

# Public Perception of Homelessness UMU Students

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# Research Questions

Homelessness has often been treated as a criminal justice issue with laws created to stop those experiencing homelessness from sleeping outside and even entering businesses. Heavy criminalization of this topic has created an unhealthy cycle between incarceration and homelessness. One of the questions that we are aiming to answer with our research project is whether the lack of individual knowledge exists with homelessness being treated as a criminal justice issue versus a social justice issue? The general public may seldom understand or think about those experiencing homelessness. Due to no personal experience, is homelessness perceived to be the responsibility of the criminal justice system? If more people started to think differently about homelessness, would there be a shift in the public perception from it being a criminal justice issue to a social justice issue?



# Literature Review

## European Public Perception of Homelessness

Participants were gathered from eight European countries (France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden), researchers aimed to reach 700 respondents per country (Petit, Loubiere, et al, 2019). The survey was carried out by telephone surveys using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) technology. Respondents were asked questions about personal knowledge of homelessness in their area, attitudes about the situation, and practices (i.e. giving money/assistance). Researchers found that while opinions varied between countries, European citizens overall had a positive outlook on homelessness. While respondents had poor knowledge about the magnitude and funding of the issues, the consensus was that funds should be reallocated towards programs that effectively address homelessness.

## Perceptions of Homelessness

Researchers raised questions regarding the impact of generational age groups and gender when it comes to perceptions of homelessness. With lack of studies done with the perceptions of Millennials, it was worthwhile to examine differences by gender and generational groups, their perceptions of the homelessness issue and the factors that contribute to homelessness. After conducting interviews with individuals experiencing homelessness, the survey was distributed electronically. When the data was collected and analyzed, researchers proved their hypothesis that Millennials are less caring towards those who are homeless and that females tend to be more empathetic than males in these situations (Dittmeier, Thompson, Krogar, & Phillips, 2018). The researchers did prove their hypothesis, but bias throughout the paper existed as many of the sources cited mentioned how Millennials tend to be less empathetic.



# Literature Review Continued

## Changes in Public Attitudes and Perceptions about Homelessness

The focus for this study emphasized on the changes in attitudes and perceptions about homelessness from 1990-2016. Conducted as an online survey, researchers asked a variety of questions about the perception of homelessness including the role government should play, beliefs and attitudes, and ages of individuals experiencing homelessness. The data collected and analyzed showed that over the past two decades, public attitudes had shifted towards more compassion and an increase in public support.

## Public Support for Homelessness in Canada

Another study that was done outside of the United States, focuses on homelessness in Canada and whether citizens support homelessness 'investments'. Using a vignette survey experiment, researchers gave respondents randomized hypothetical people experiencing homelessness and asked how much support (in monetary amount) each person should receive per month. The results concluded that while all citizens agree homeless individuals should be supported, those who are more of a liberal spectrum tend to be in support of more money versus those who are conservative. Rather than focusing on the costs of homelessness, researchers suggested that the focus should be more personal as it can expand citizen perceptions of what it means to be deserving of support.



# Research Method

The research method used in this study will be a qualitative survey. Researchers will be contacting the UM Institutional Research to request and be given a list of 500 randomized UM student emails. The survey consisting of 34 questions will be sent out to the list of students through an email invitation and by enabling anonymous response, we will be maintaining the anonymity of the participants. We will be following up via email reminder, on a weekly basis, with potential participants who haven't taken the survey yet and right before concluding with the study. We do not know if any of the individuals or their family members have ever experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. Because of this, some of the questions may trigger an emotional or psychological response. Our plans for minimizing risks include adding information for the Homeless Connections Hotline, Community Action Provo, Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the UN Crisis Line.

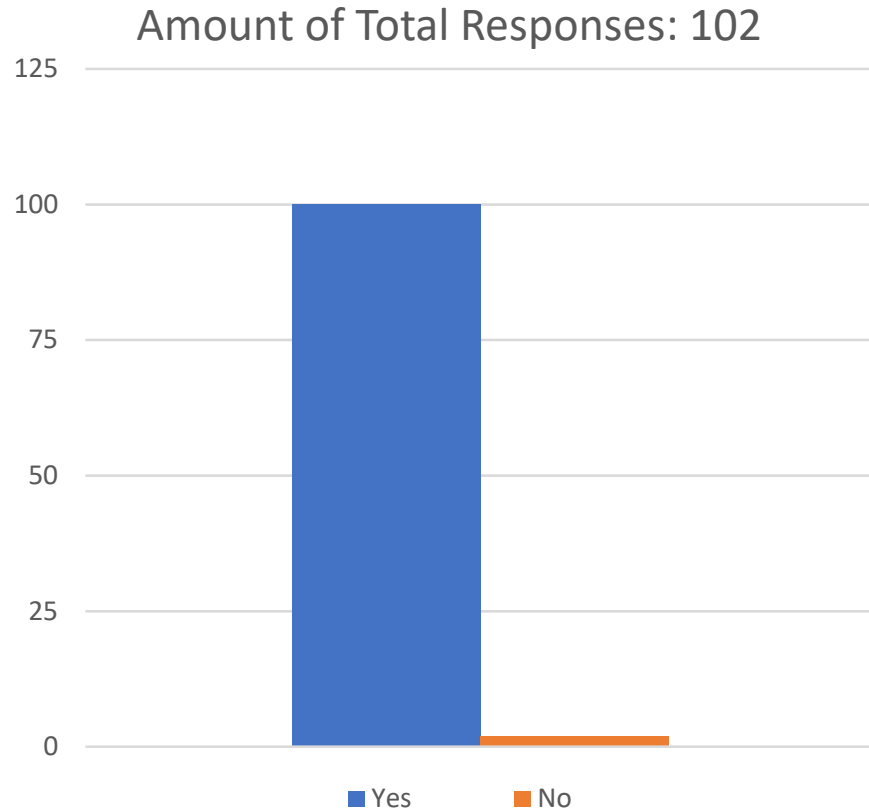


# Survey

Our sample size was of 500 but we only got 102 responses. Our confidence interval was of plus or minus 4.36. For our confidence level to be 95%, we would need a total of 499 response. Because we didn't get as many responses, the bias in our study is a weakness.



# Feedback



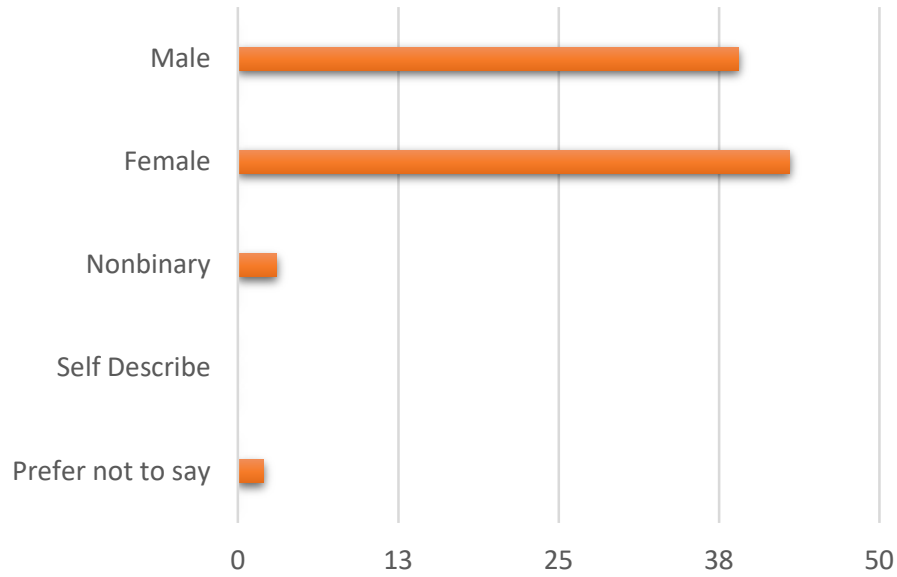
## Why this response rate?

- Email reminders
- Unique topic



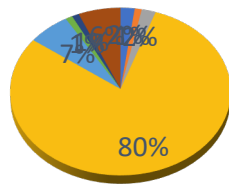
# Demographics

## Gender

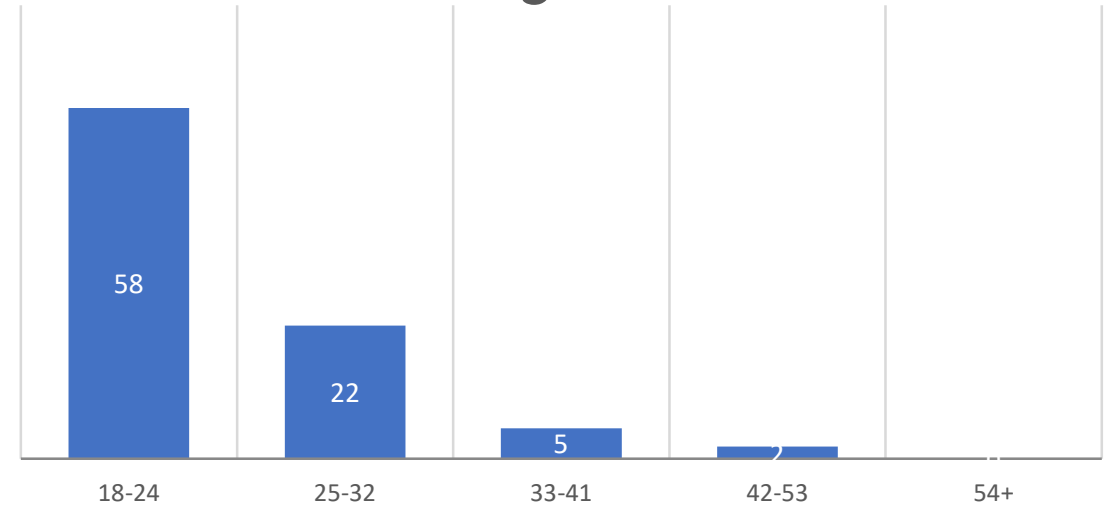


## Ethnicity

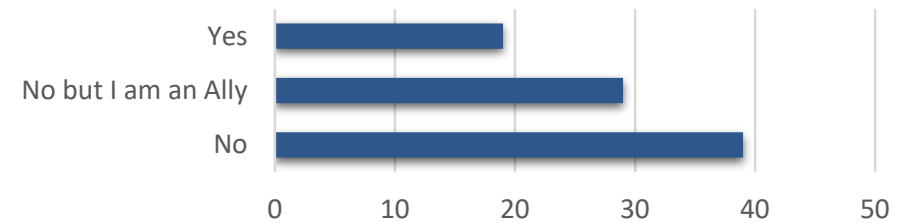
- Asian
- Black-African American
- Native American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Pacific Islander
- Self Describe
- Prefer Not to Say



## Age

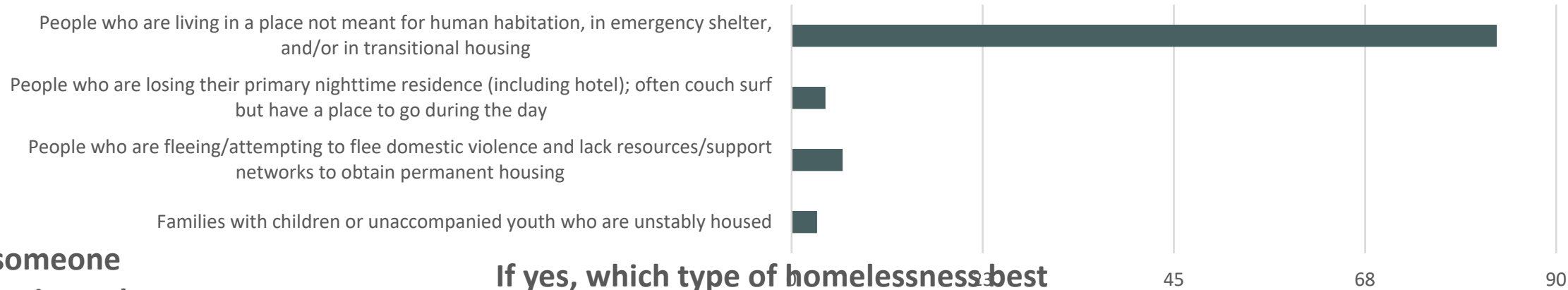


**Do you consider yourself a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer (LGBTQ) community?**

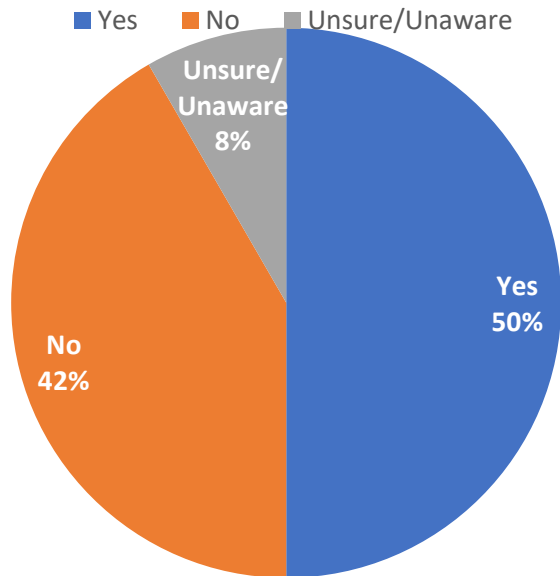




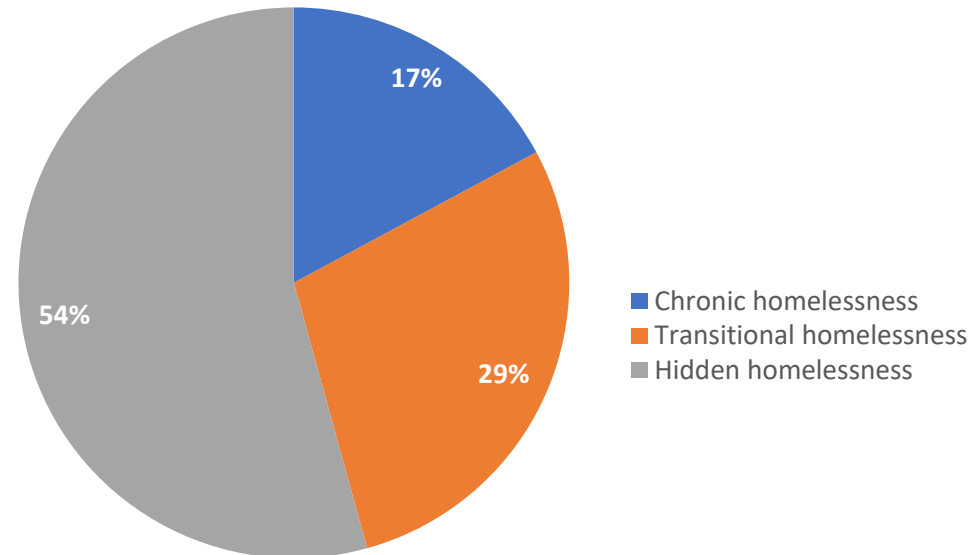
# When you think of homelessness which definition comes to mind first?



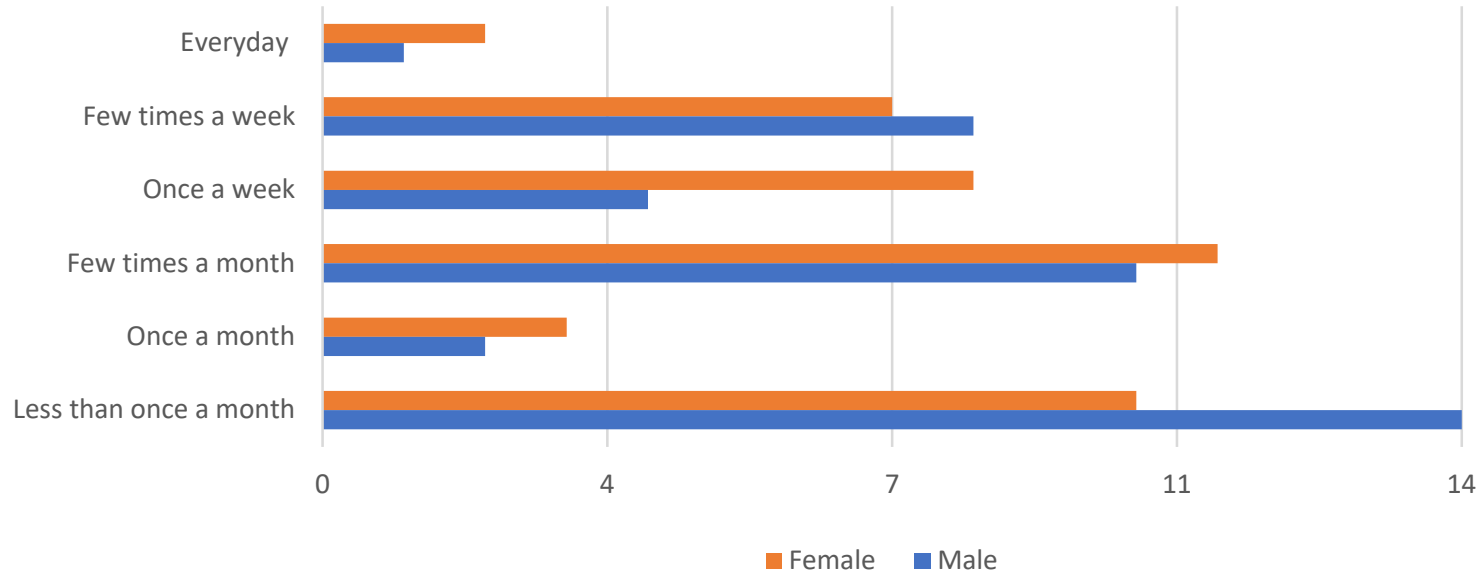
## Have You or someone you know experienced homelessness?



## If yes, which type of homelessness best describes the situation?

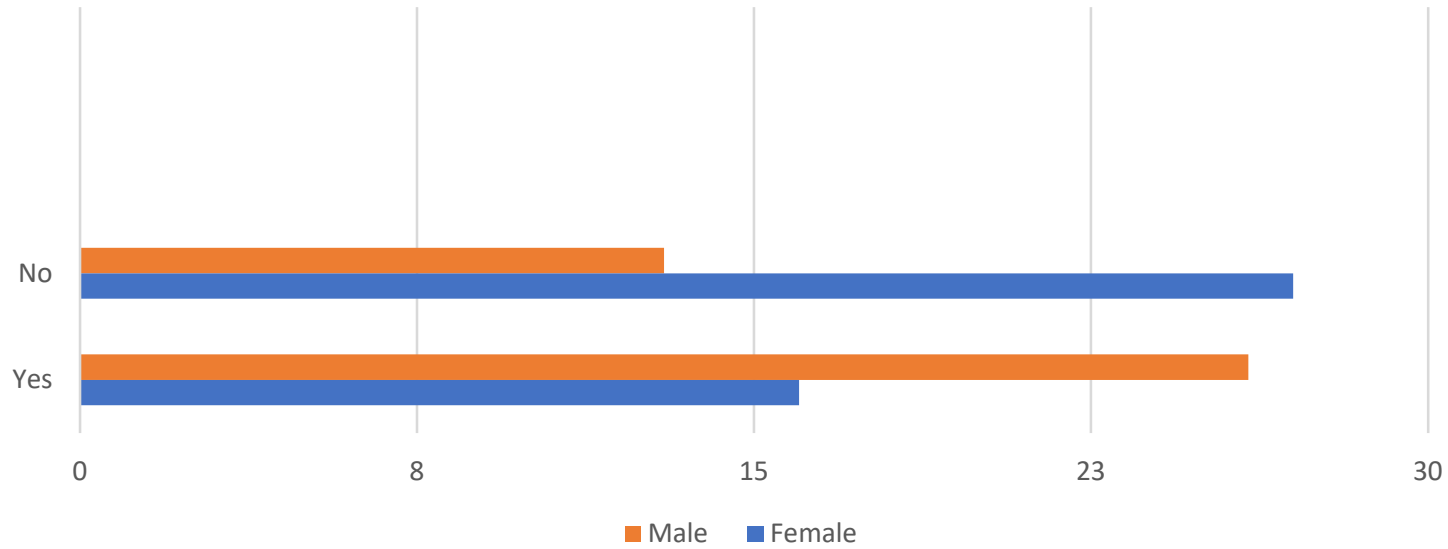


# How often do you think about homelessness?

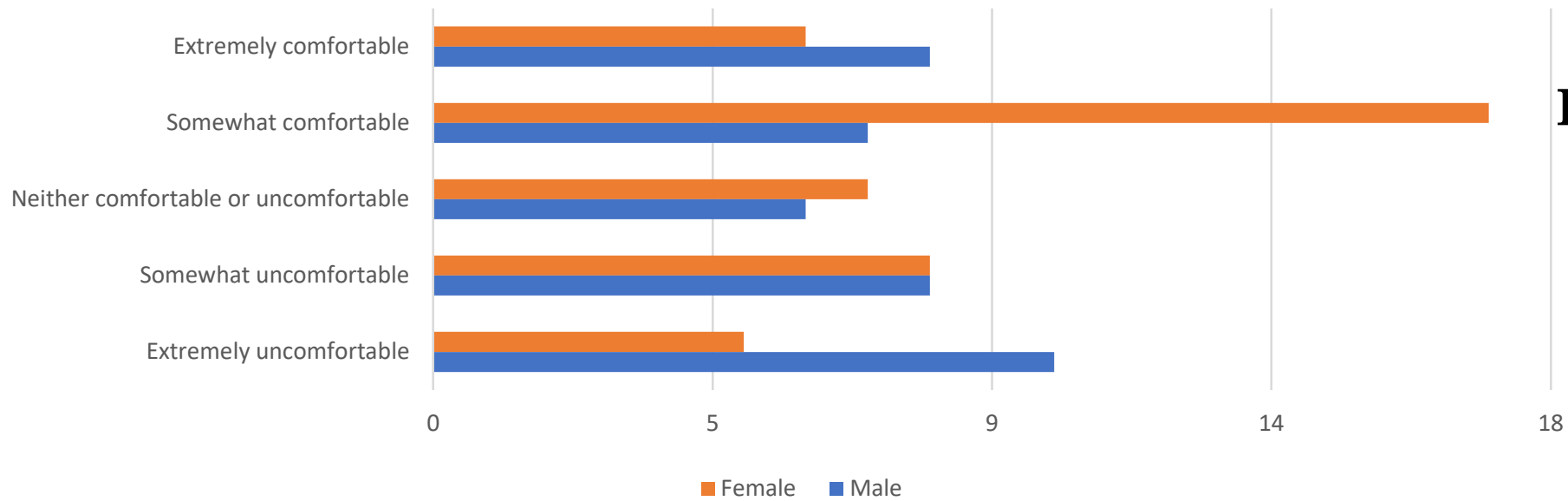
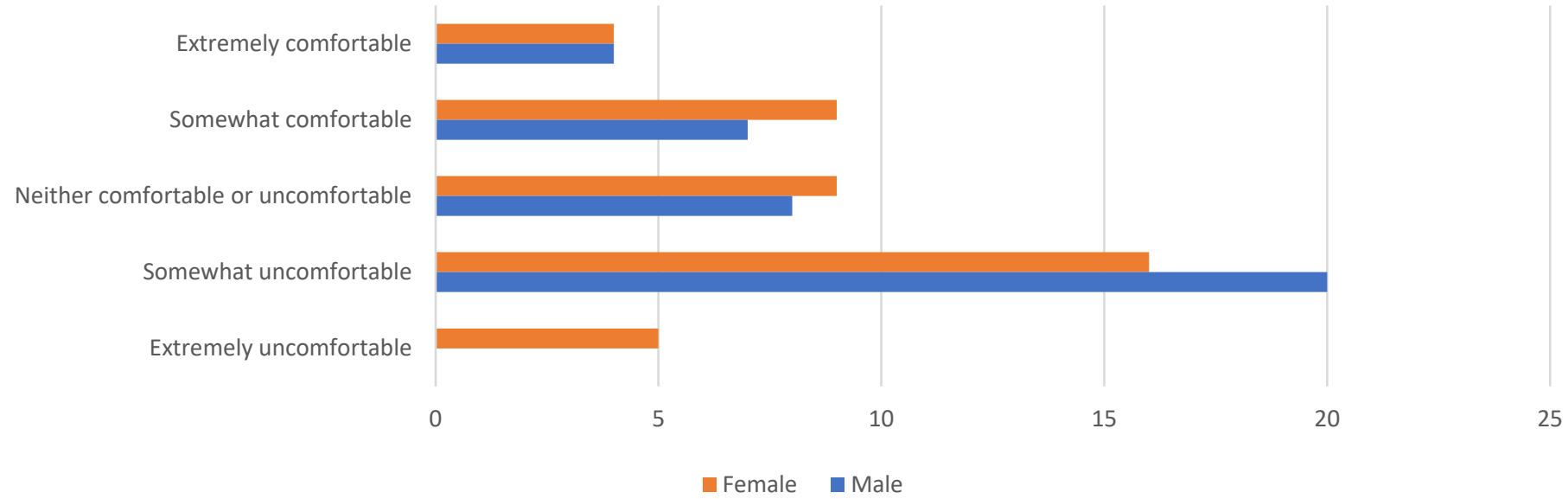


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# Have you ever had a conversation with someone who is visibly homeless?



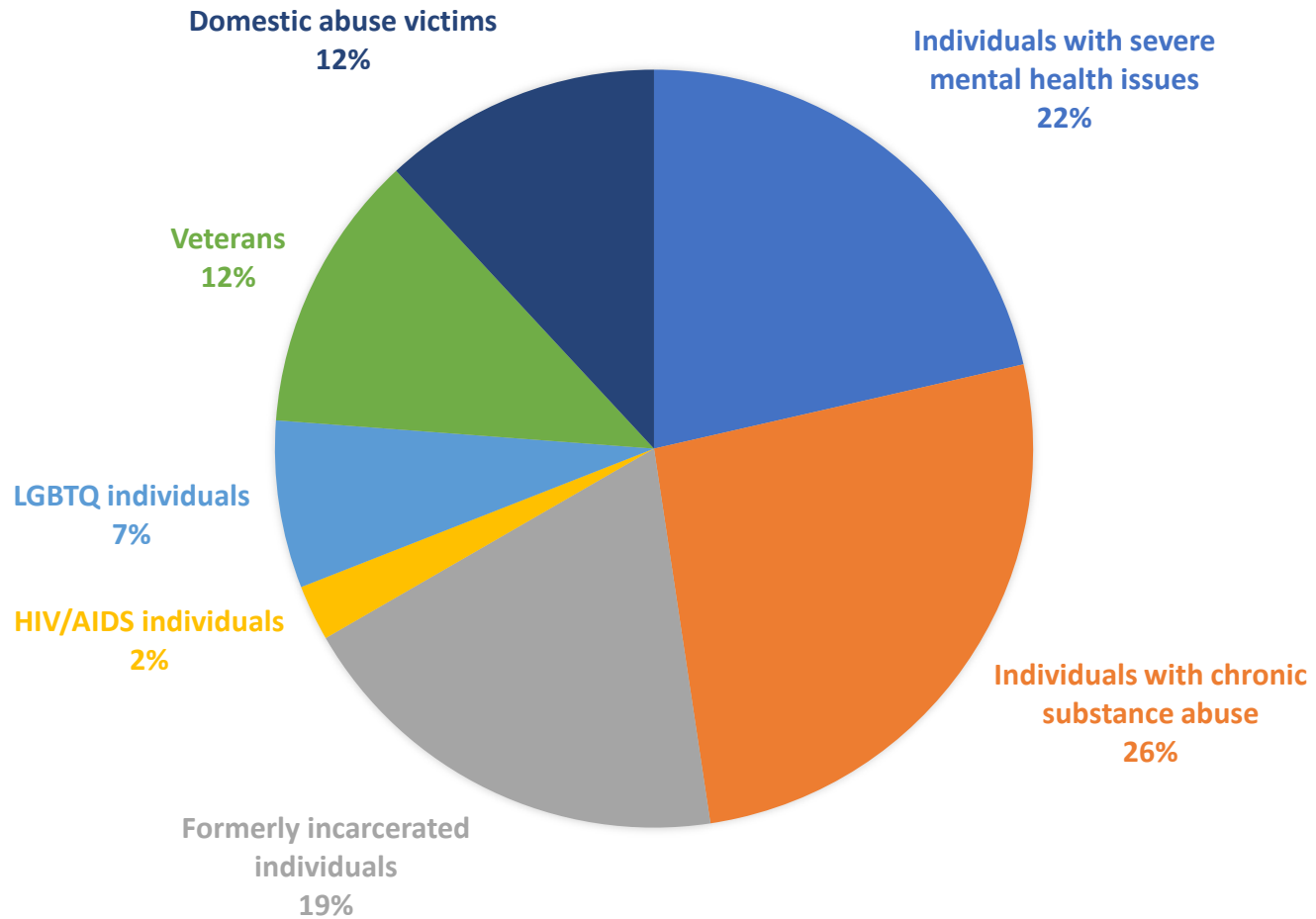
**I feel comfortable approaching someone who is visibly homeless (i.e. carrying bags of their items, smelling bad, dirty clothes, etc)**



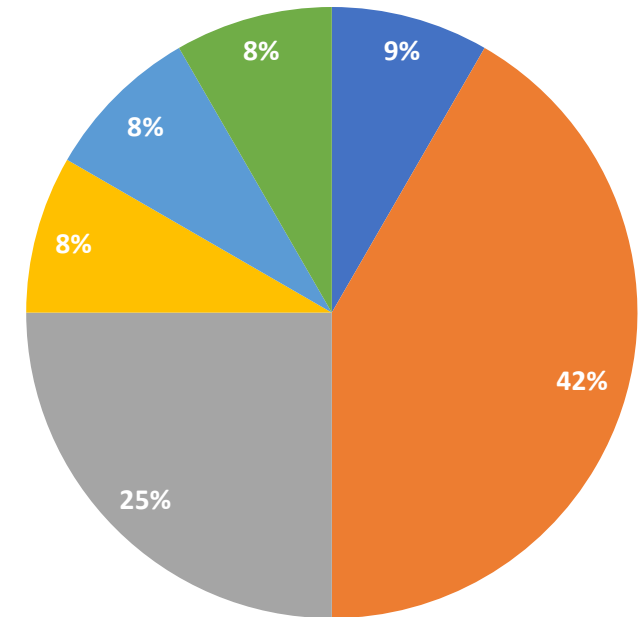
**I am comfortable giving money to an individual who is experiencing homelessness**



Which individuals do you think experience the highest rate of homelessness?



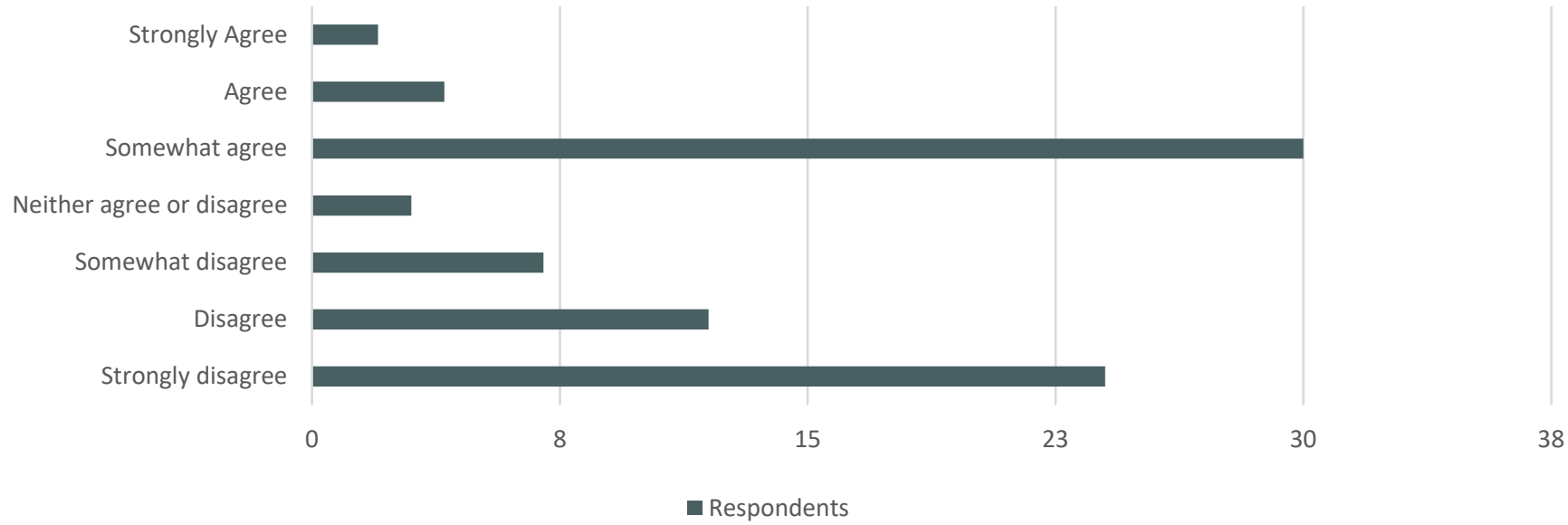
How can individuals best get out of homelessness?



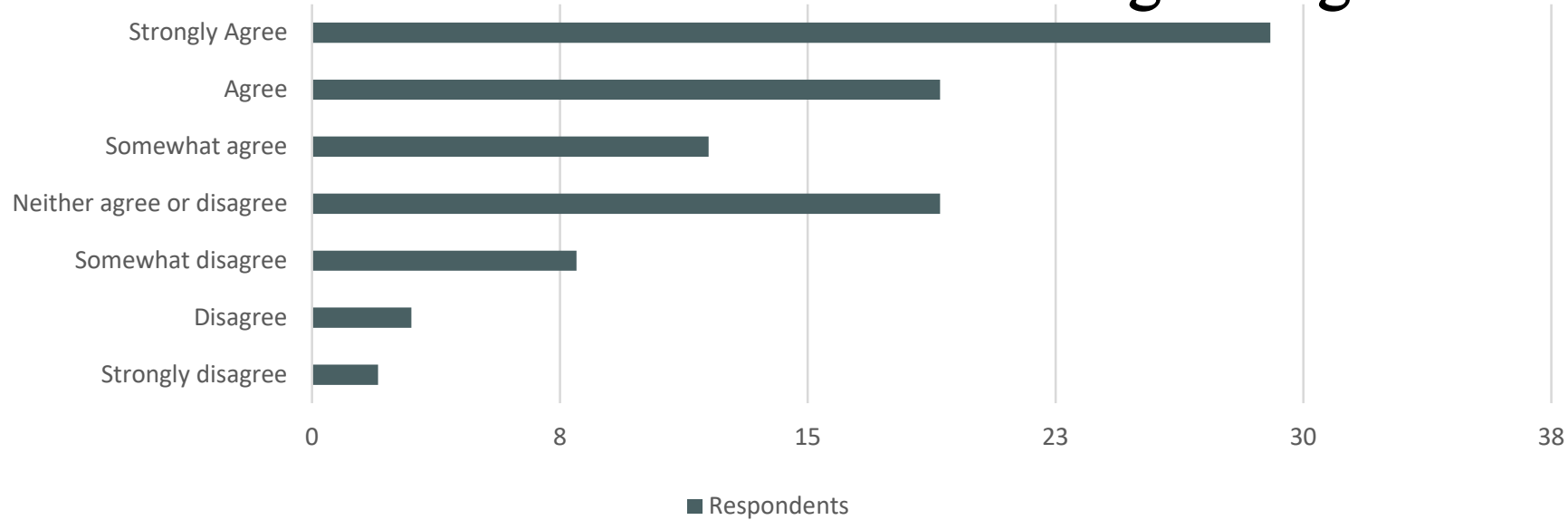
- They can't
- Get an Education/job
- Get their own housing
- Go to rehab
- Move in with family



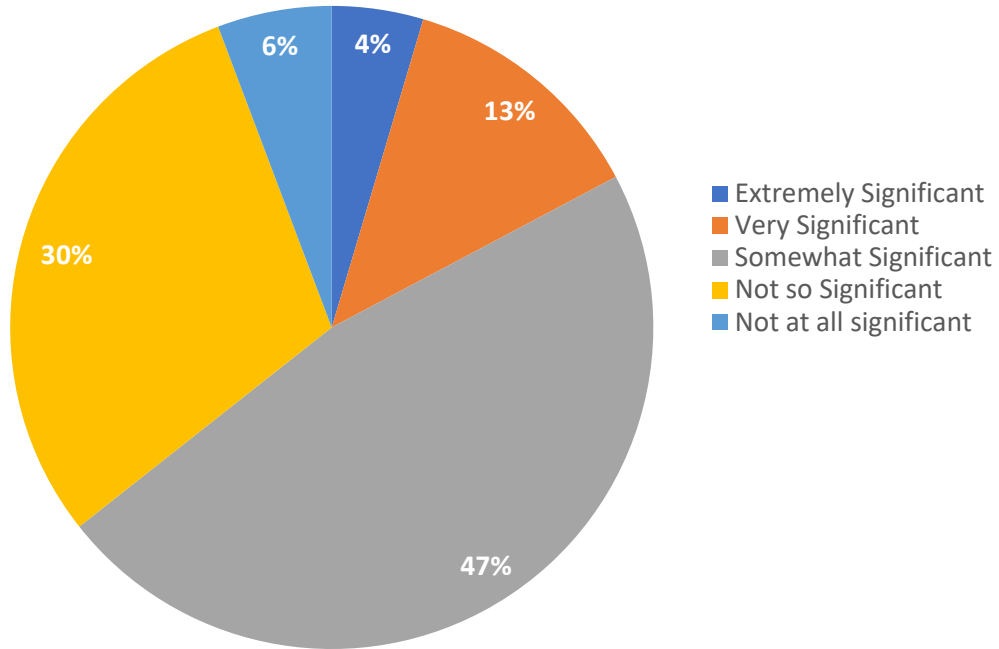
# Homelessness is a choice. Agree or disagree?



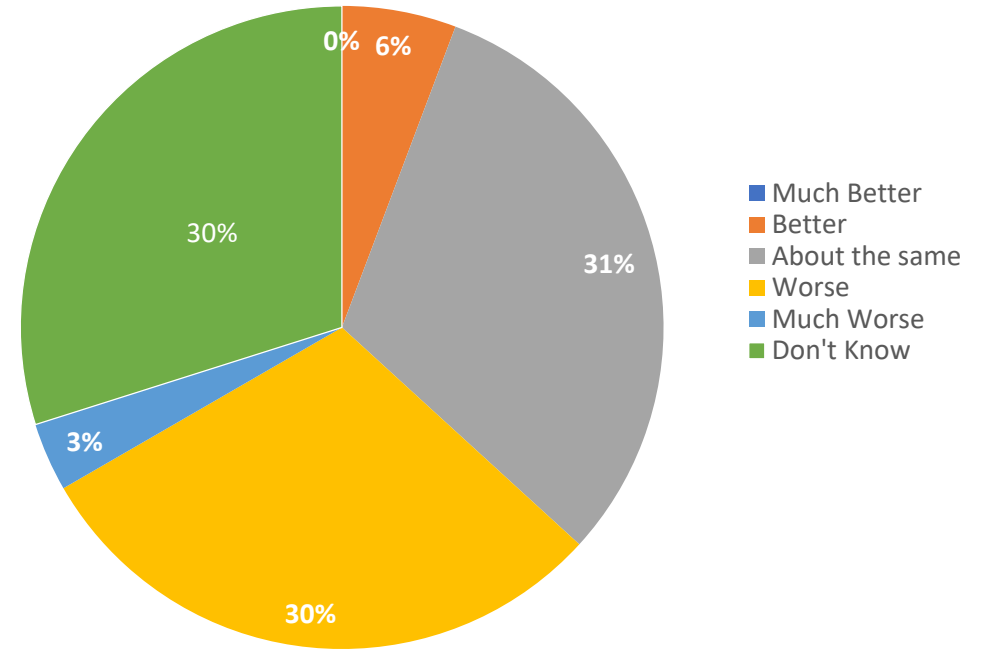
# Homelessness should be decriminalized. Agree or disagree?



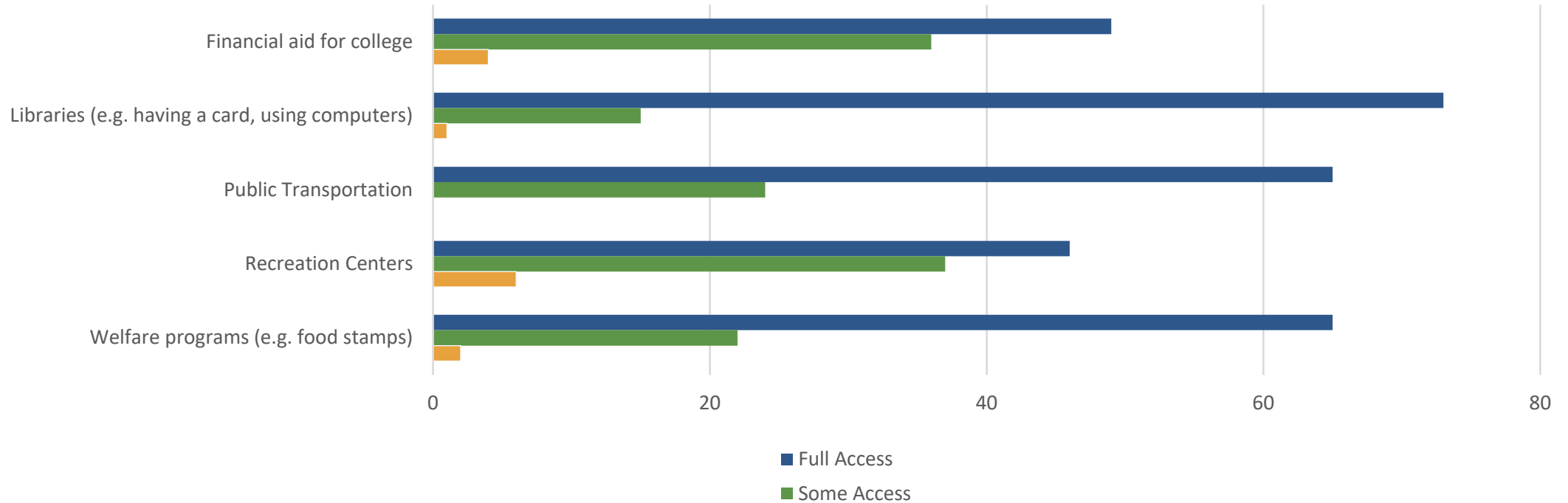
### How significant is Homelessness where you live?



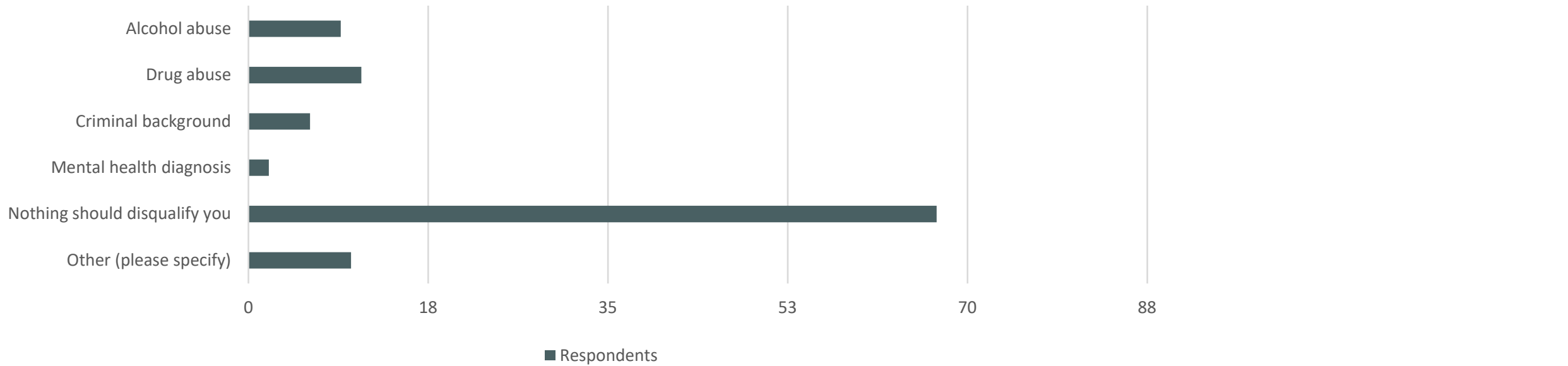
### Is homelessness getting better or worse where you live?



# What level of access to community resources should those experiencing homelessness have?



# Should any of the following characteristics disqualify someone experiencing homelessness from receiving your community's resources? Mark all that apply.



## Other responses:

Only if it is obvious that a person will do harm to the people in charge of the shelter

Services could be provided to each of the characteristics separately from the community resources regarding homelessness is

Domestic Abuse charges

Sexual predators

A repeated amount of all the options above, more of a strike system.

It depends on repeating behaviors. But it's kind of a loaded question.

Alcohol and/or drug abuse, TO THE EXTENT that it represents an individual's choice

(eg exceptions for addiction)

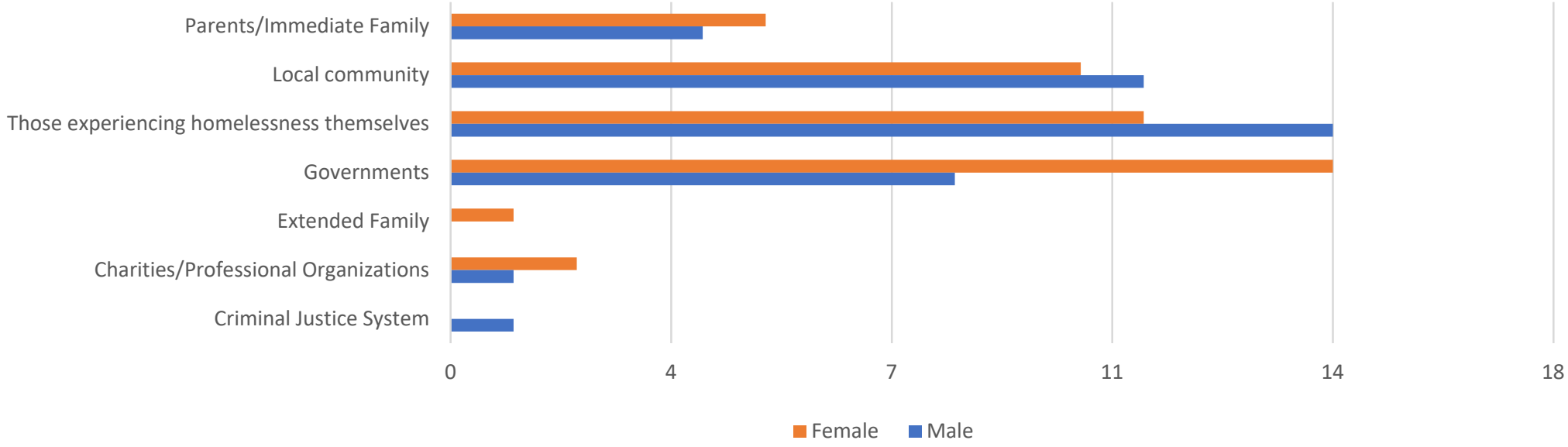
Individuals with substance abuse problems and mental health issues absolutely deserve help in recovering and finding homes and stable lives. A criminal background should not disqualify someone unless they have a history of violence. Non violent criminals deserve help too.

If you are homeless you are homeless and frankly people are terrible at making assumptions. Smell and teeth don't mean drugs they mean bad hygiene which isn't surprising when people turn them away from using showers and having water.

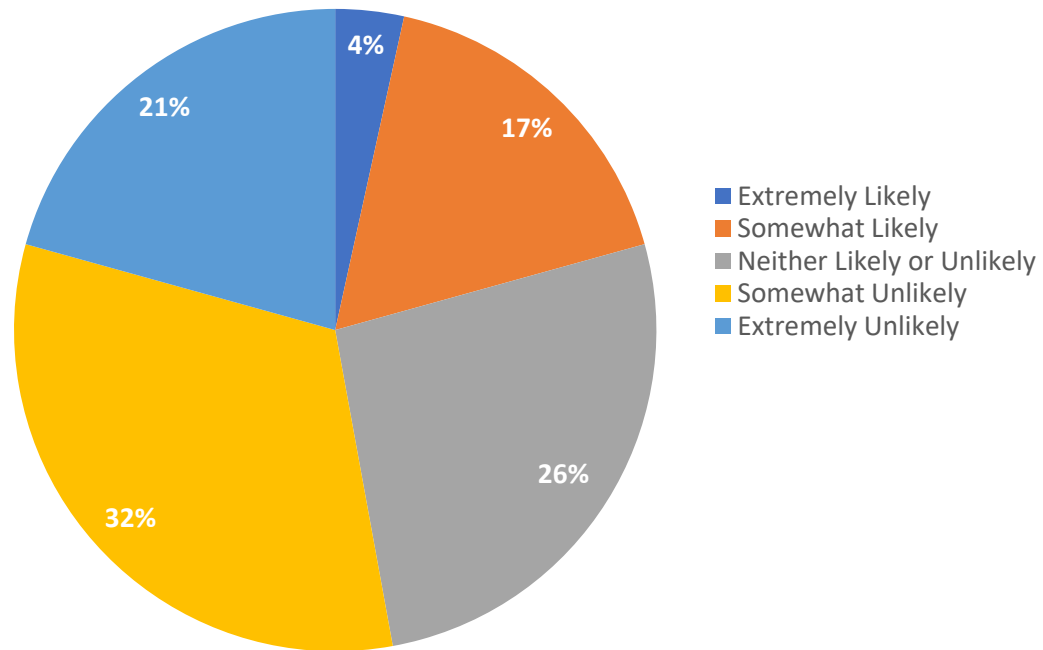




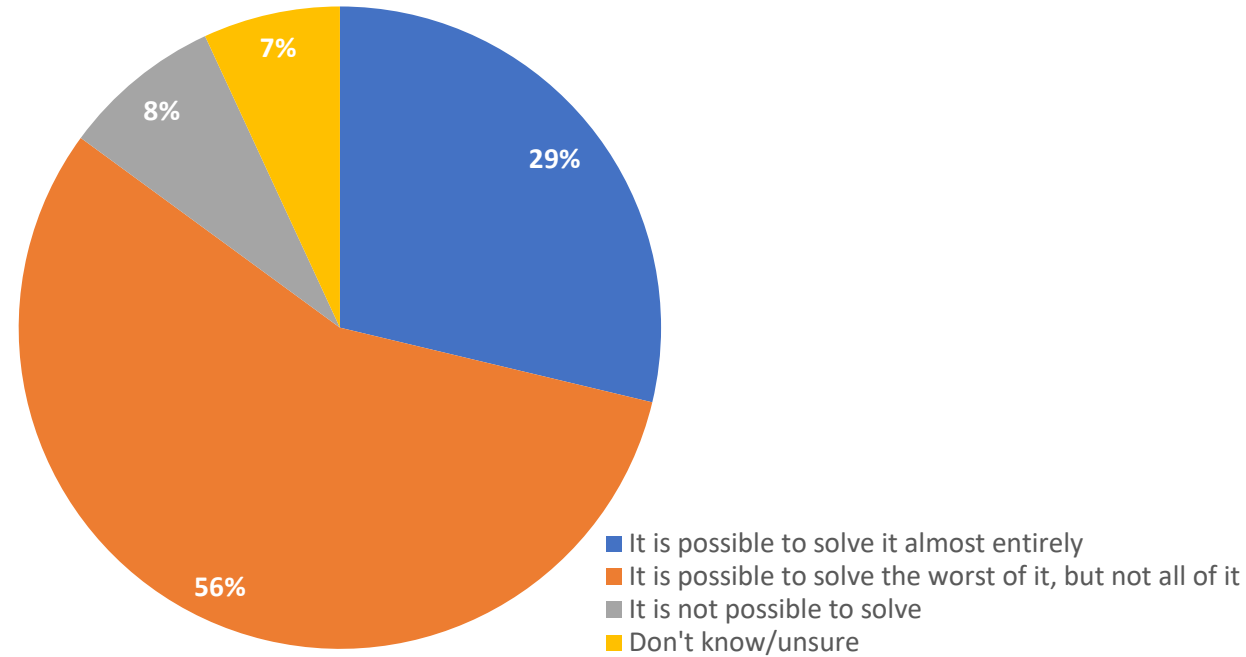
# Who is Responsible for Solving Homelessness?



### How likely will Utah see an end to homelessness within the next 50 years?



### Do you think it is possible to solve homelessness? Would you say...



# Conclusion

This concludes the end of our research project. Ask as many questions as you can concerning our topic and we will be sure to answer them to the best of our ability. While our project had varying results, it reveals some interesting information concerning how the younger generations view homelessness. Homelessness has typically been treated as a criminal justice problem and not a social issue. We think that the data indicates people don't view homelessness purely as a criminal justice problem. So perhaps it is time to change how we solve this problem. It would have been nice to get more responses but there is only so much we can do through reminders and other non-aggressive methods. The data gathered still shows us some valuable opinions shared by the younger generation at Utah Valley University. We will appreciate any questions concerning our research.

-Sarah Miller

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