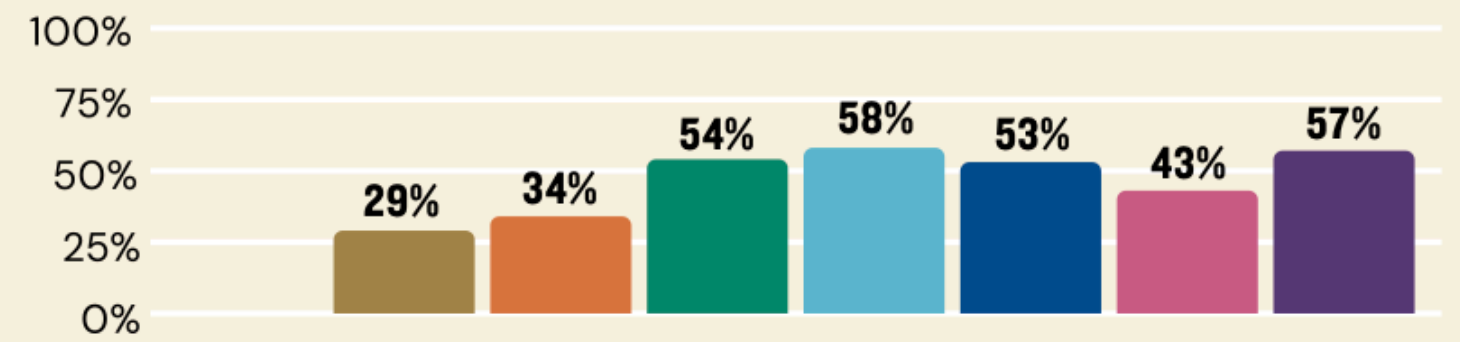
Chlamydia only affects women (false)\*



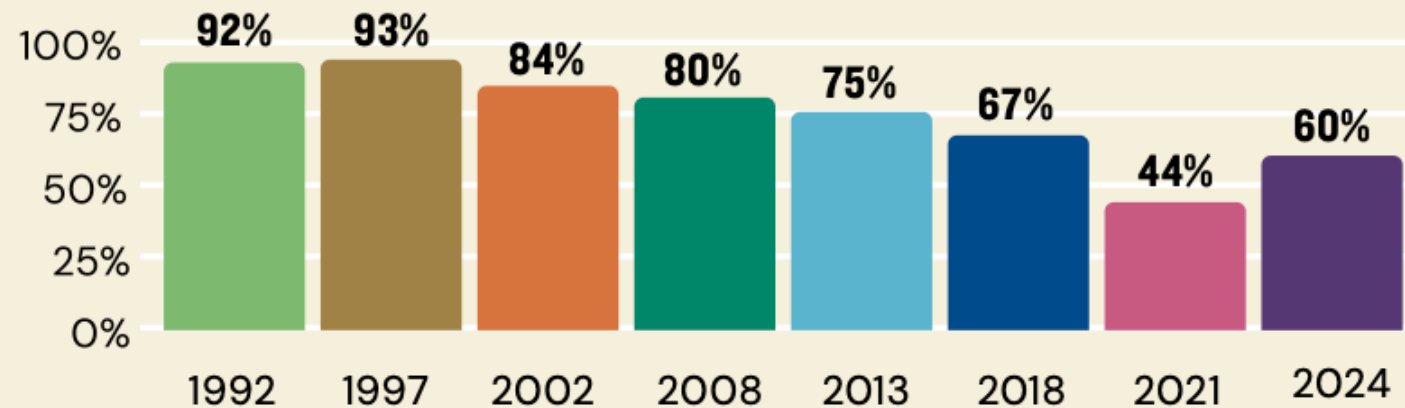
The contraceptive pill protects a person from HIV (false)



If left untreated, chlamydia can lead to infertility in women (true)\*



HIV can be spread through coughing or sneezing near other people (false)



1992 1997 2002 2008 2013 2018 2021 2024

Of Year 10 and Year 12 students

# CONTRACEPTION AT MOST RECENT SEX

Evidence-based  
contraception  
(condom, the pill, LARC)

83%

Used a condom

51%

Oral contraceptive  
pill

35%

LARC

17%

Rhythm  
method

14%

10%

Withdrawal

5%

Emergency  
contraception

5%

No contraception



# ACCESS TO SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ACCESS TO CARE

**89%**

Knew that they could ask for an STI test without experiencing symptoms



**68%**

Wrongly believed parents could access their Medicare records until they were 18



**44%**

Did not know they could get a Medicare card before 18 years of age

**41%**

Did not know that sexual health clinics are available without a medicare card



# STI SCREENING AND DIAGNOSES

53%

Know where to get an STI check-up



1.1%

Diagnosed with an STI

12%

Ever had an STI check-up

I'd be embarrassed/  
ashamed if I had an STI

78%

I know how to find a  
doctor for STI testing

53%

STI testing is common  
for young people

24%

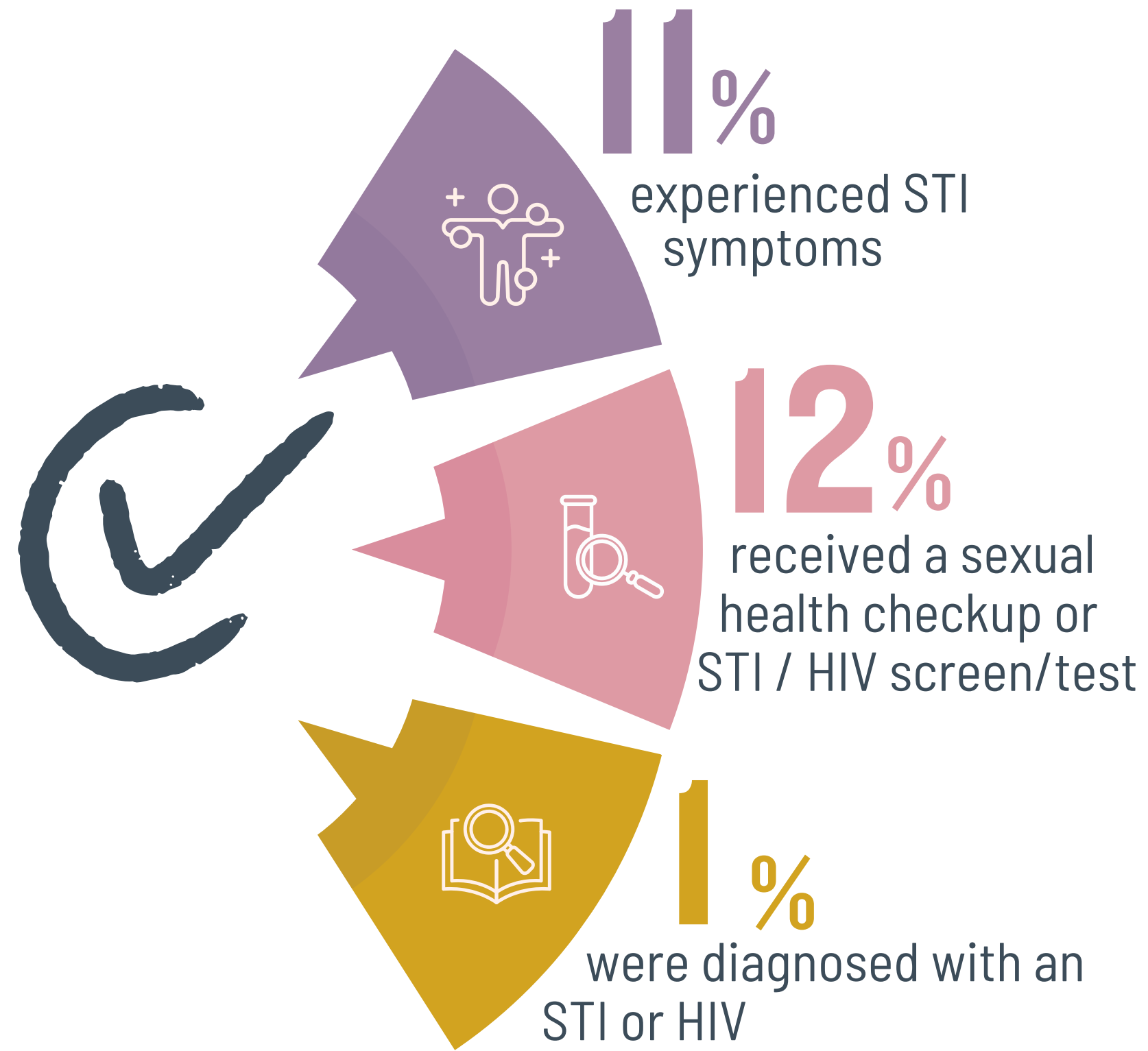
Young people don't  
think about STIs

63%

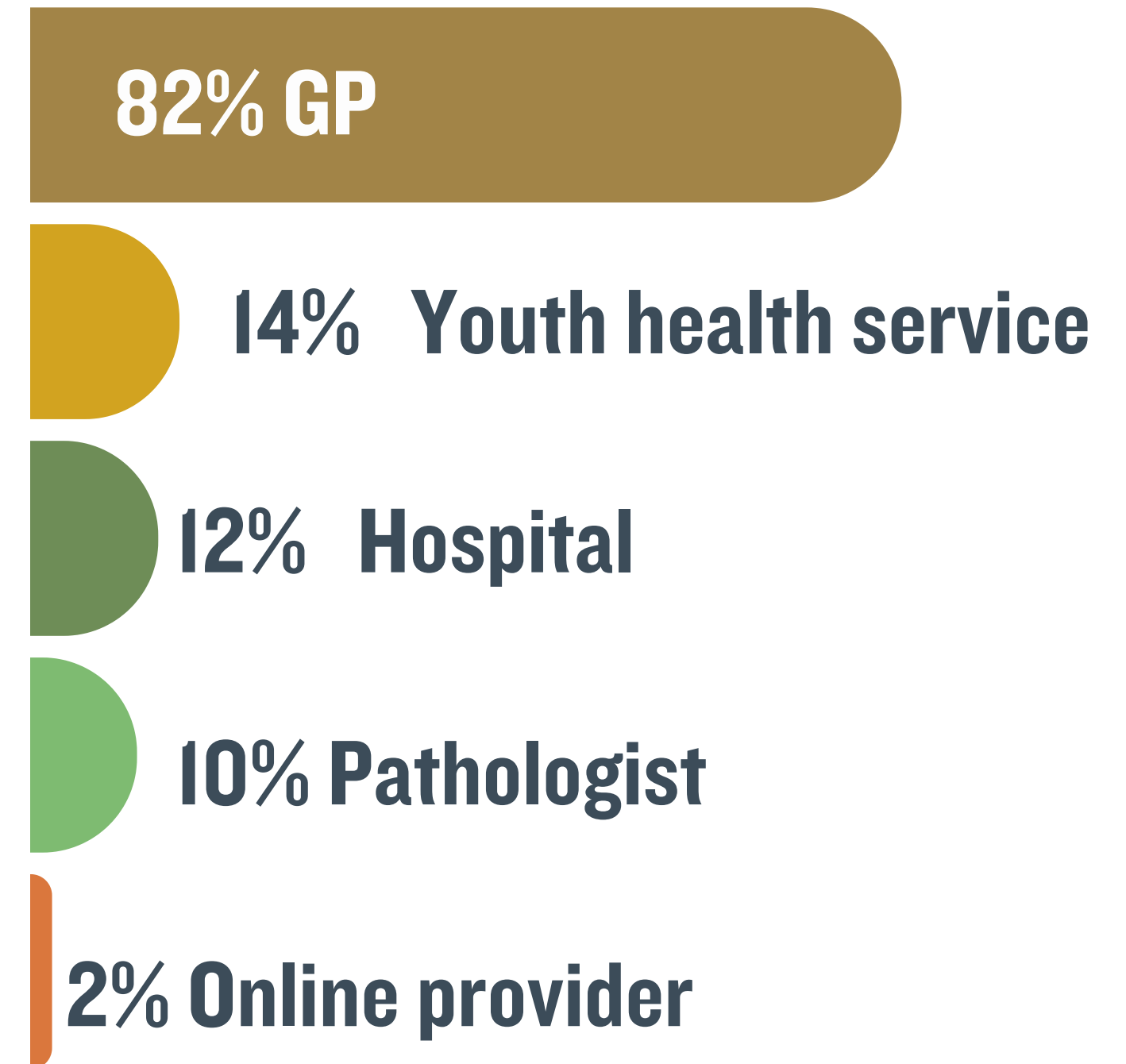
STIs can seriously affect  
your health

87%

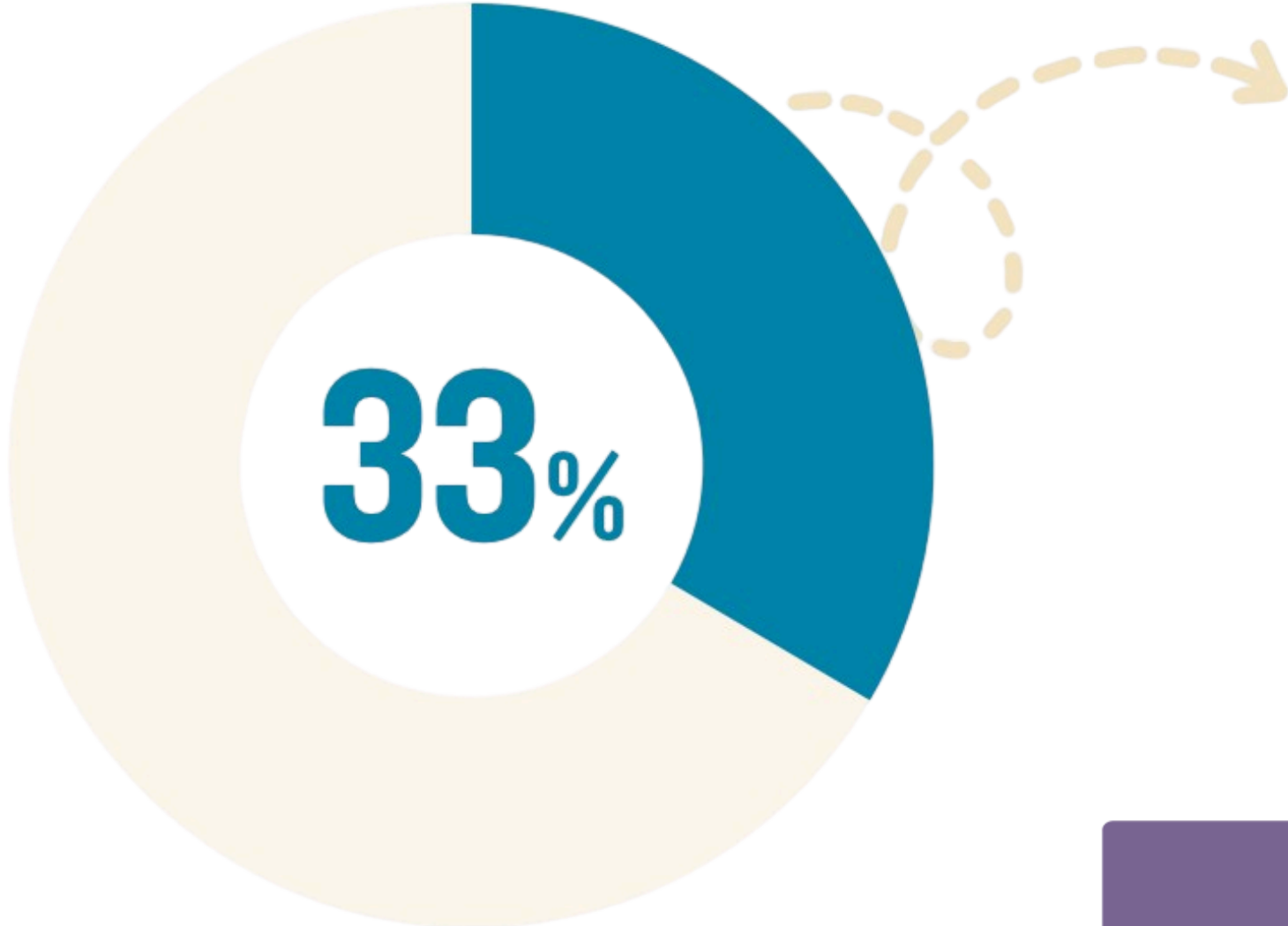
# STI SCREENING AND DIAGNOSES



## LOCATION OF SEXUAL HEALTH CHECKUP

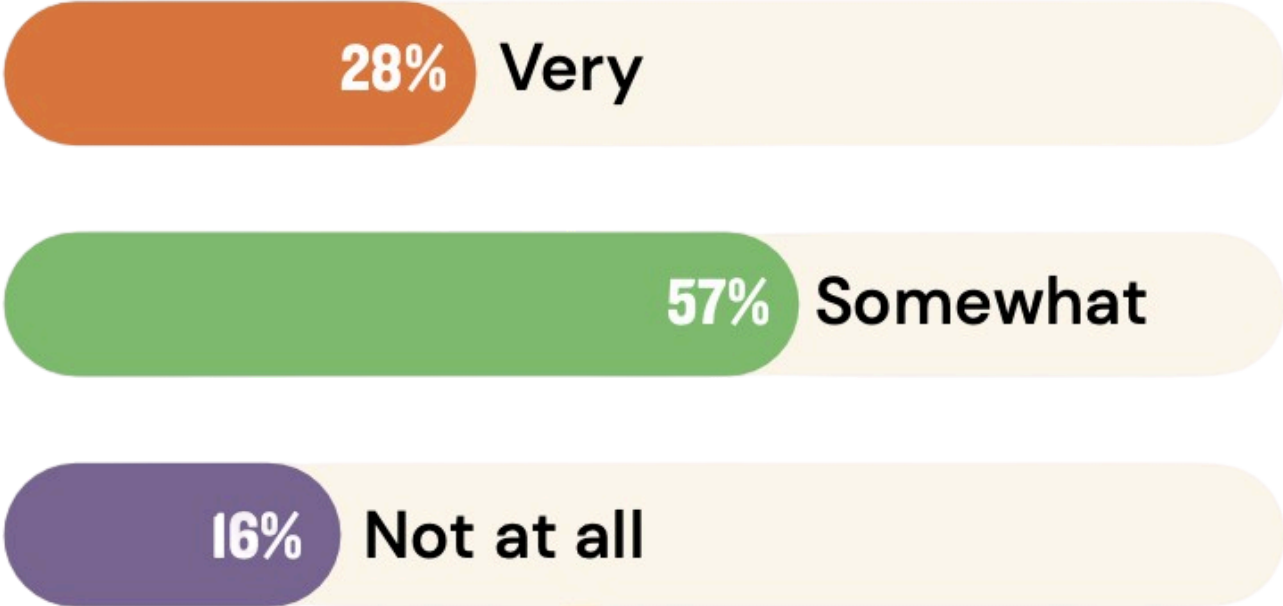


# EXPERIENCES WITH GPs

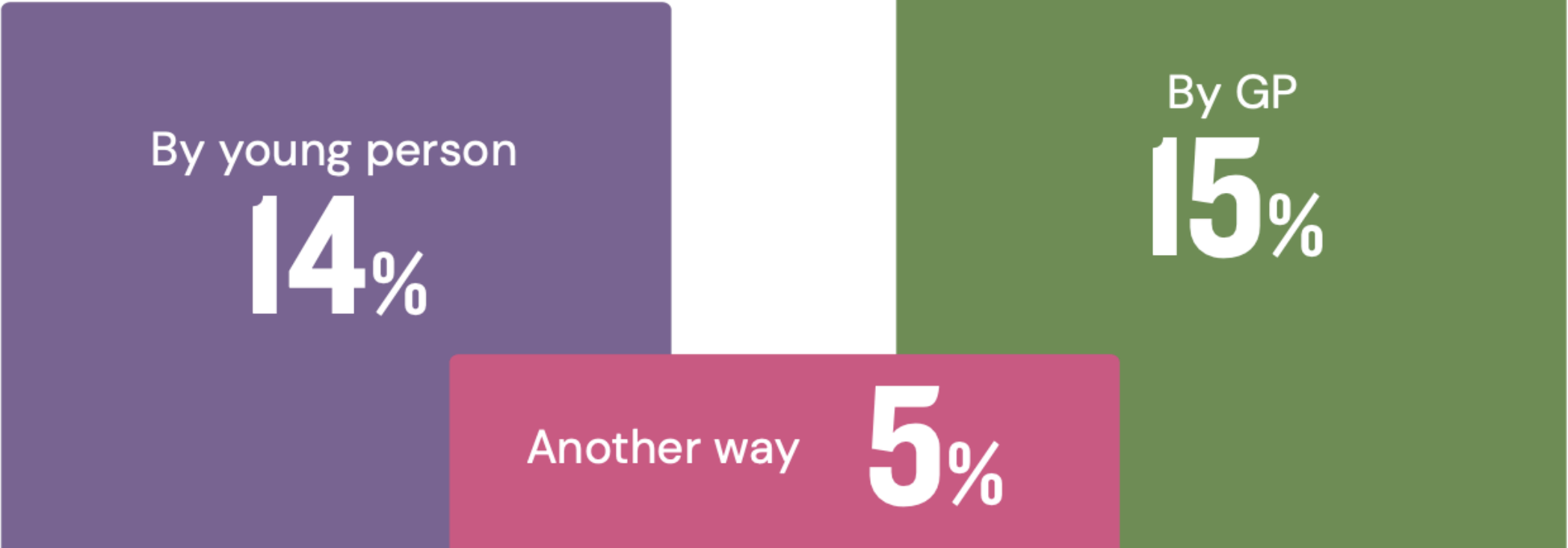


Discussed sex/relationships with GP

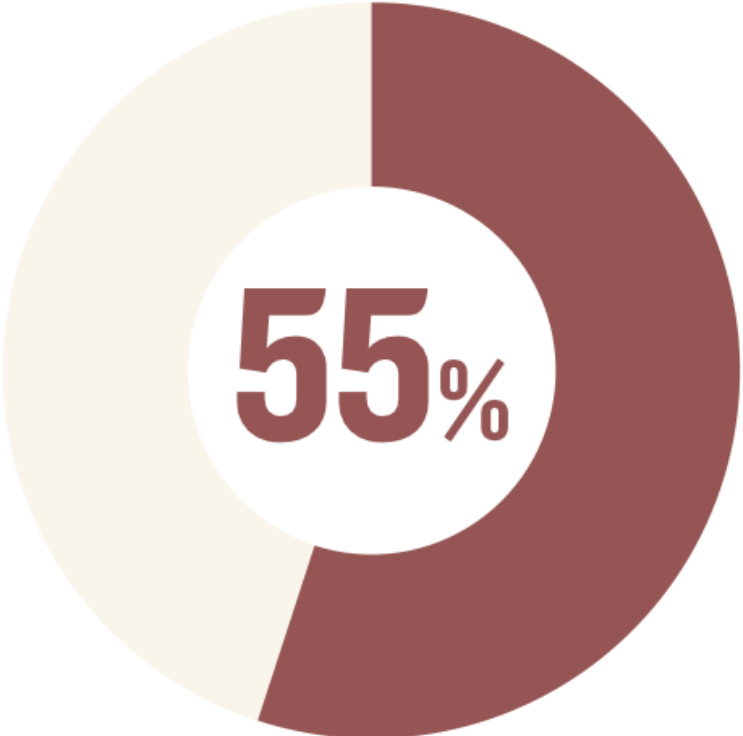
## Confidence talking to GPs about sex



Discussion initiation



# UNMET NEEDS

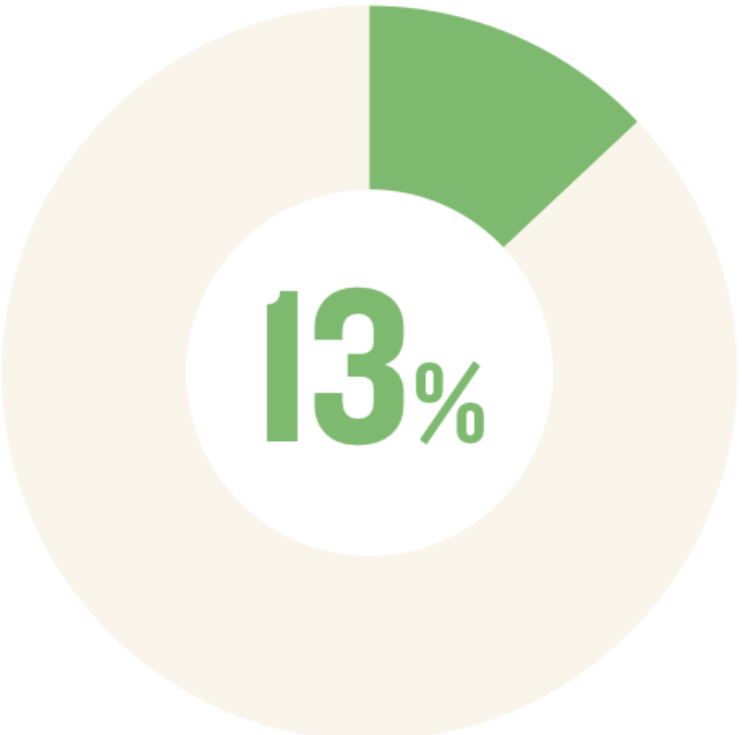


No help needed

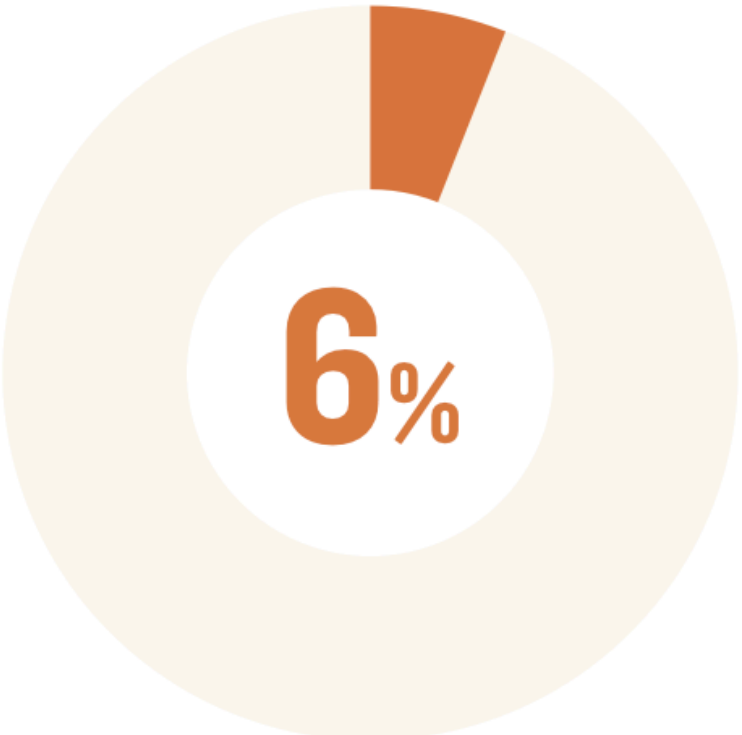


Able to get help

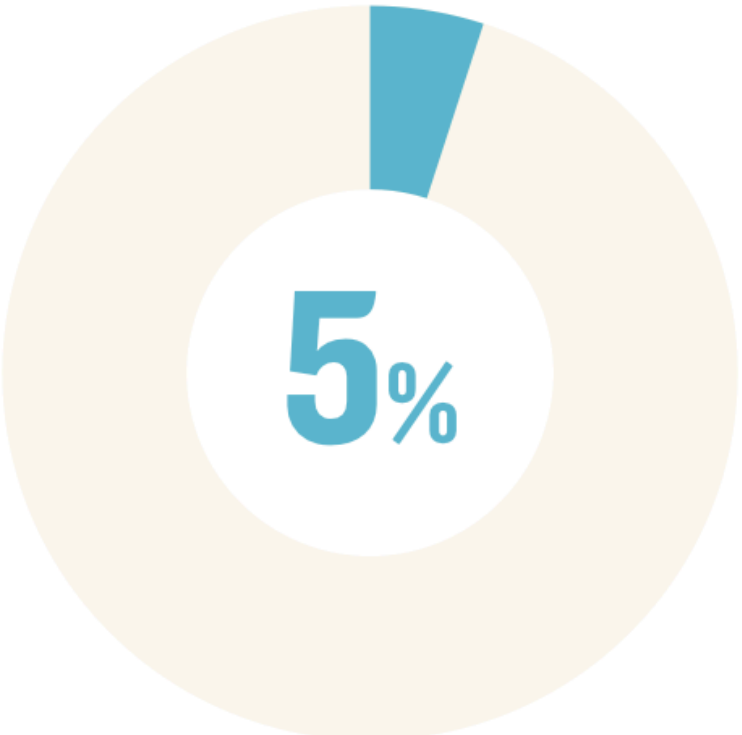
## Unmet needs



Contraception



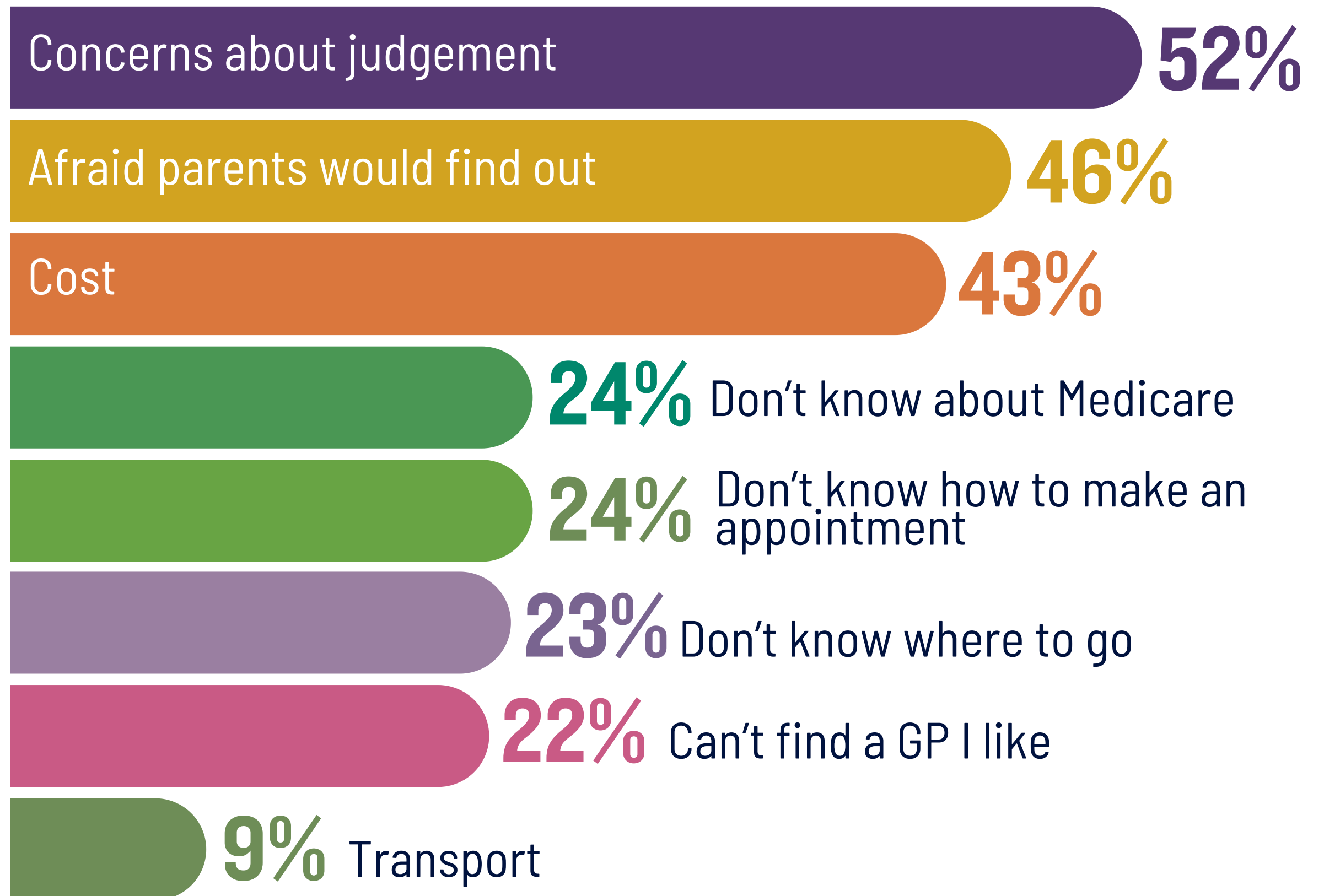
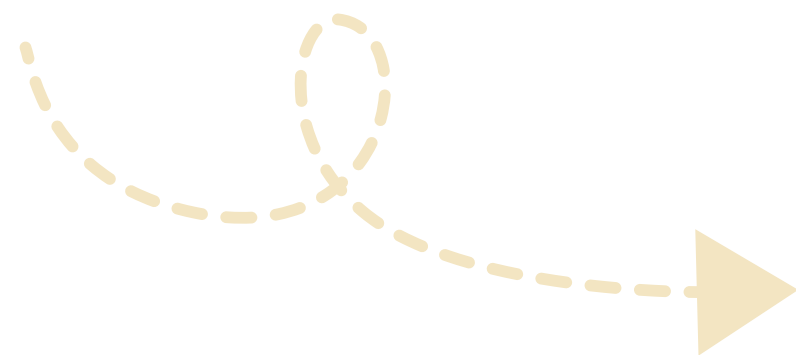
STI treatment/prevention



Other sexual issues

# BARRIERS TO SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

Of those who reported an unmet need, what prevented them from seeking sexual health help and advice?





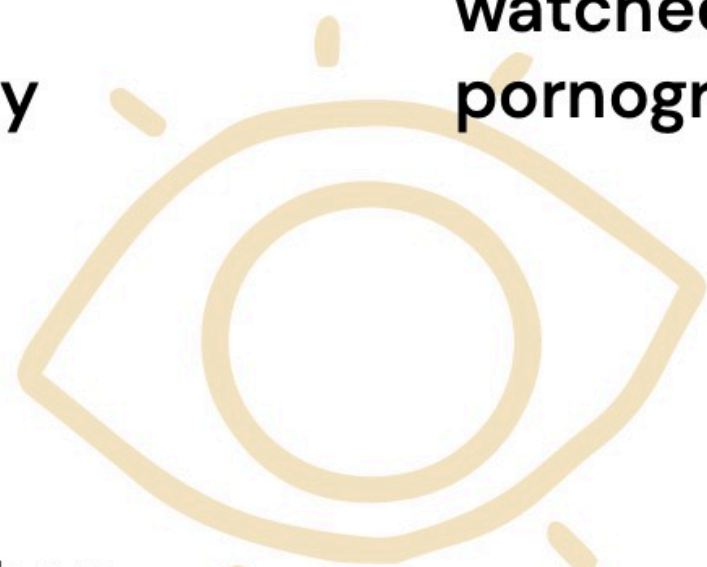
# DIGITAL SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

**77%**

Unintentionally  
viewed  
pornography

**74%**

Intentionally  
watched  
pornography



First time at an  
average of

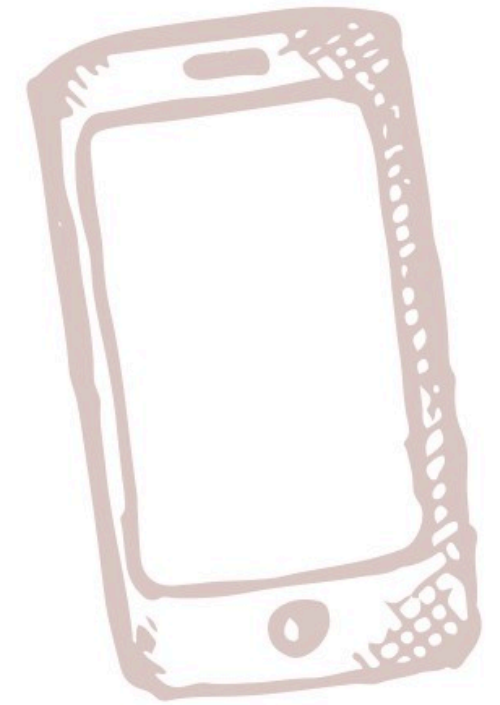
**11.5** years

First time at an  
average of

**13** years

**50%**

Shared sexual images



**51%**

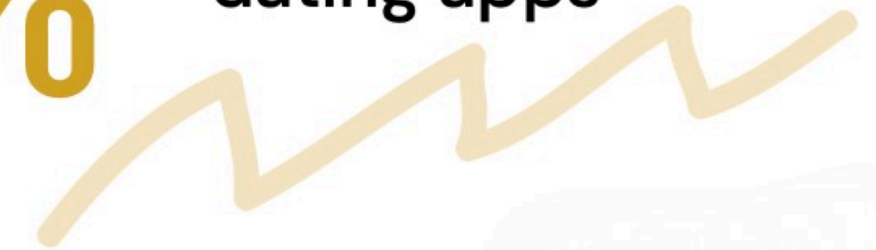
Received  
unsolicited  
images

**13%**

Nudes shared  
without  
permission

**17%**

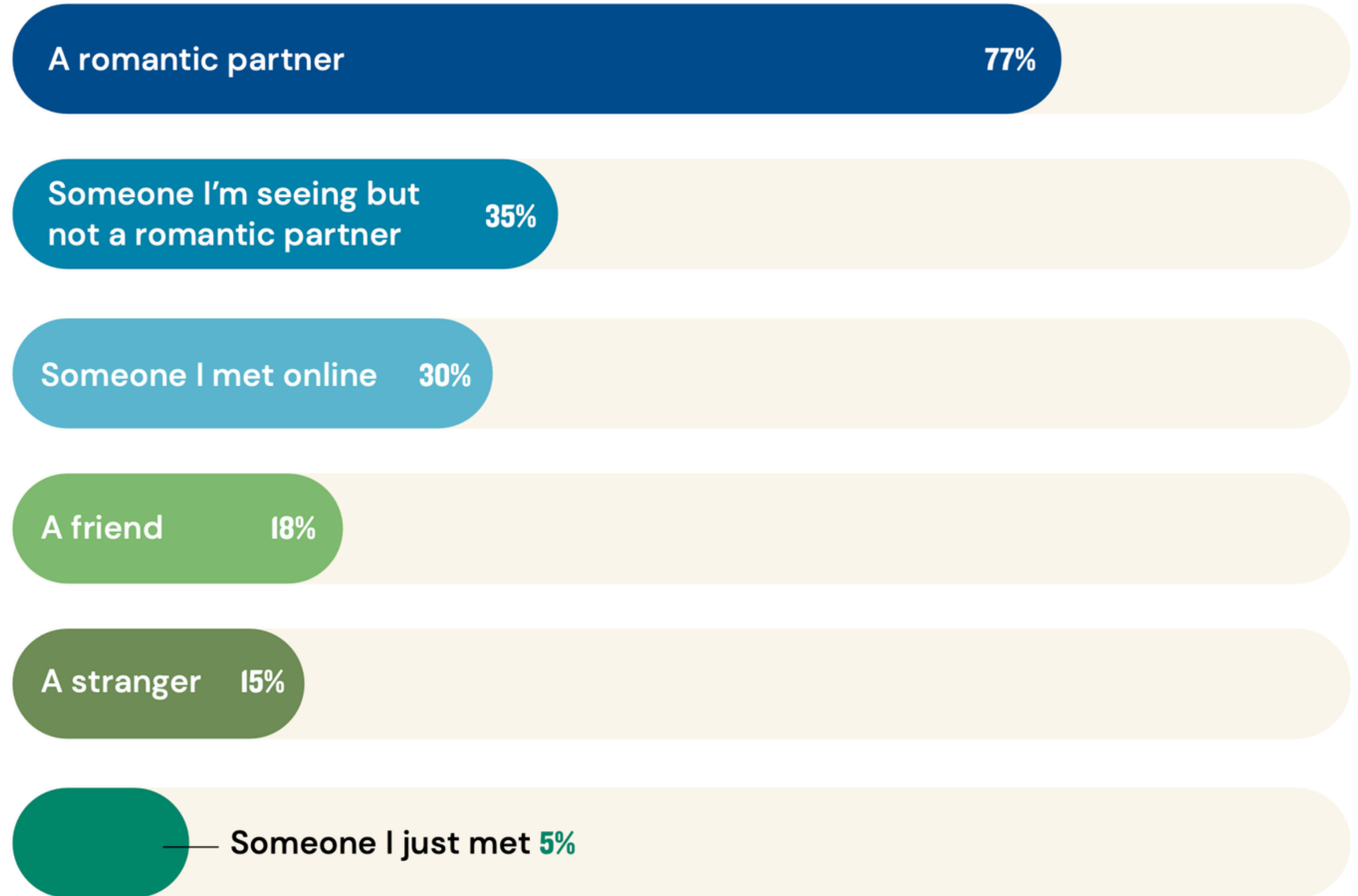
Ever used online  
dating apps



# SEXTING

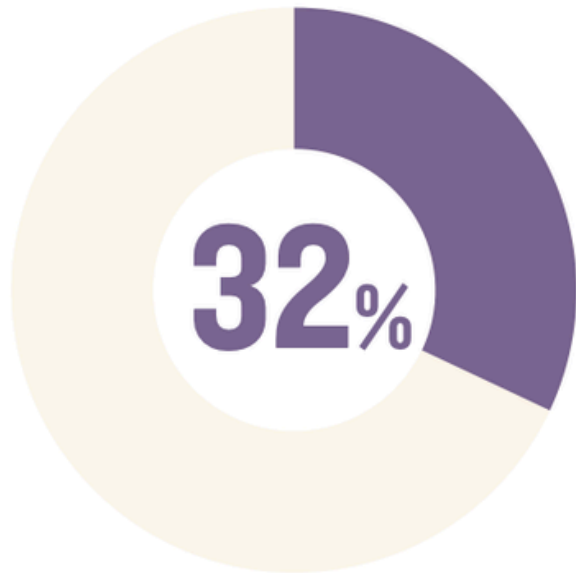


Sent a sexual image of themselves to someone



# UNWANTED SHARING OF IMAGES

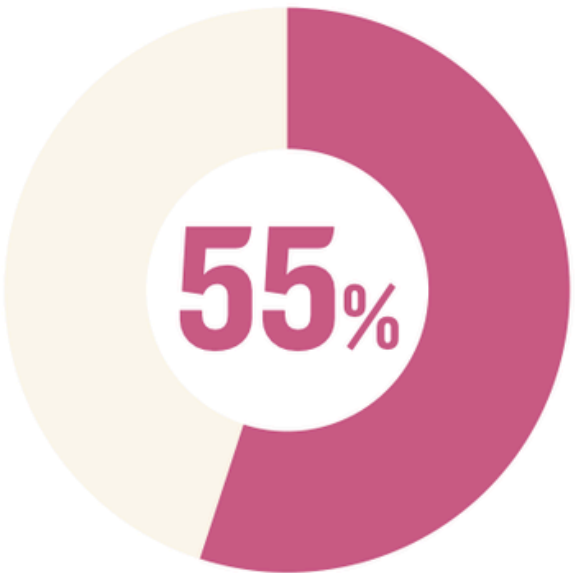
Unwanted images received



Men



Women



Trans people

Images shared without permission



Men

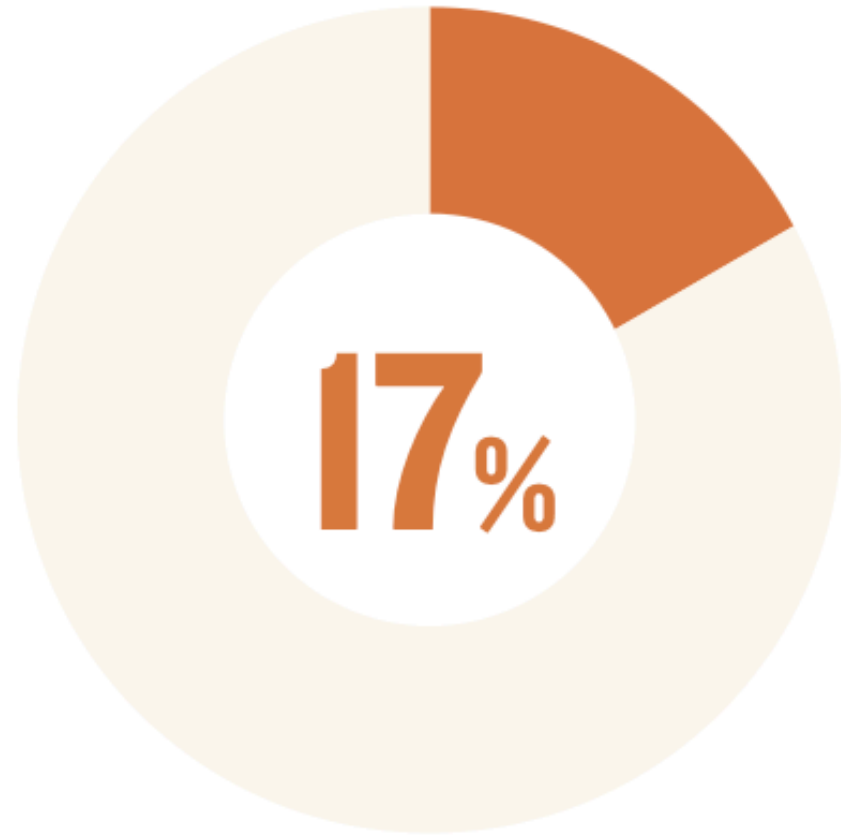


Women

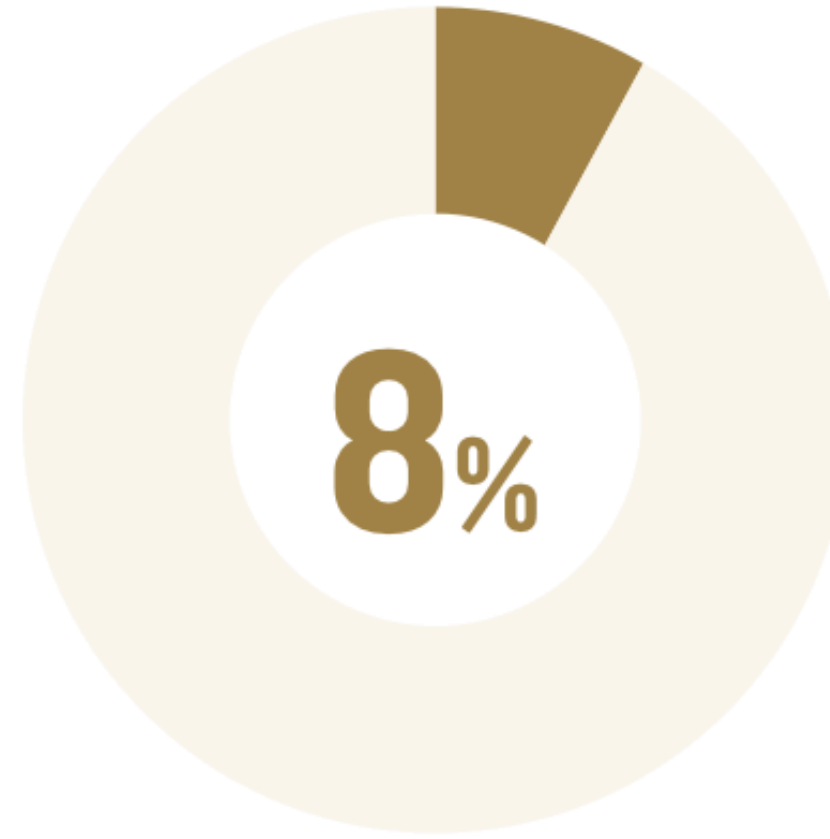


Trans people

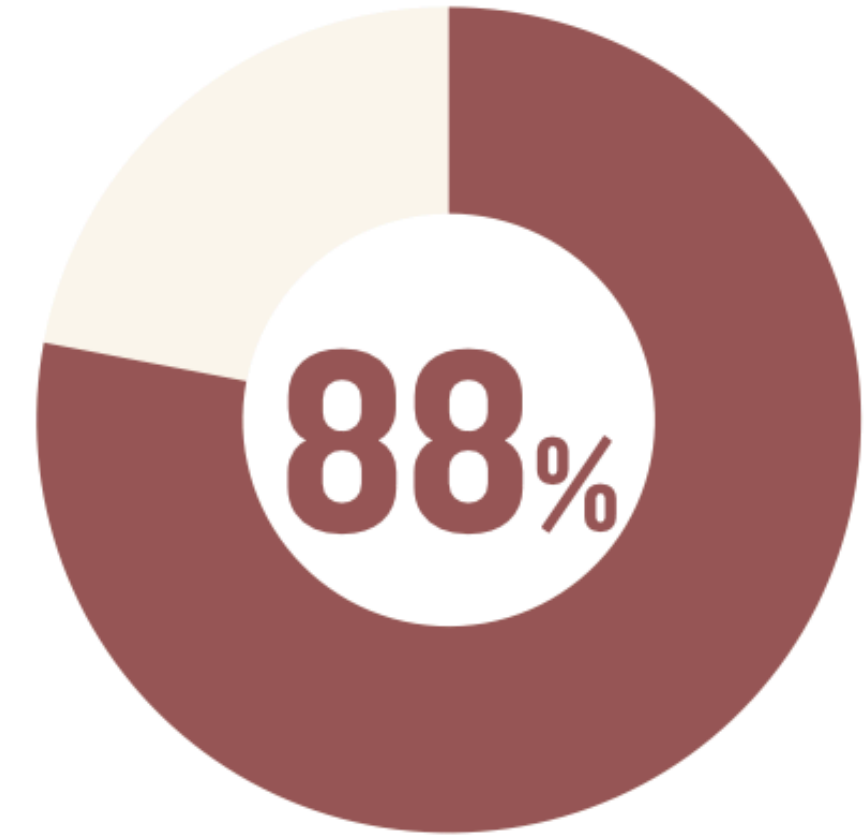
# ONLINE DATING



Used an online dating app



In-person meet-up

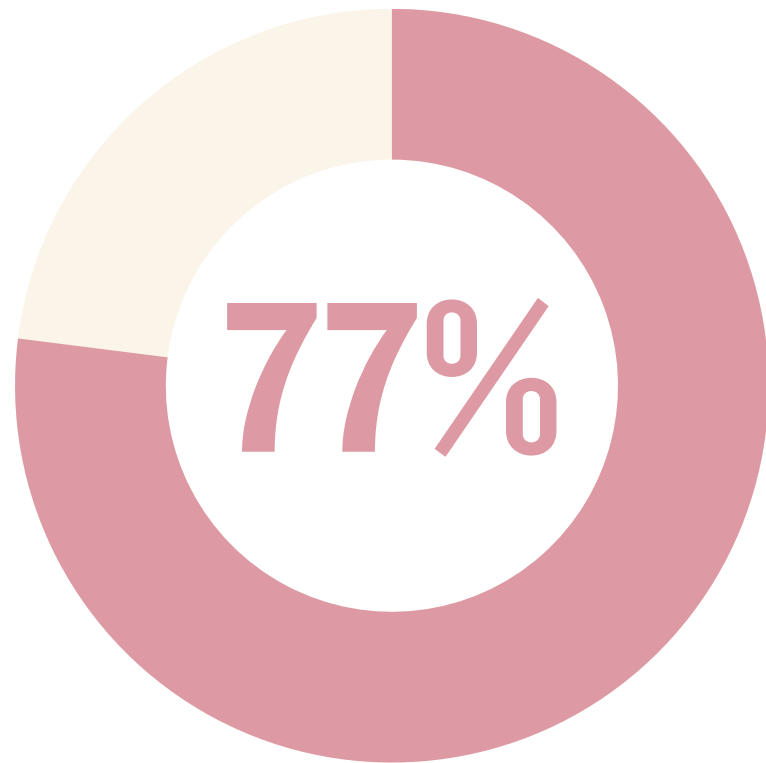


Let someone know about the meet-up

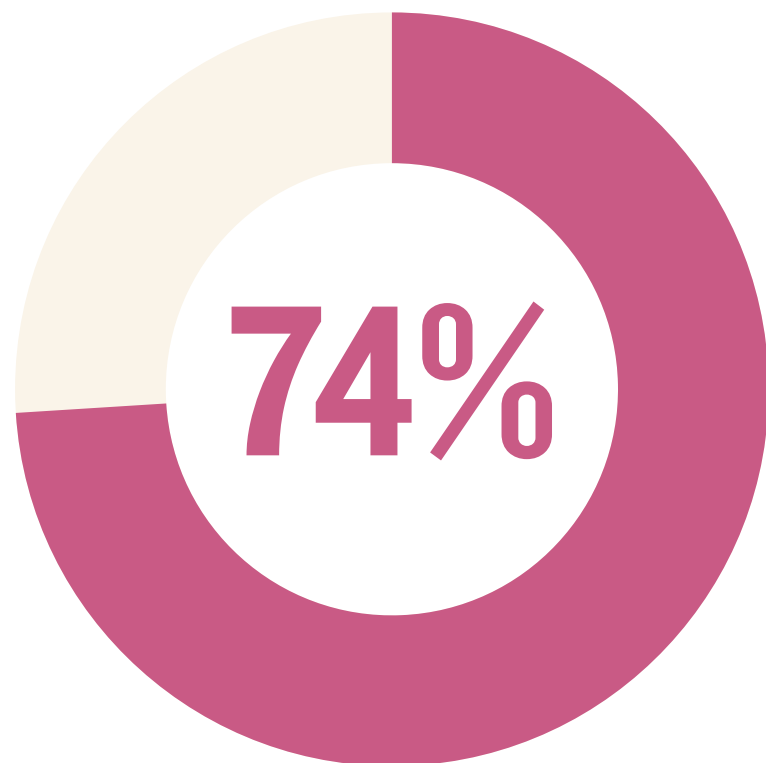
## Location



# PORNOGRAPHY USE



**Unintentional**



**Intentional**

Pornography makes me uncomfortable

**86%**

Pornography taught me something

**65%**

Watching pornography is enjoyable

**60%**

It's easy to talk to friends about pornography

**27%**

It's hard to stop watching pornography

**26%**



# UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

# UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

Out of the total sample



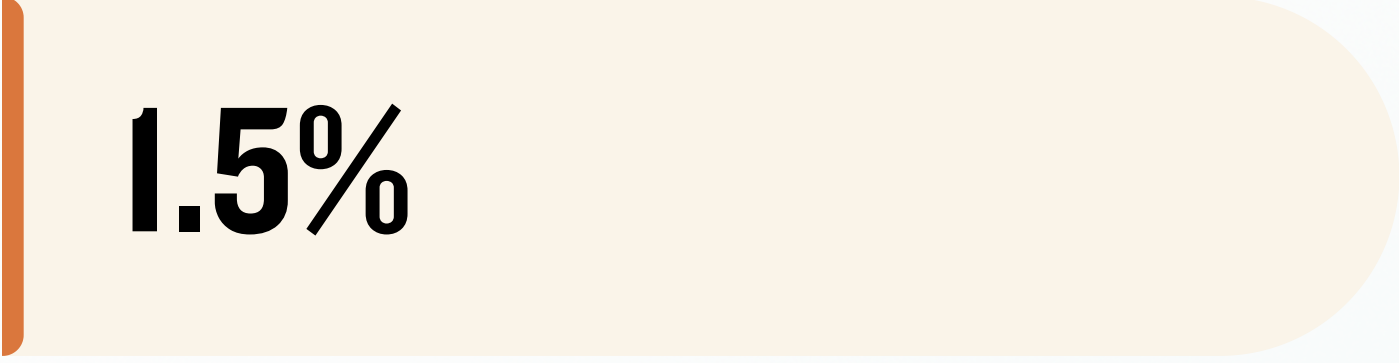
Frightened of a partner



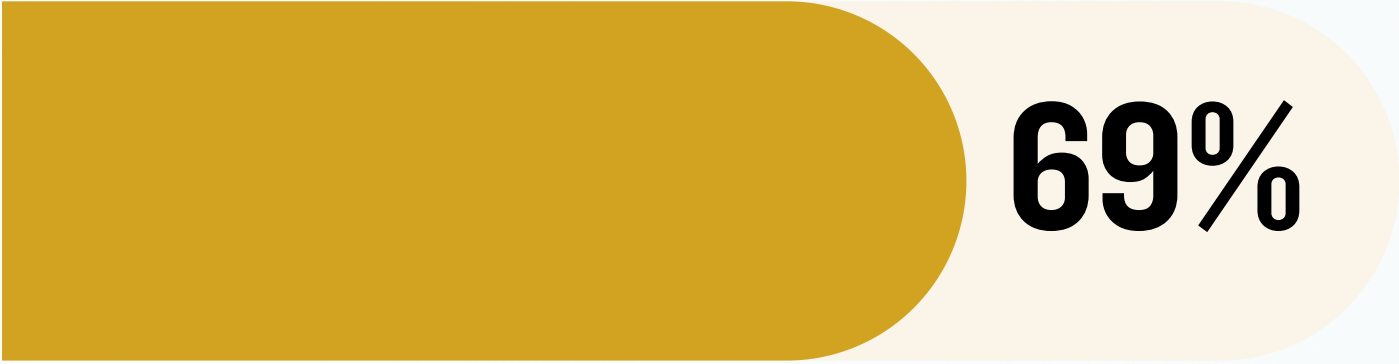
Experienced Unwanted sex



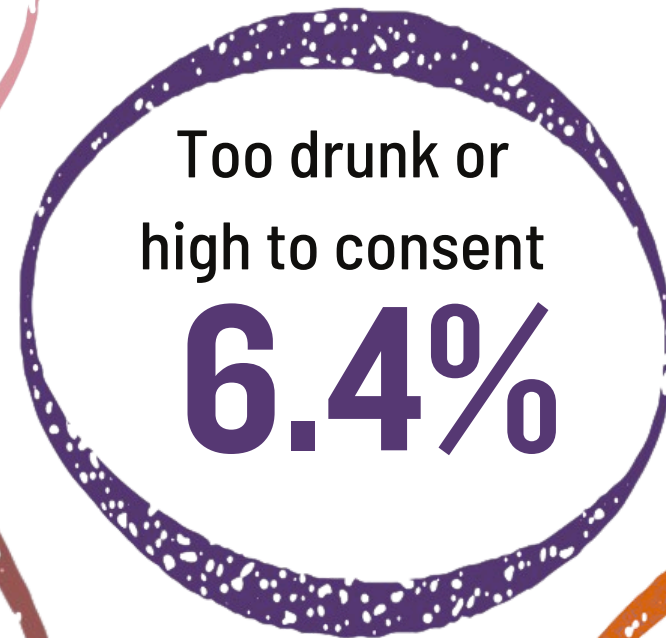
Forced to have sex by a partner



Talked to someone about their experiences (of those who experienced unwanted sex)



# CONTEXT OF UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCE





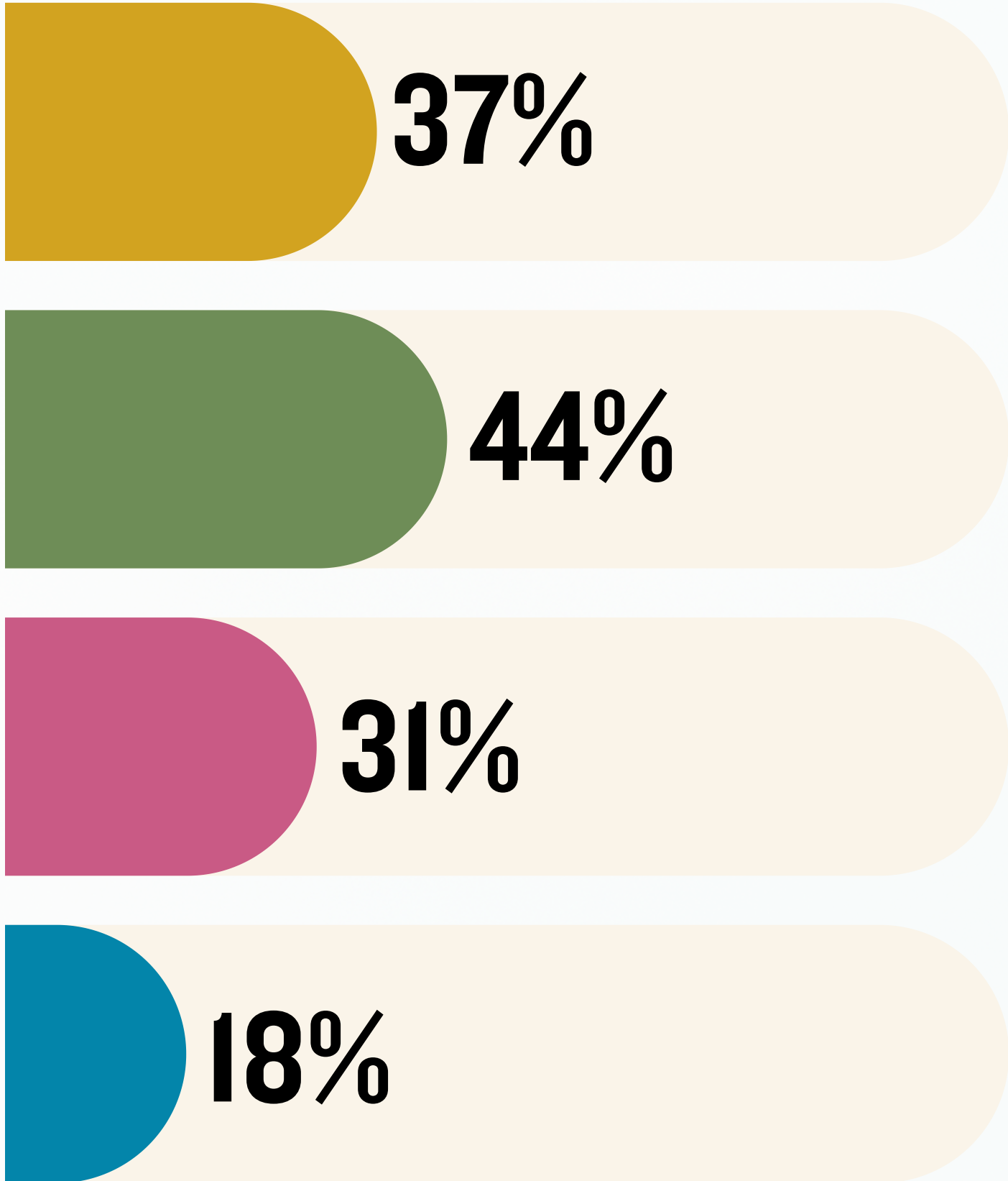
# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

# UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

Of those who  
had ever  
been in a  
relationship  
(61%)



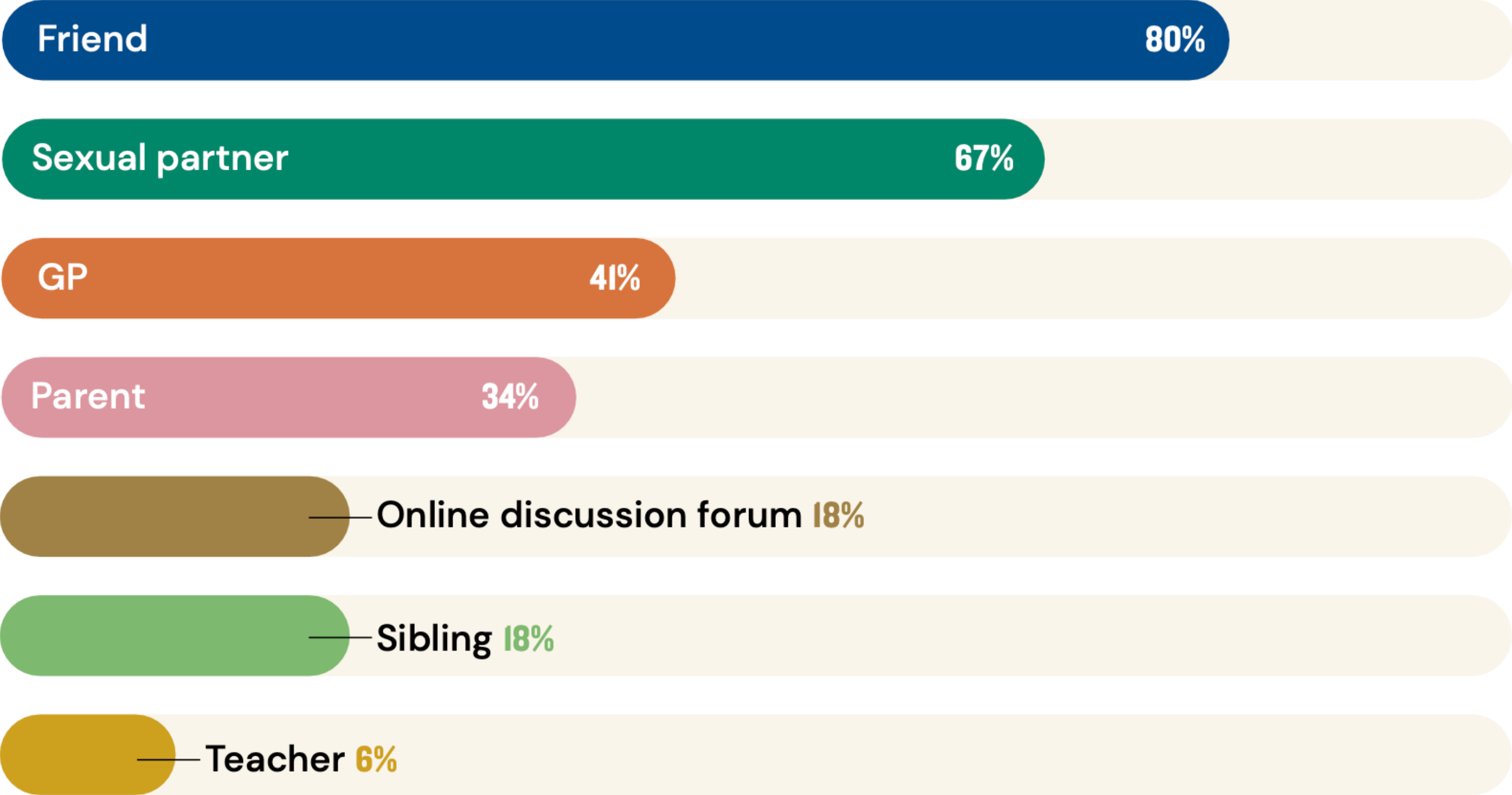
- Frightened of a partner
- Experienced verbal abuse from partner
- Experienced digital tracking or harassment
- Experienced physical violence (e.g. hitting, shoving)



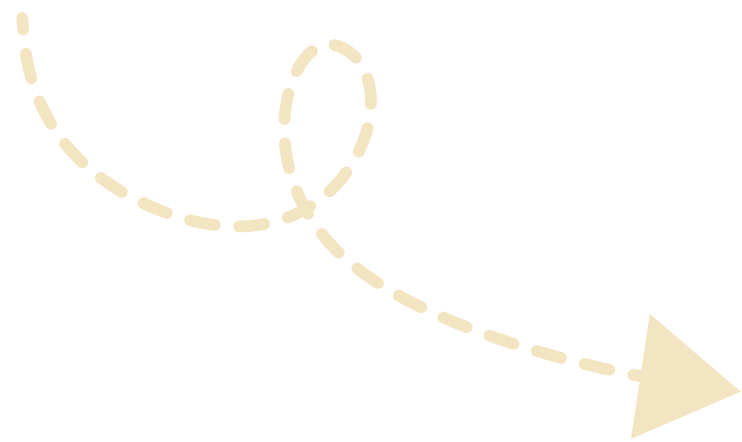


# COMMUNICATION ABOUT SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

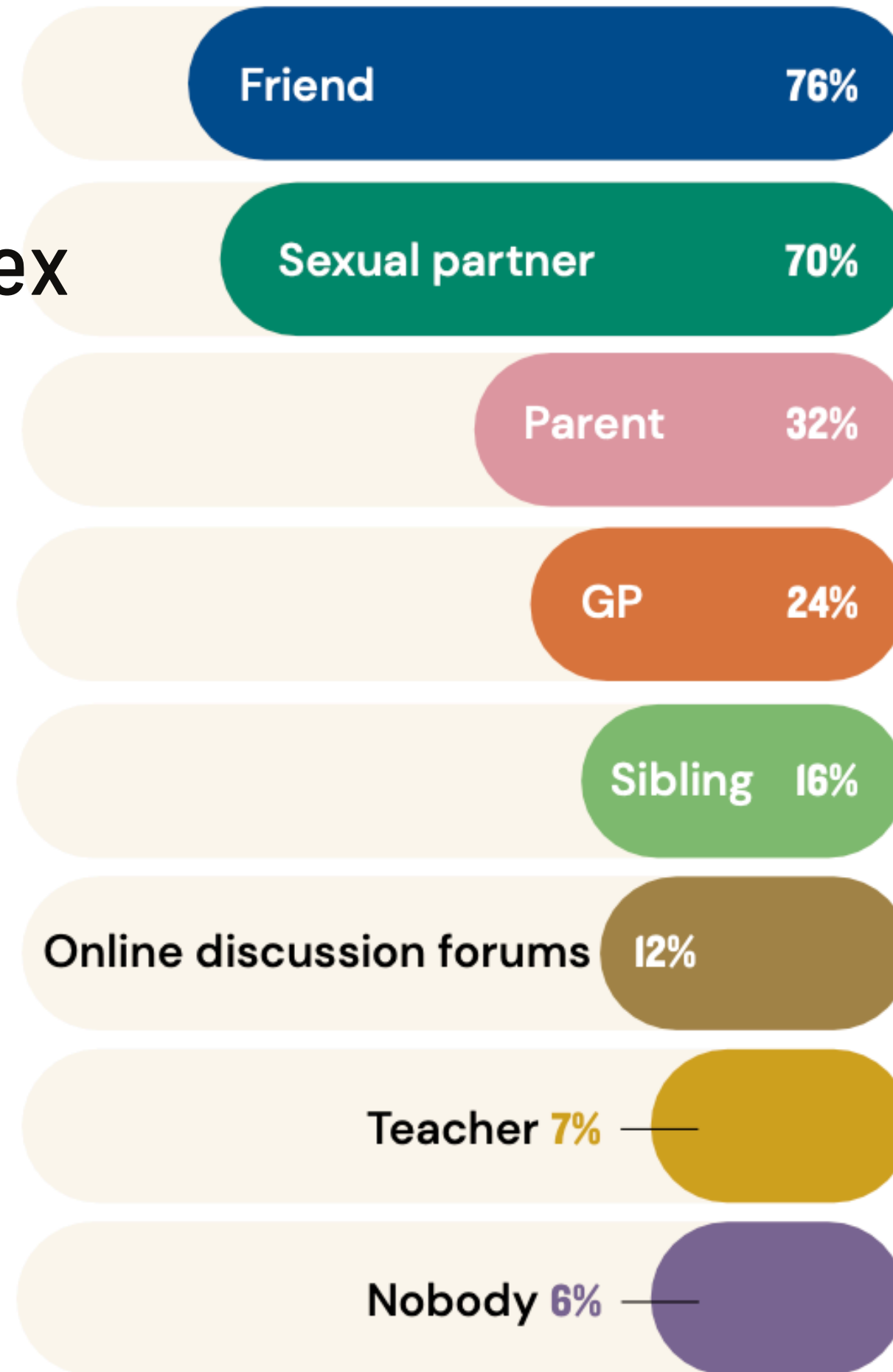
# WHO DO YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO TALK TO ABOUT SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS?



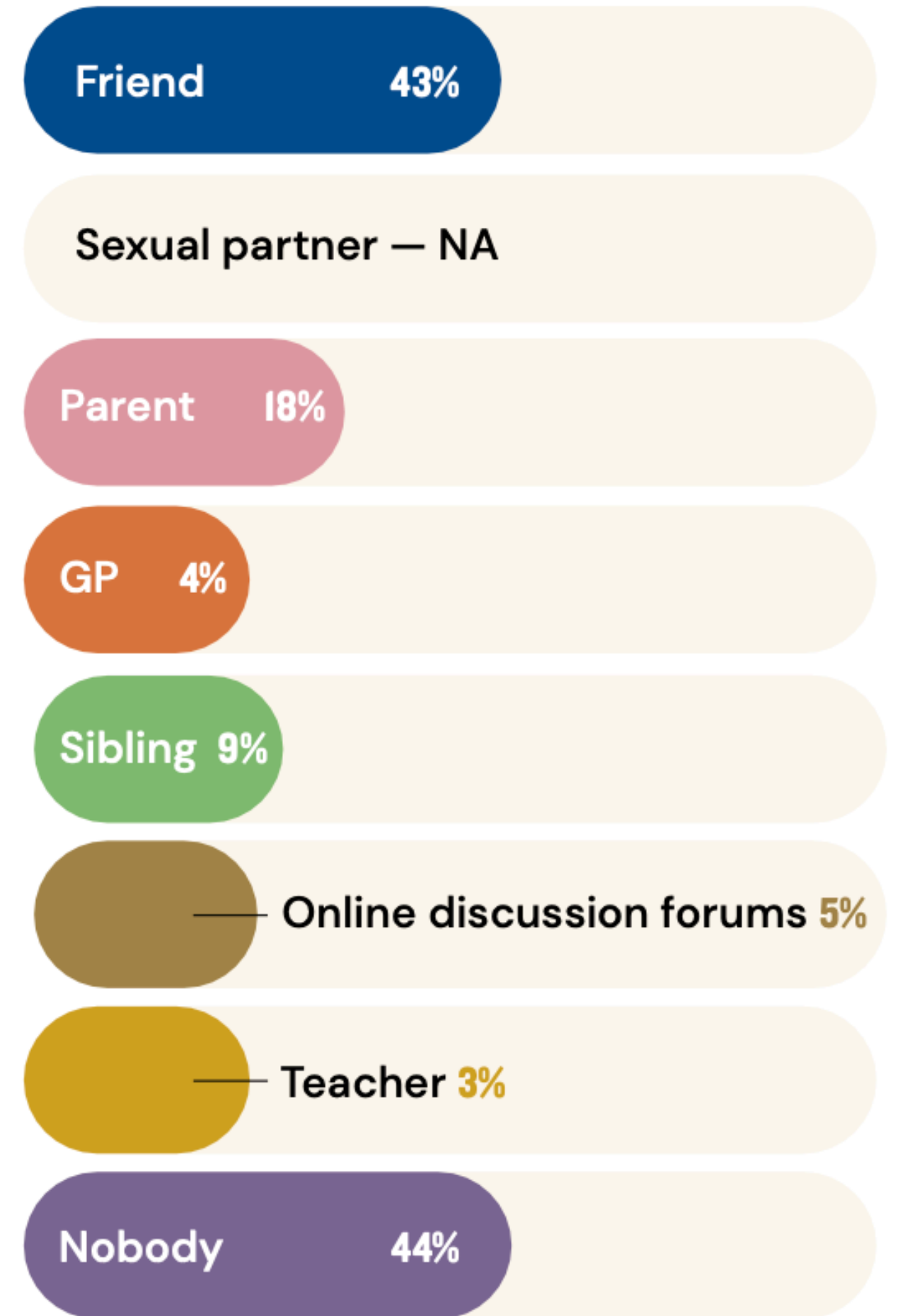
Young people initiated conversations about sex and relationships with these sources



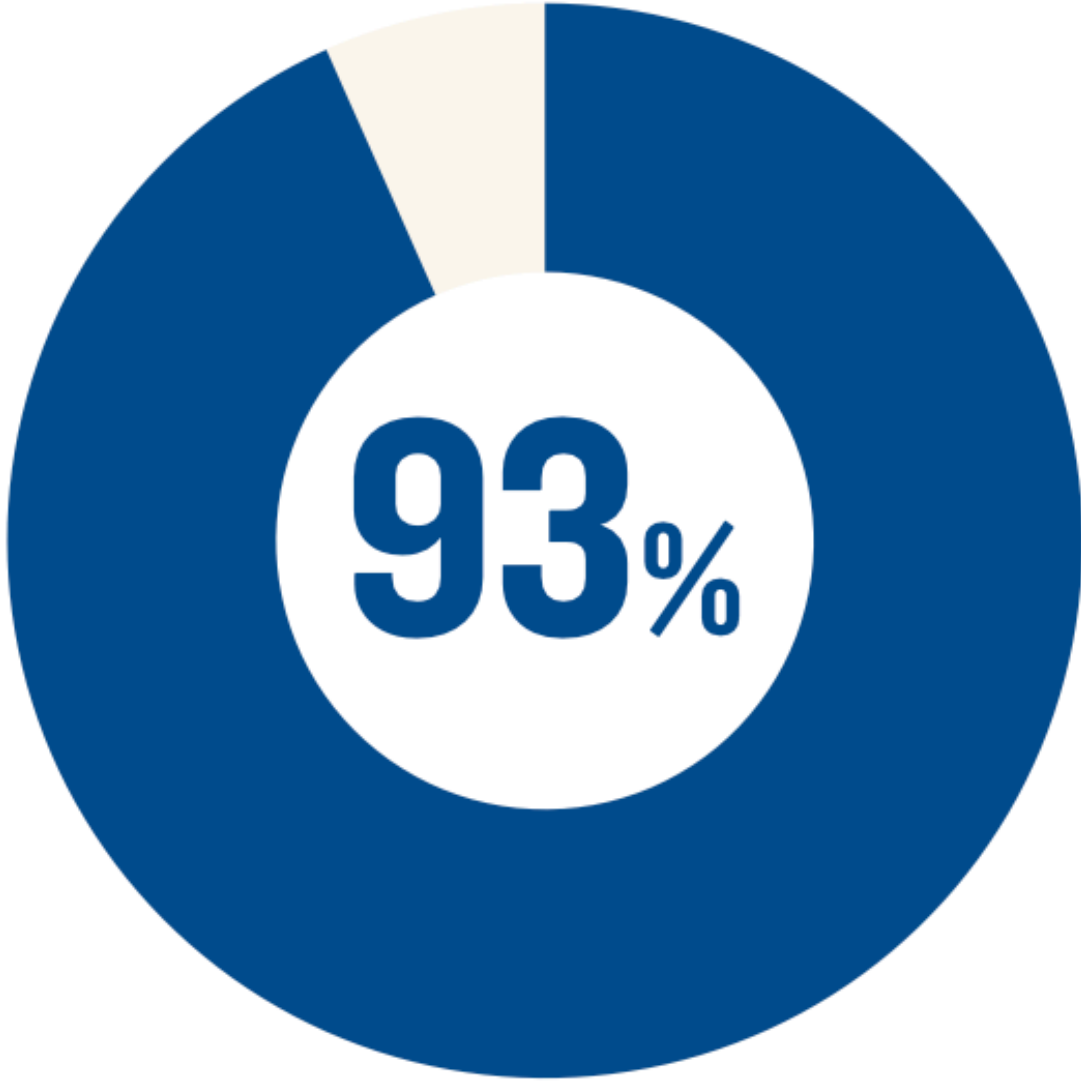
## Sexually active



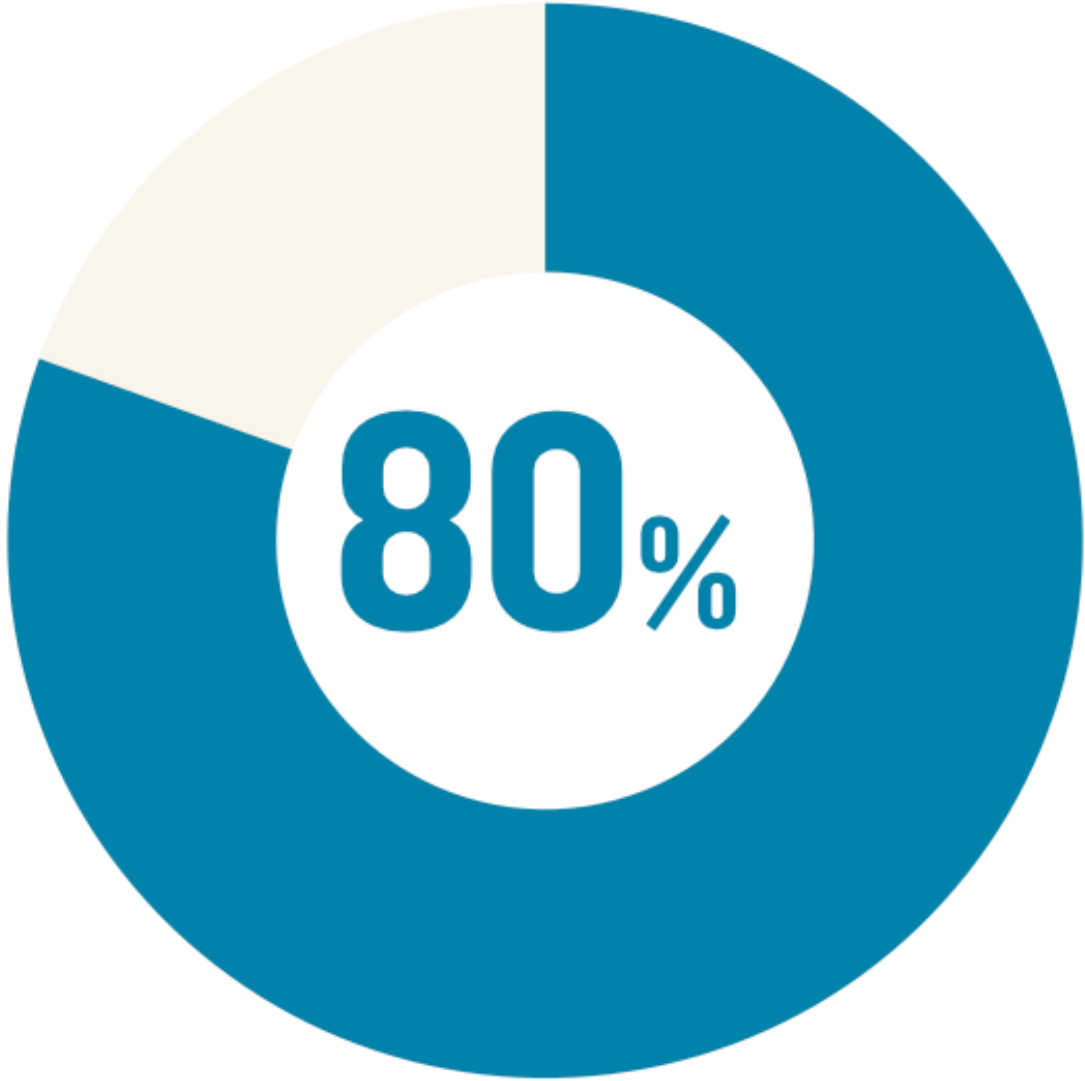
## Not sexually active



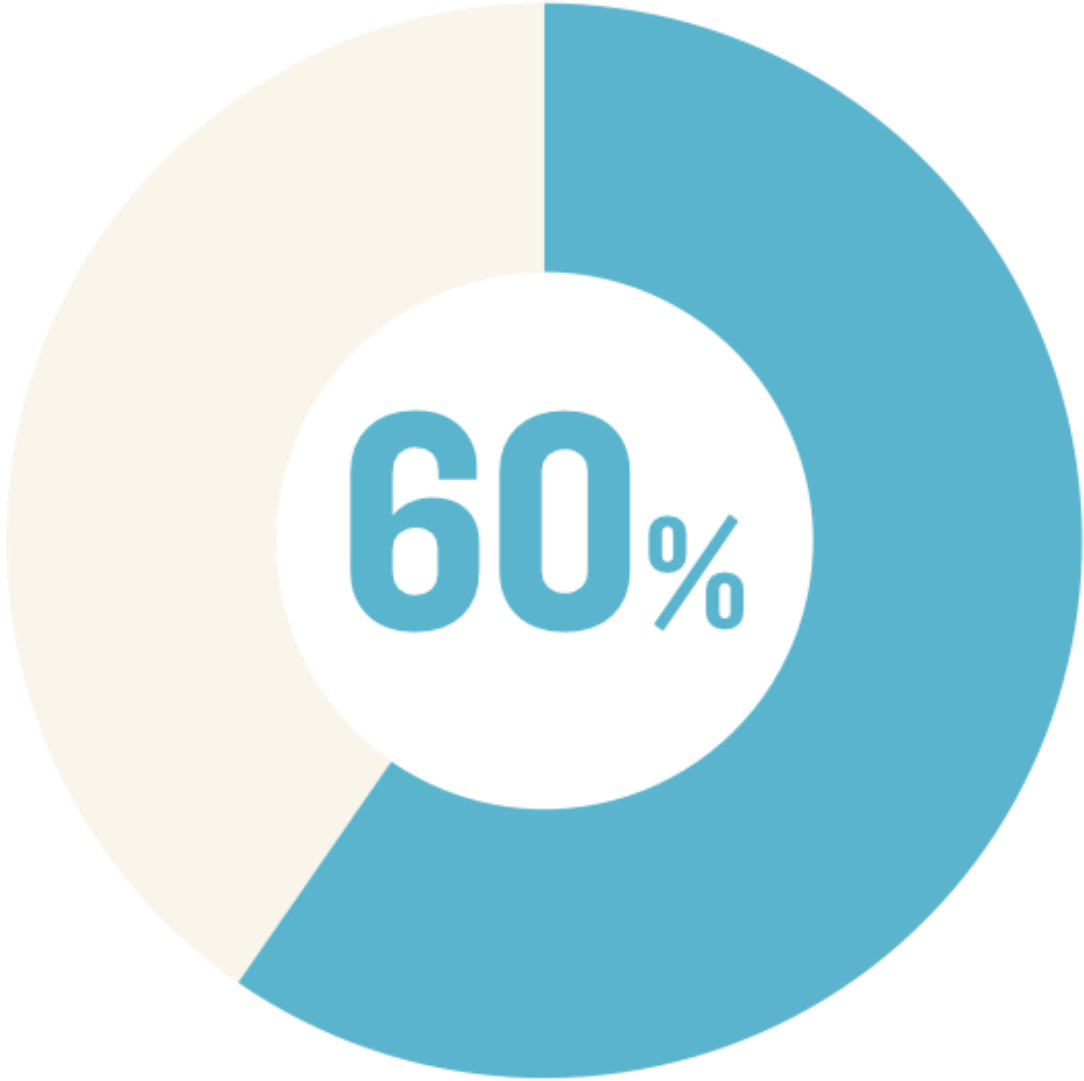
# ENGAGEMENT WITH FRIENDS



Confidence talking to friends

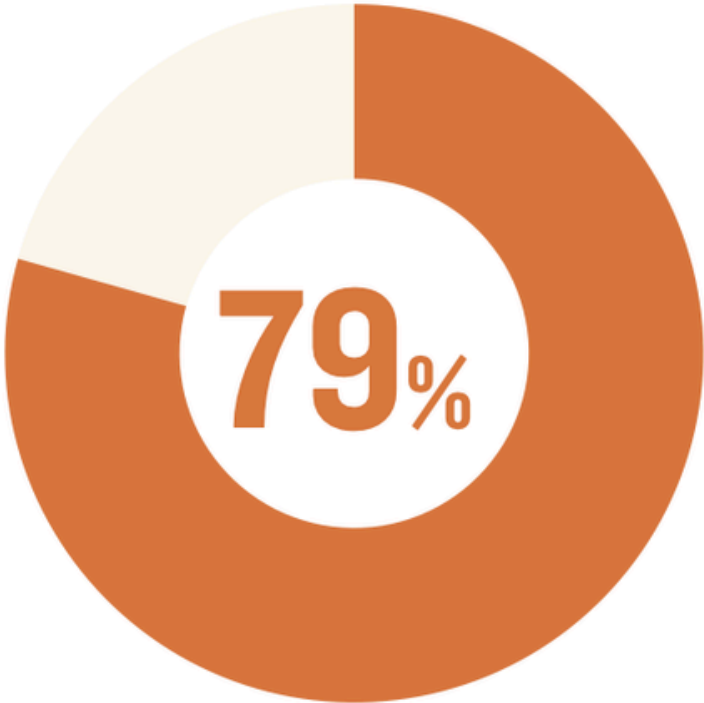


Friends are preferred confidants

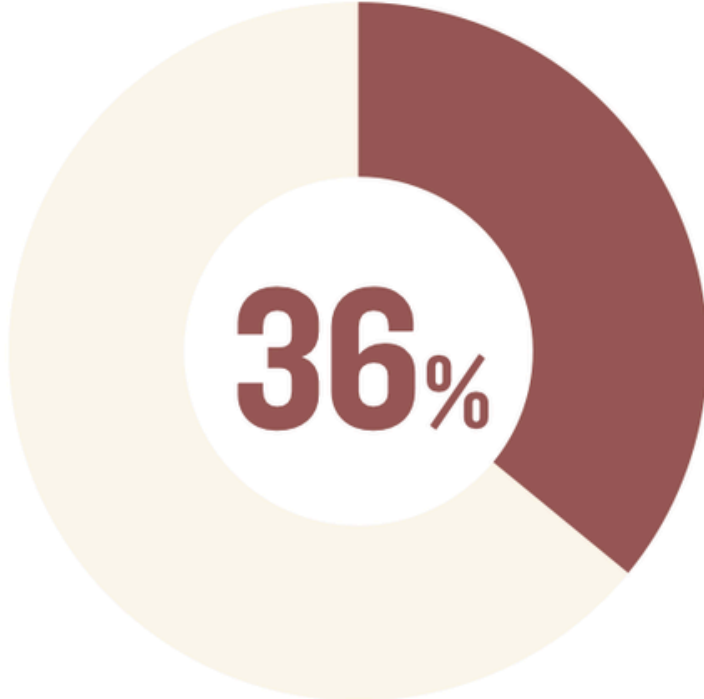


Initiated conversation with friends

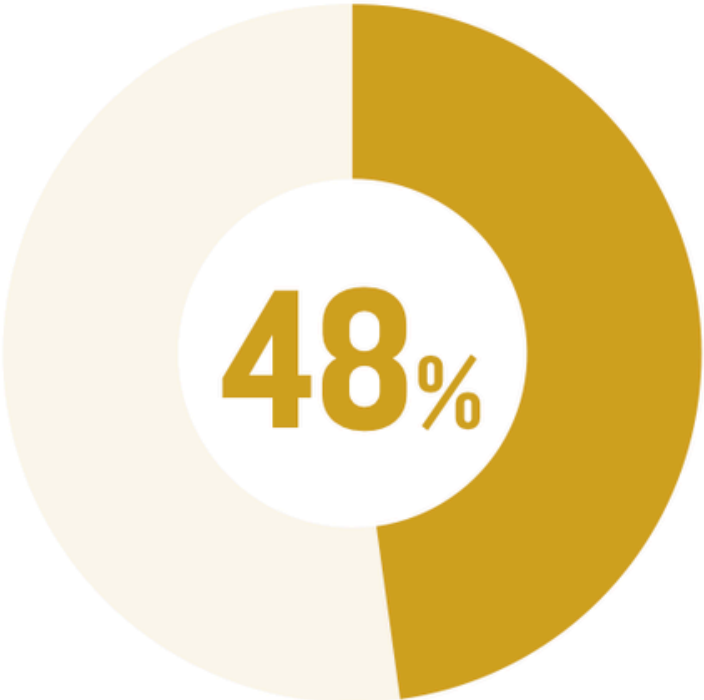
# ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS



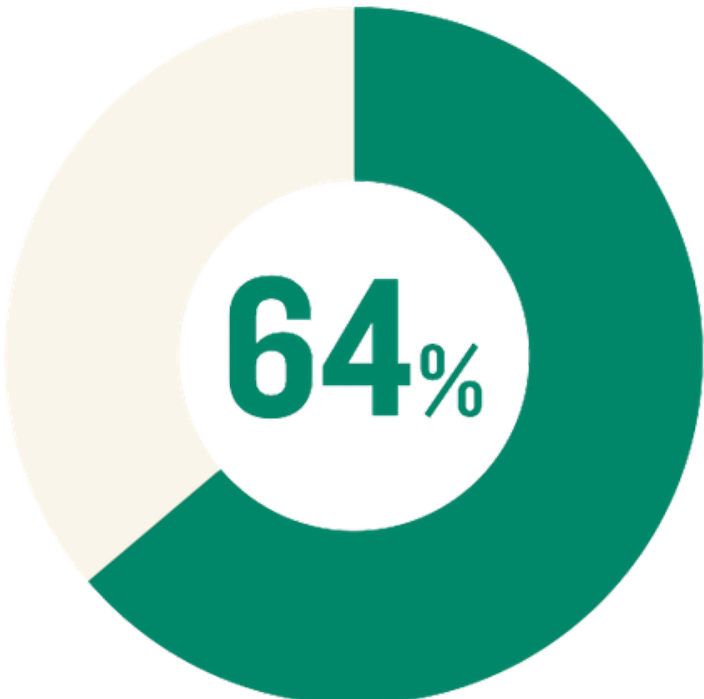
Parental support



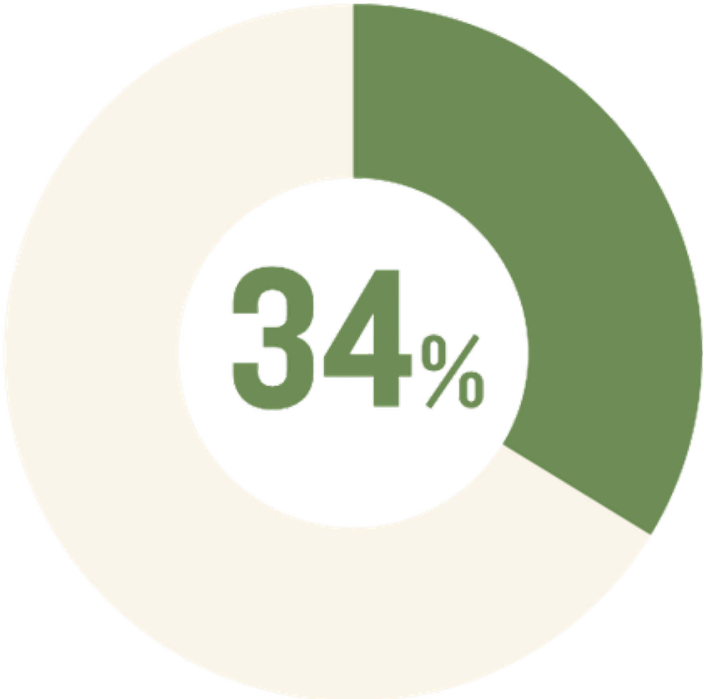
Confidence talking to father about sex



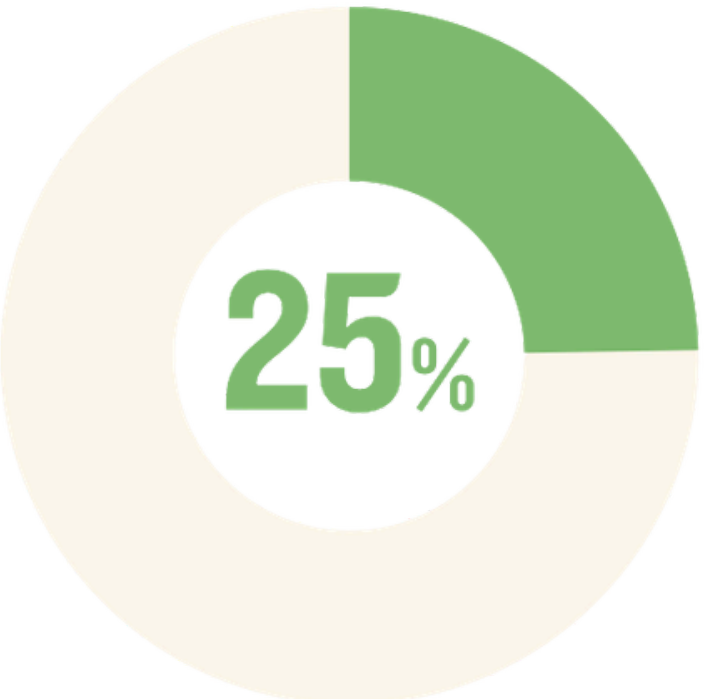
Able to talk to parent about important things



Confidence talking to mother about sex



Parents are preferred confidant

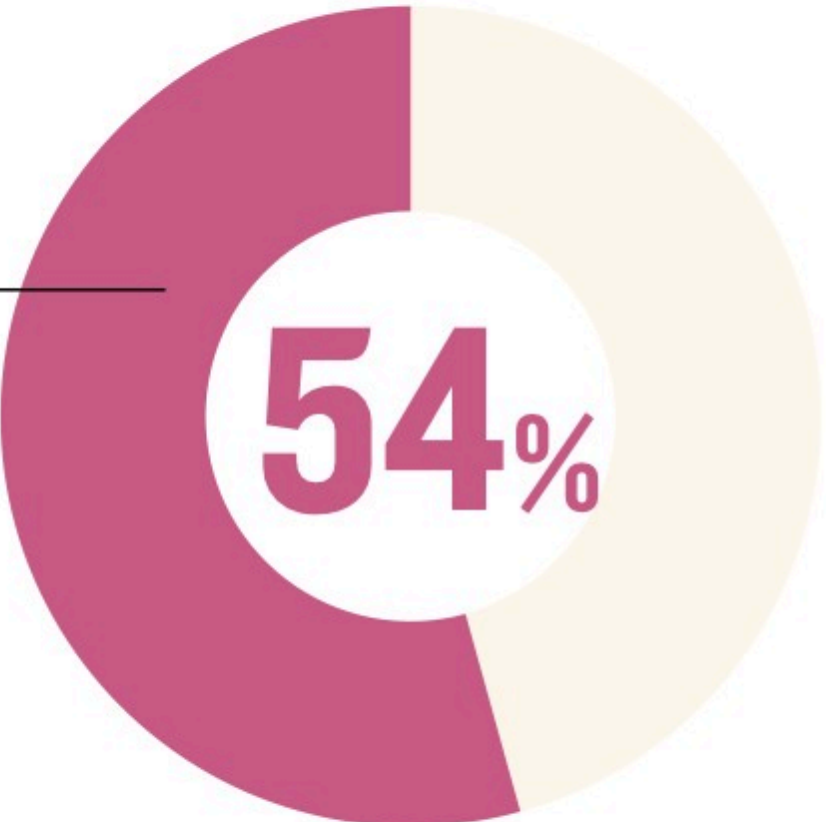


Initiated conversation with parent

# TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH PARENTS

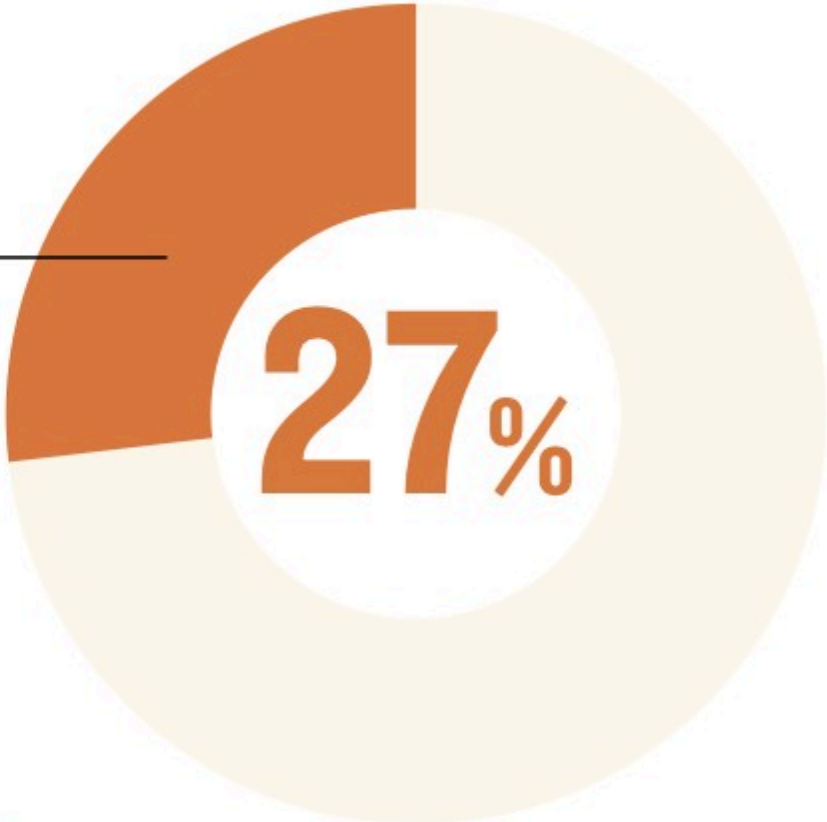
## Relationships

35% Parent-led  
24% Youth-led



## Sexting

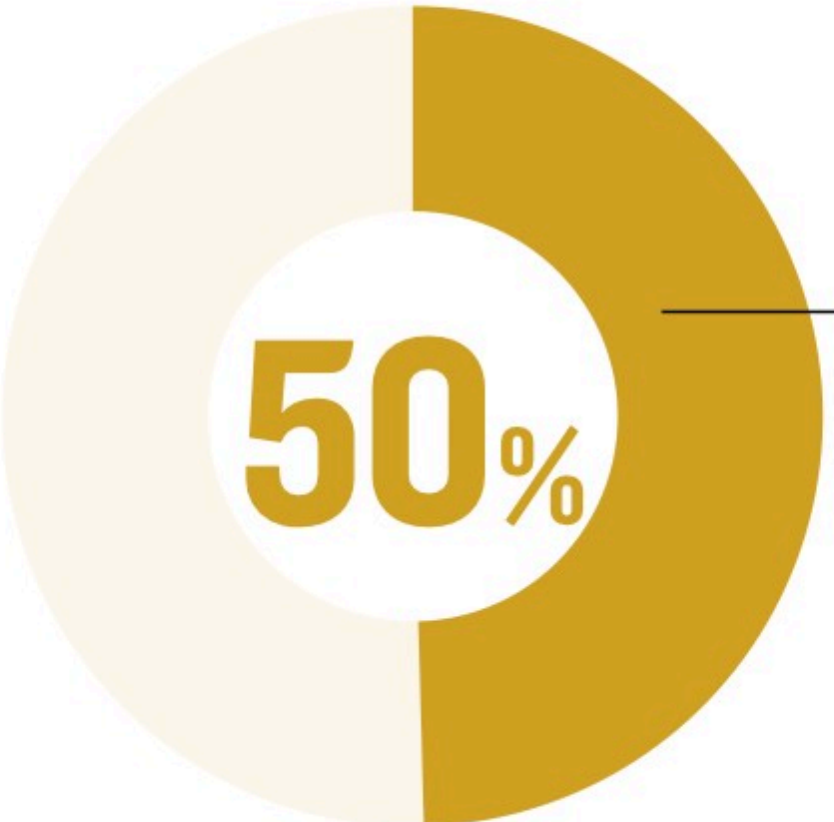
21% Parent-led  
4% Youth-led



50%

## Sex

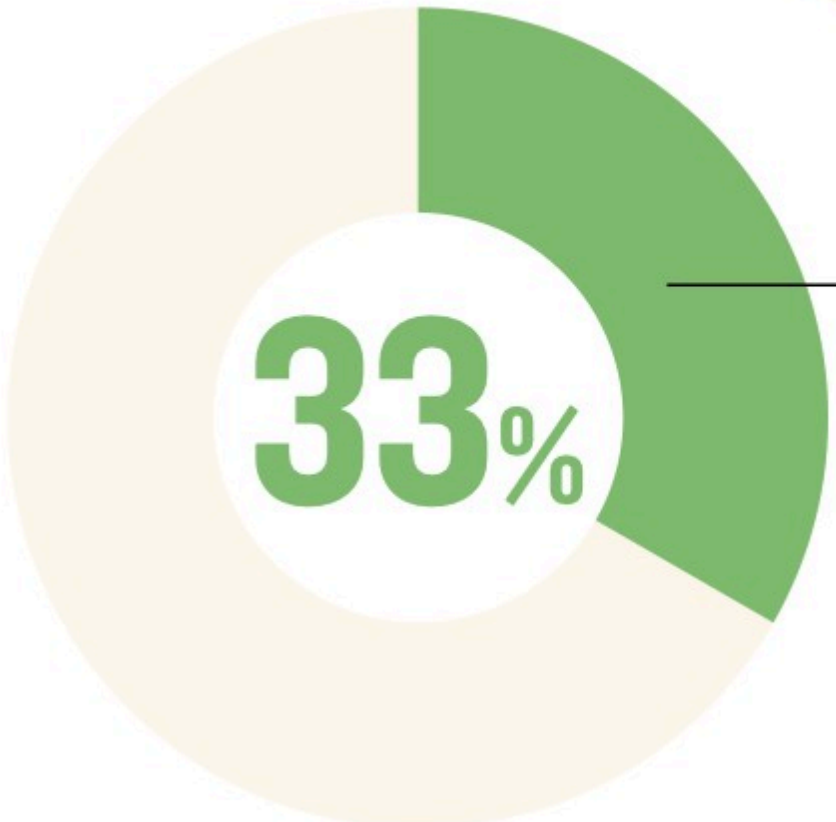
39% Parent-led  
12% Youth-led



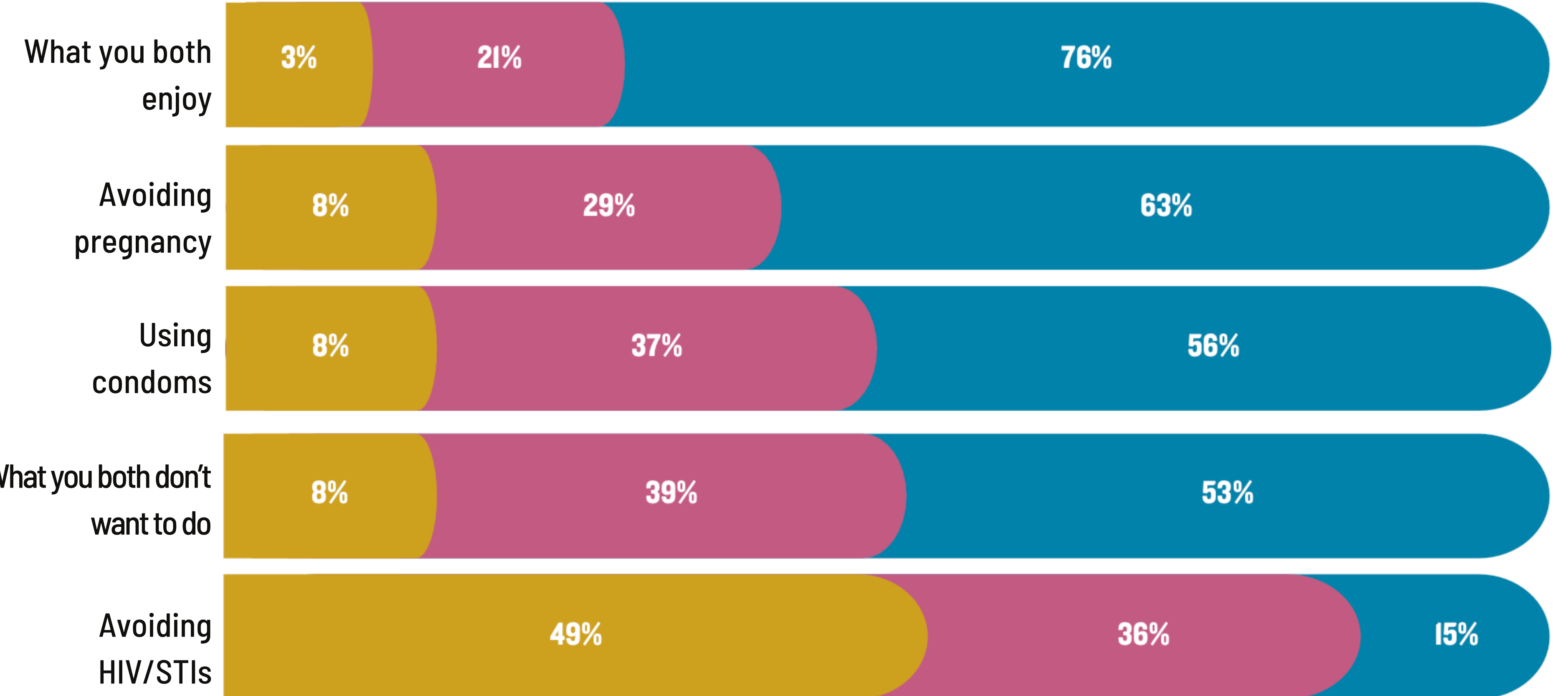
33%

## Pornography

24% Parent-led  
7% Youth-led



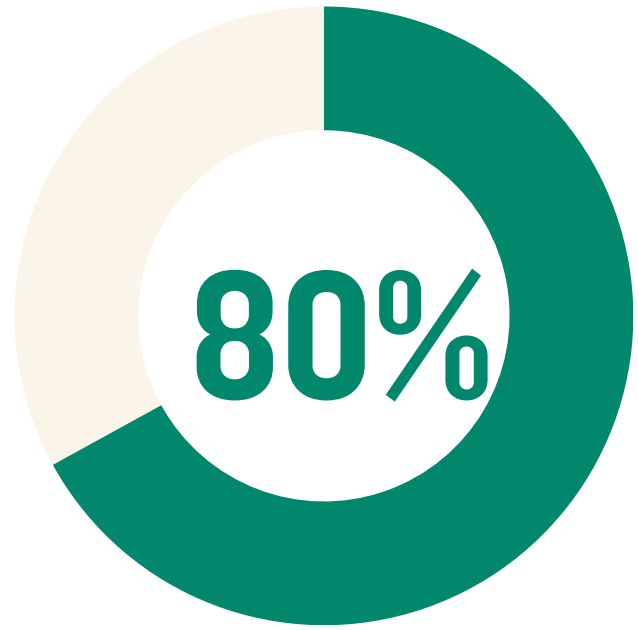
# TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH PARTNER



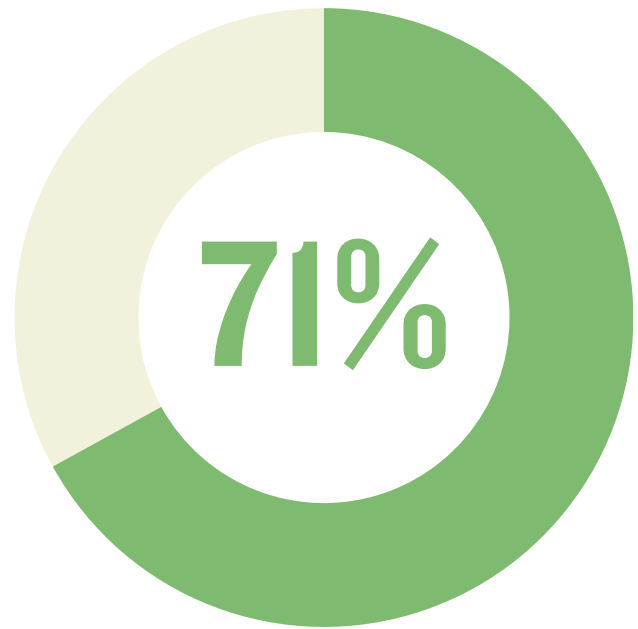


# RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

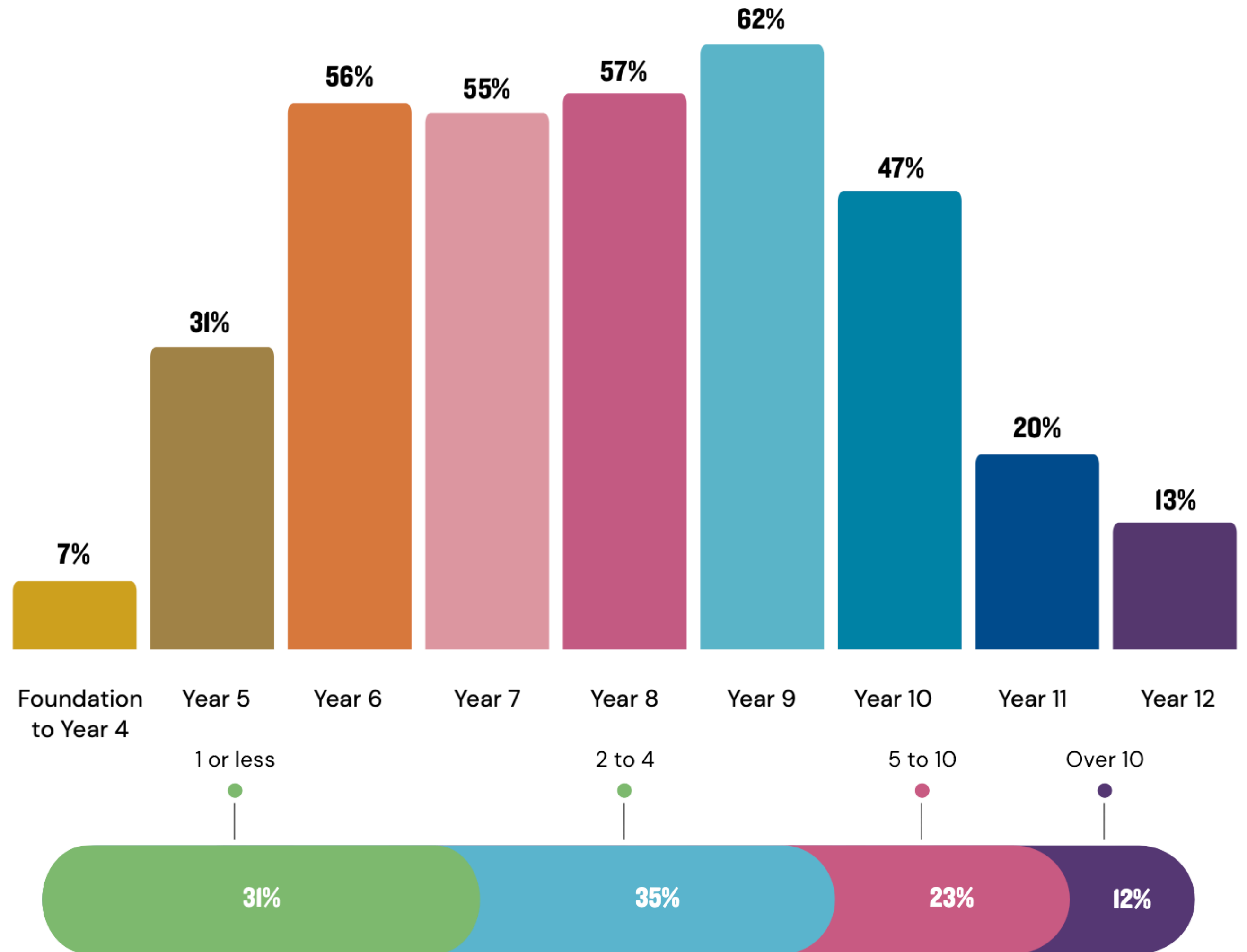
# RECEIPT OF RSE



Taught by a teacher at school



Taught in Health and Physical Education



# TOP 7 TOPICS DISCUSSED IN RSE

Puberty and reproduction



92%

Sexual consent



82%

Condoms



76%

Healthy relationships



73%

Contraception



67%

STIs/HIV



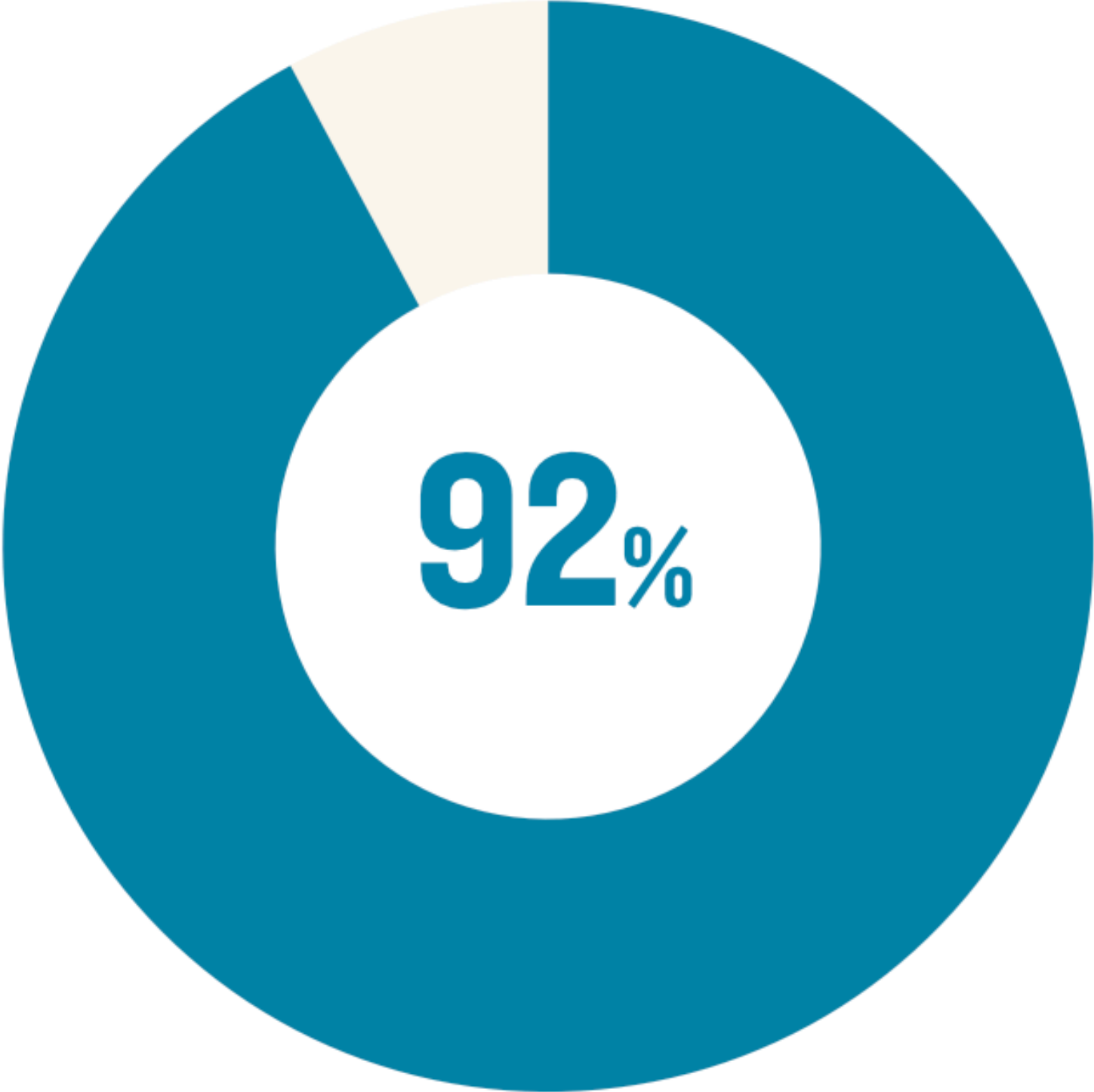
65%

Technology and sex

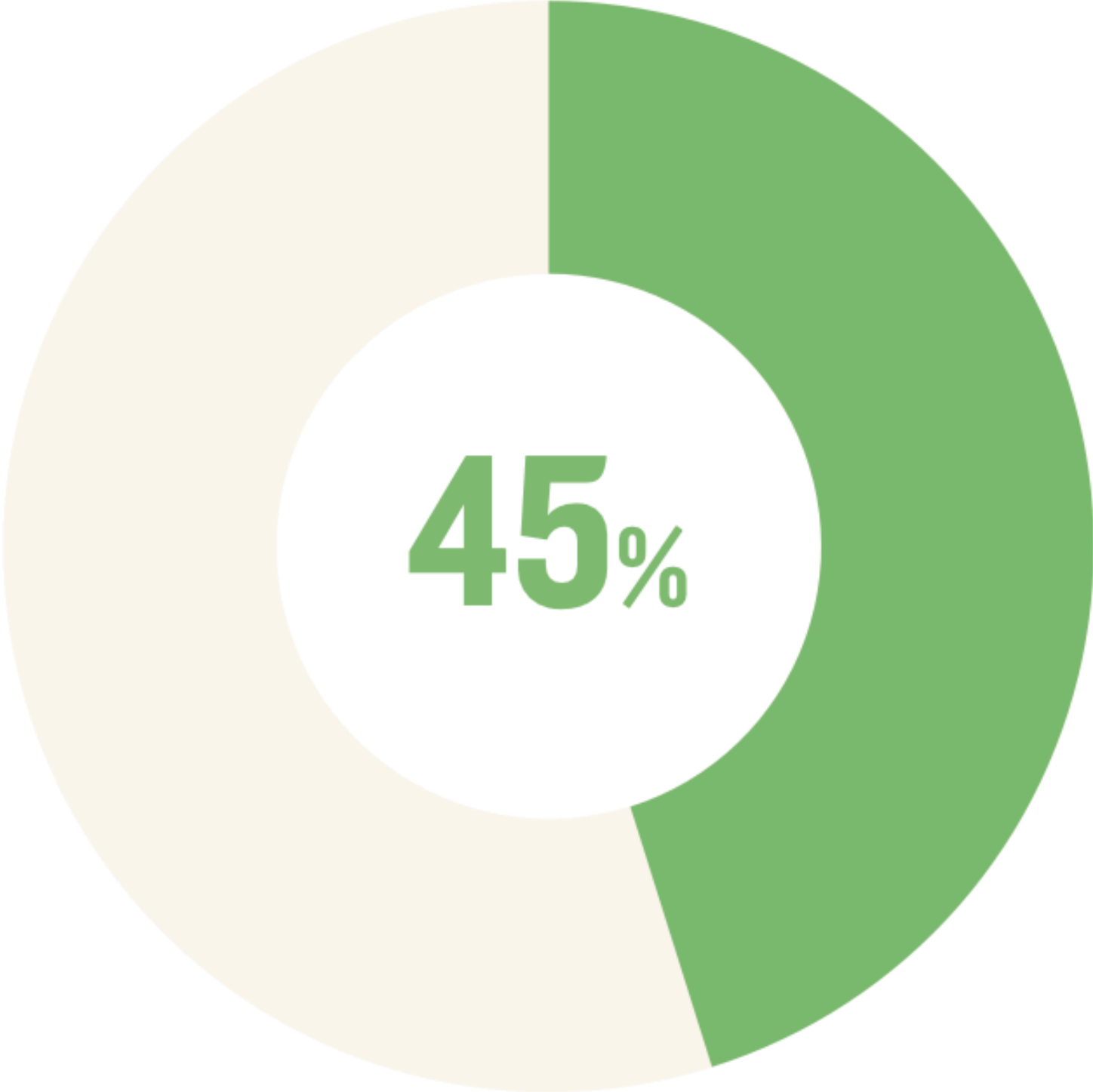


58%

# PERCEIVED RELEVANCE

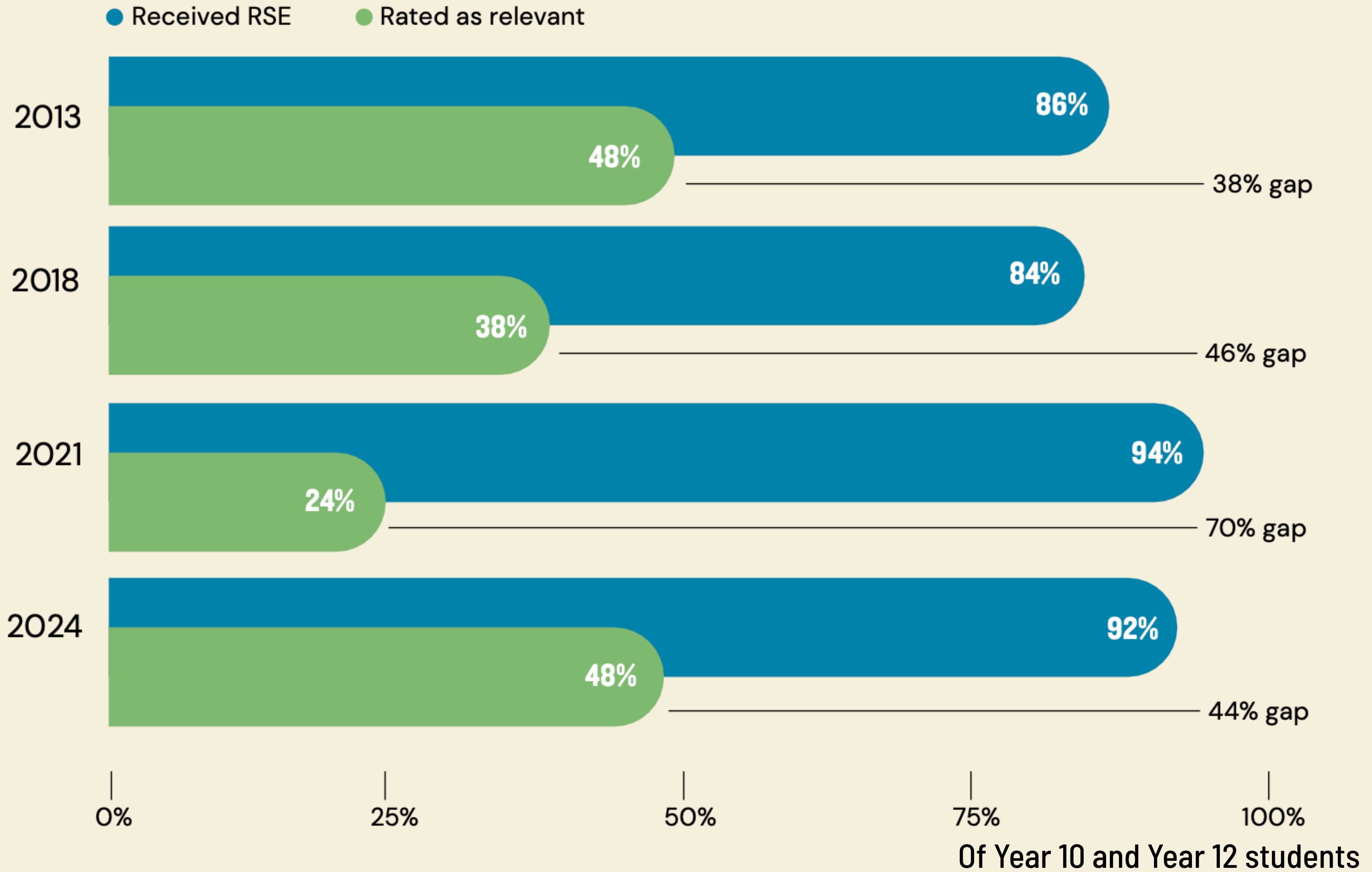


Received RSE at school



RSE perceived as relevant

# CHANGES OVER TIME



**THANK  
YOU**



*SSASH 8 Report available here:*  
<https://ssashsurvey.org.au/reports/>



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