

Mental health screening and referral to treatment in dental practices

TB Smith¹, N Culmer¹, MB Berryhill¹, D Barton², MA McBurnie², D Kopycka-Kedzierawski³, G Gilbert⁴

¹University of Alabama, ²Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, ³Eastman Institute for Oral Health, ⁴University of Alabama at Birmingham

Background

Mental health (MH) issues are prevalent but often remain untreated. Dental professionals, due to their unique access to patients, could potentially play a significant role in identifying and addressing mental health needs.

This pilot study is designed to investigate the feasibility, acceptability, and appropriateness of integrating patient mental health screening and referral to treatment into the dental health workflow.

Results

- Out of 36 patient participants:
 - 22 (61.1%) screened positive on any measure.
 - 8 (22.2%) screened positive on only one measure.
 - 11 (30.6%) screened positive on two measures.
 - 3 (8.3%) screened positive on three measures.
 - No patient screened positive on all four measures.
 - 30 (86%) completed post-visit surveys.
 - 29 (80%) unaware of referral to MH services.
- In terms of the feasibility and acceptability of integrating mental health screenings and referrals to treatment:
 - Practitioners reported that the mental health screening procedures did not interrupt the workflow in 93% of patient encounters.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

- The study involved participation from five practices.
 - Five dentists
 - Three hygienists
 - Nine office staff members
 - 36 patients participated in the screenings.

Intervention

- Practitioners were asked to administer a mental health screening on a study-provided iPad
 - Patients answered short 2-6 questions to screen for depression (PHQ-2), anxiety (GAD-2), suicide risk (C-SSRS), and substance abuse (CAGE-AID).
- Practitioners reviewed screening scores and provided patients a list of local mental health services.

Data Collection and Analysis

- Questionnaires were given to patients and practitioners before and after the study.
 - Clinician’s attitudes toward mental health
 - Feasibility of mental health screening and referral
 - Acceptability of mental health screening and referral
 - Current use of screening and referrals for mental health
 - Benefits and barriers for mental health screening and referral
 - Training and other resource needs
 - Good for patients/practice

Conclusions

- Mental health screenings in dental practices were found to be beneficial and feasible by both providers and patients.
- However, a significant number of patients, identified as potentially needing mental health services, were unaware of their referrals when surveyed a week after their dental appointment.
- This underscores the need for further research on effective communication strategies for dental providers to ensure patients are properly informed about their mental health screenings and referrals.
- Insight was gained about the general practice workflow and how to best implement MH screening.
- The screening tool, derived from several validated mental health screening tools, functioned effectively in the practices.
- There is an aspiration to expand this study to a much larger population, including a variety of practice types across multiple regions of the country and diverse patient demographics.

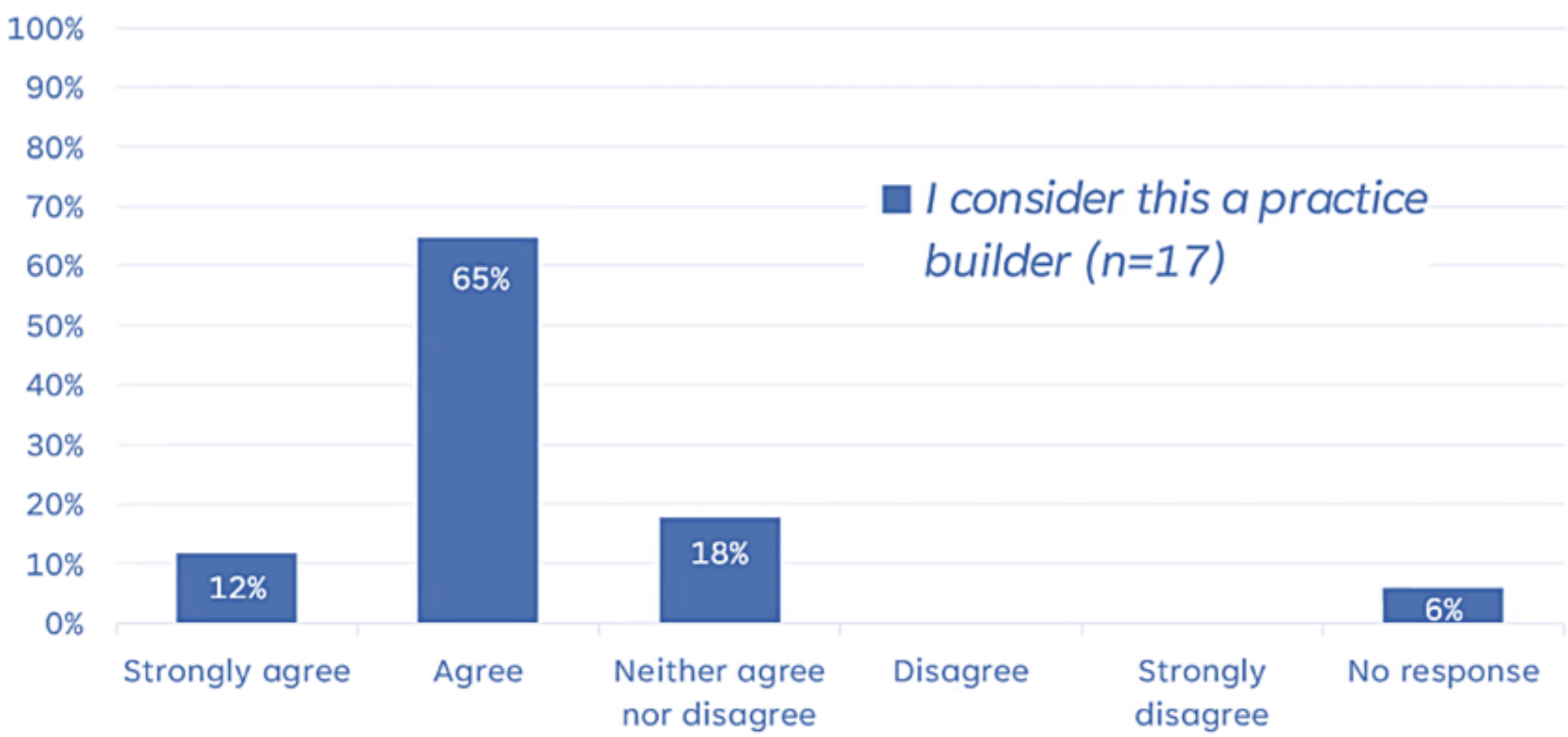


Figure 1. Practitioner perception of the value of the procedure regarding their practice.

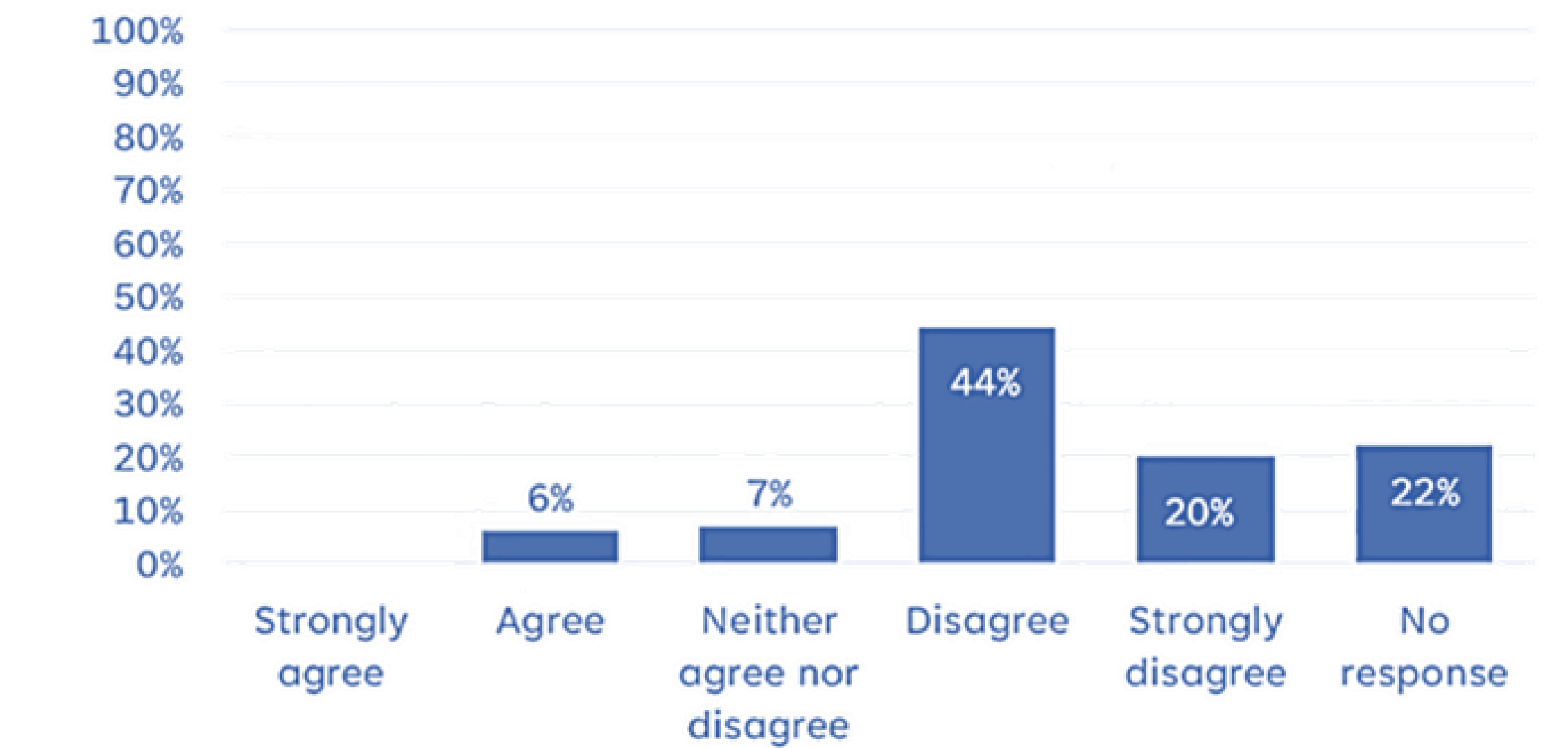


Figure 2. Practitioner perception of whether the procedure affected their clinic’s workflow.

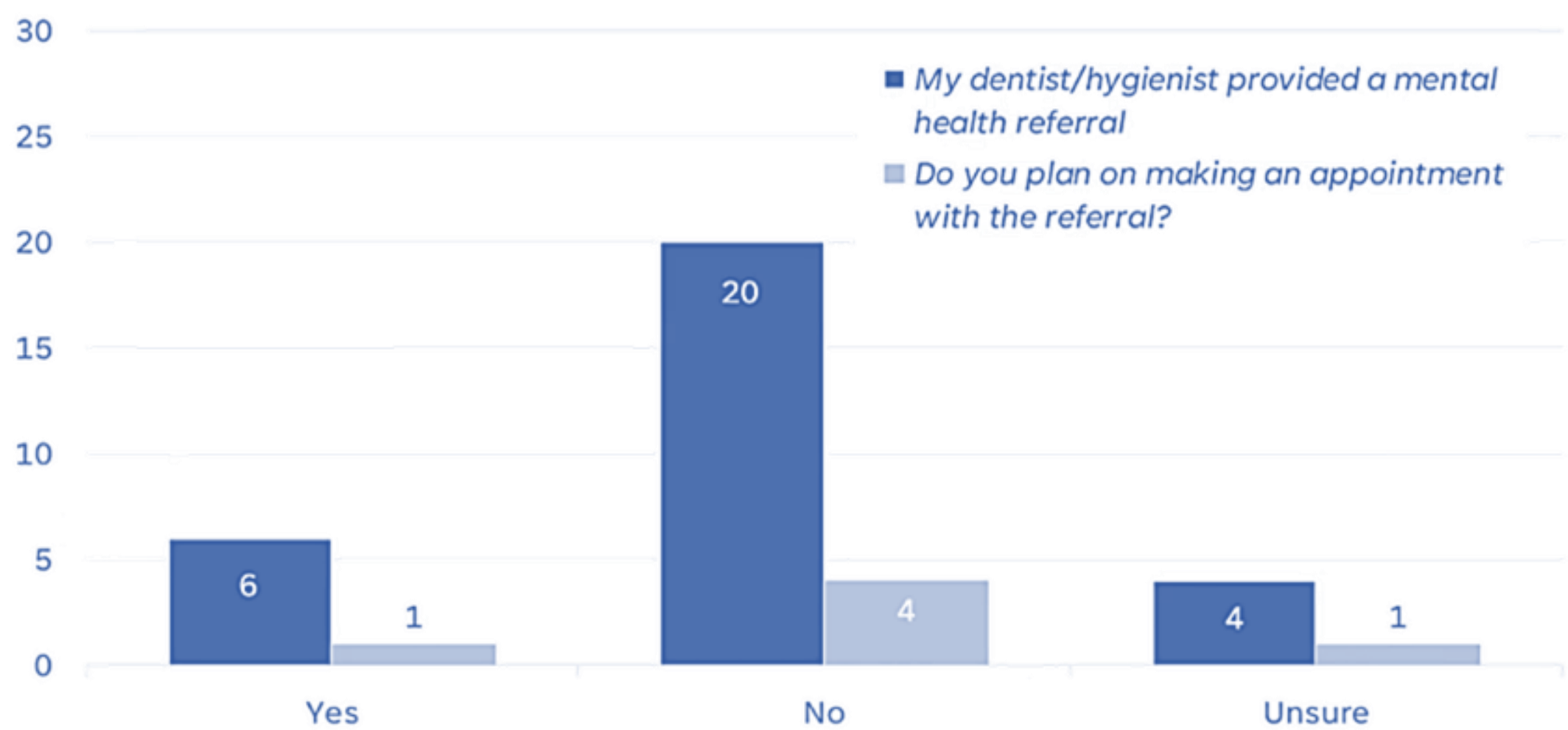


Figure 3. Patient responses to referrals.