

HOW SAFE IS FORENSIC PSYCHIATRY?

Dr Elizabeth Masterson BSc (Hon), MBBS, Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Dr Leo McSweeney MRCPsych, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Dr Nicholas Taylor MB ChB, MRCPsych, LLM, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

INTRODUCTION:

“So, how safe is forensic psychiatry?” This is a question commonly put to us by medical students, foundation doctors and core trainees at medical careers fairs and recruitment events. We tend to reply by subjectively drawing upon our personal experiences and those of close colleagues.

In this pilot study we set out to gather simple, objective data to provide those interested in a career in forensic psychiatry with a more informed answer to this question.

METHODS:

We sent out an electronic survey to all forensic psychiatry higher trainees and consultants, via forensic TPD’s (training programme directors) in England, Wales and Scotland, asking 5 simple questions:

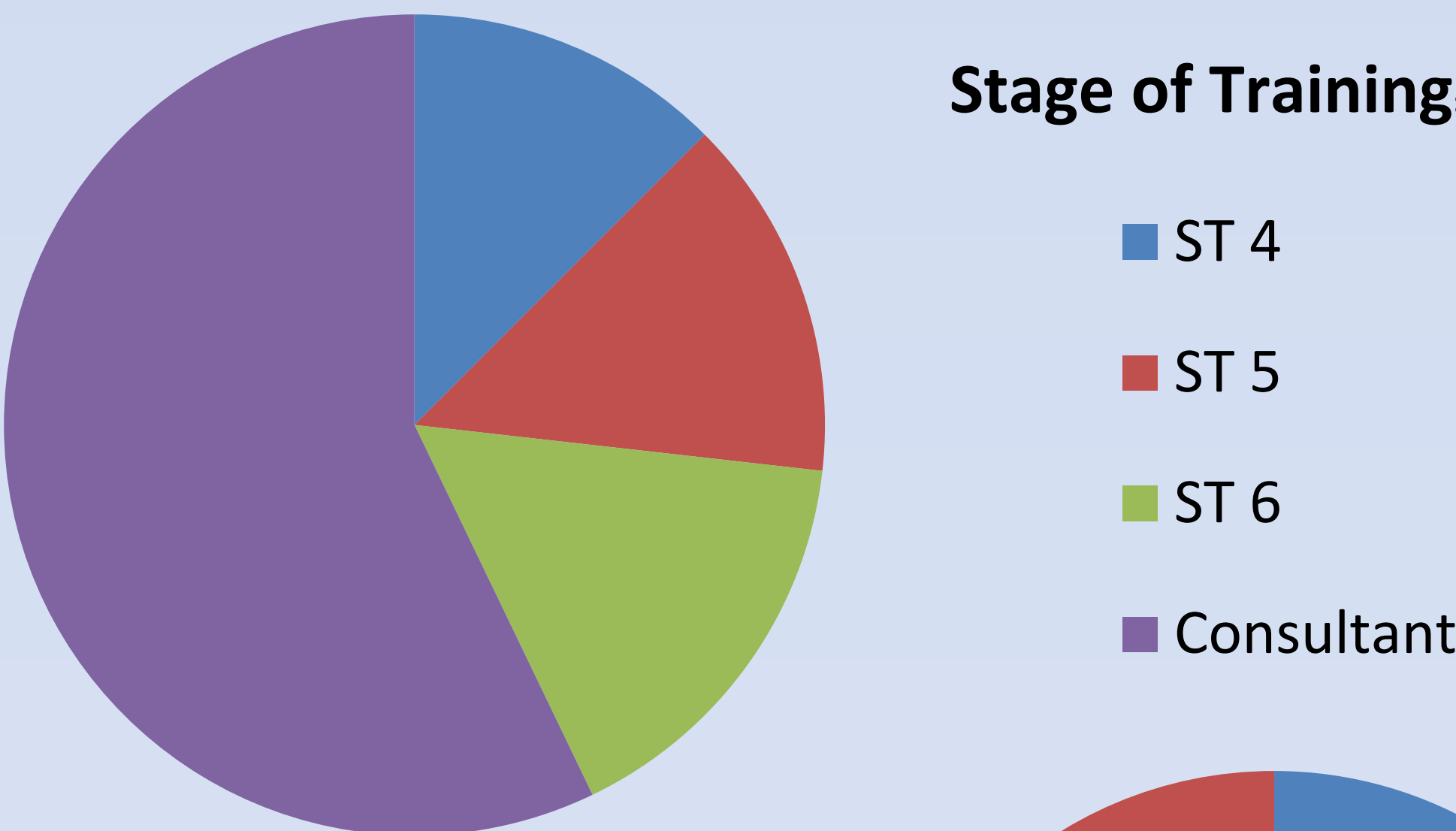
- Have you ever been physically assaulted?
- When in your career did this happen?
- Where did it happen?
- How often do you feel at significant risk in your current role?
- In your current role, do you feel there are appropriate security protocols in place to maintain your safety?

These were simple multiple choice tick box questionnaires taking less than two minutes to complete.

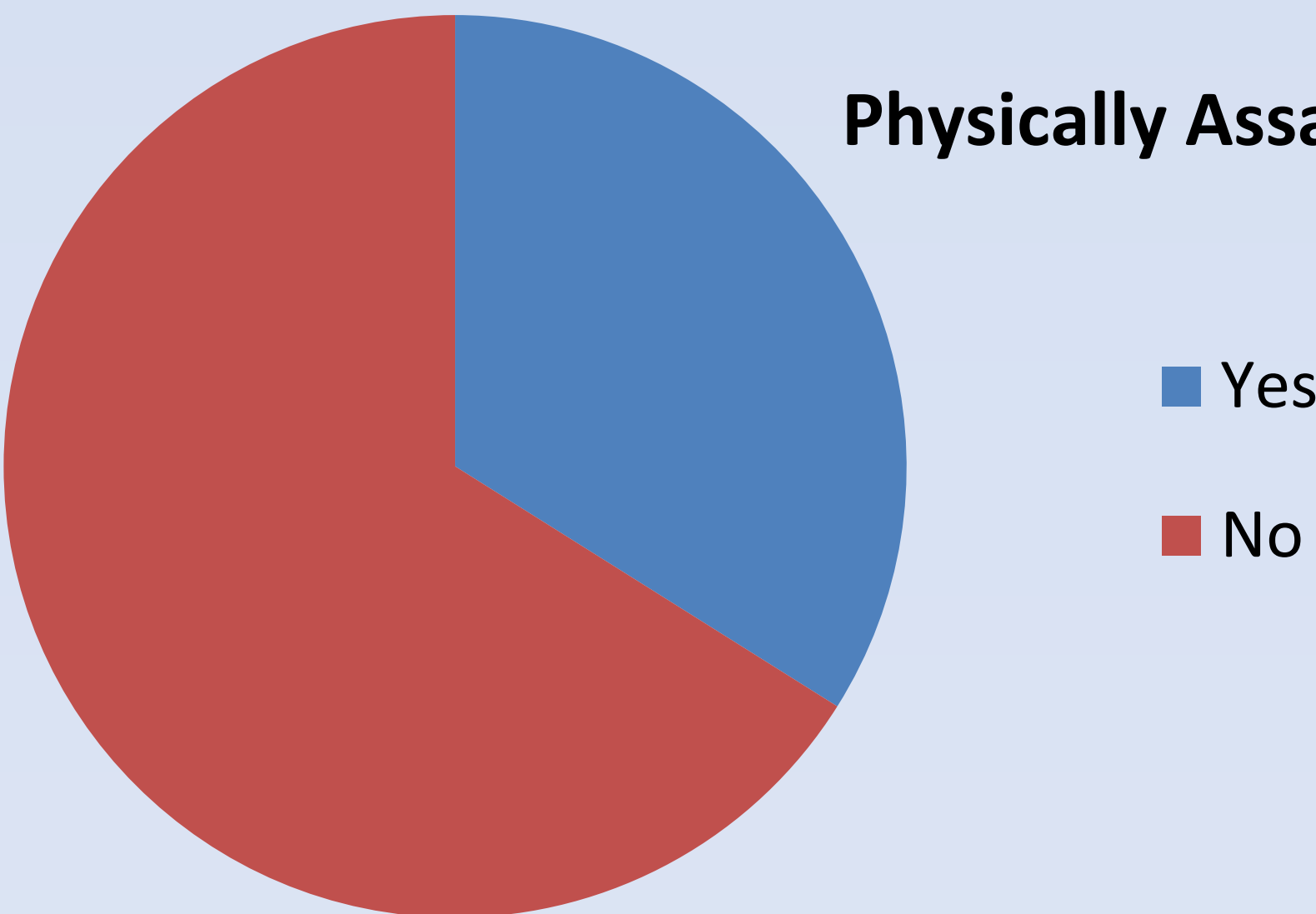
RESULTS:

We had 56 responses in total, with 32 consultants, 7 ST 4, 8 ST 5 and 9 ST 6 higher trainees. Of these, 37 (66%) reported never having been physically assaulted. Of the remaining 19 (34%), the majority had been assaulted as a consultant (55%) with the other assaults distributed roughly evenly throughout ST 4, ST 5 and ST 6 trainees.

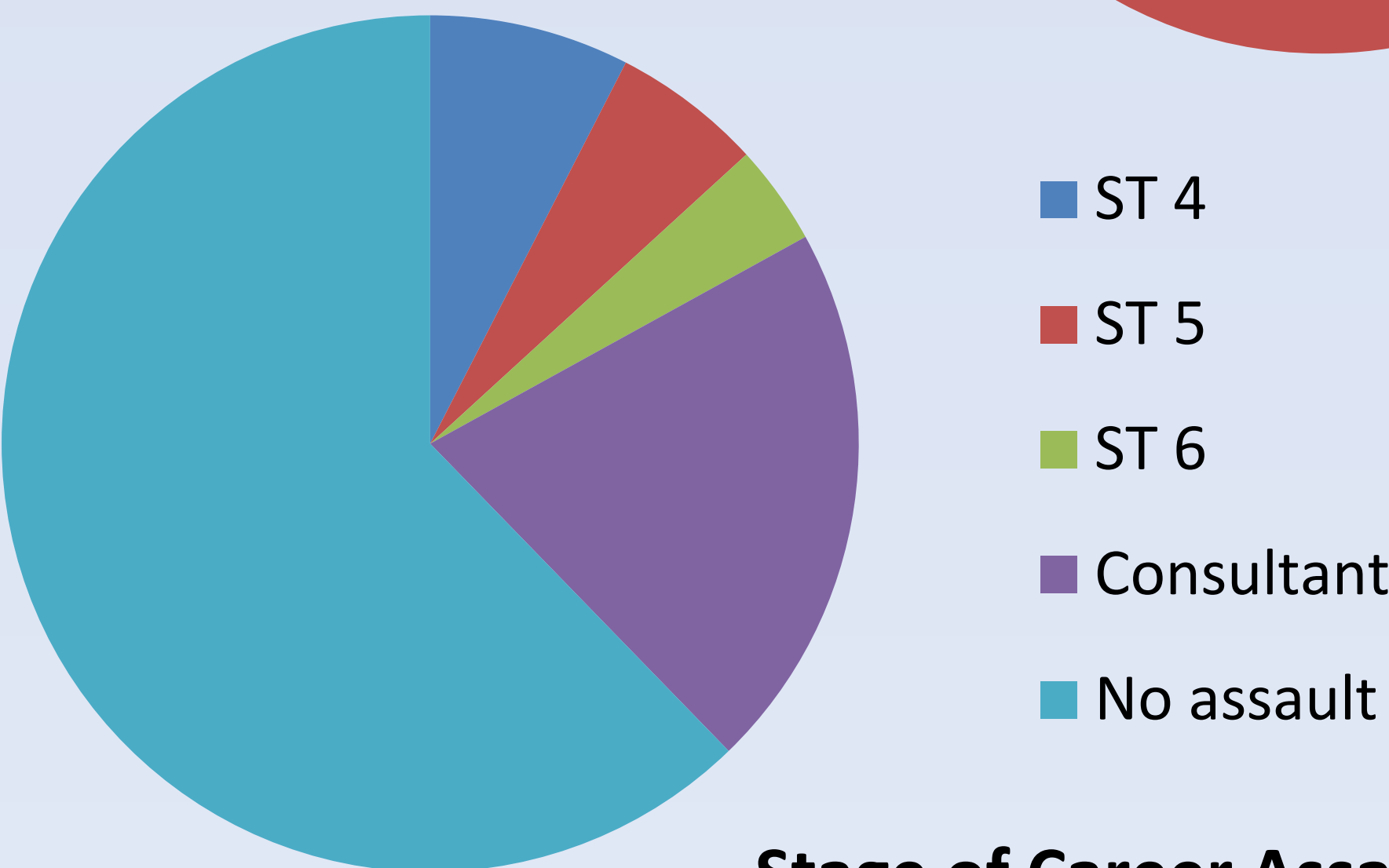
Stage of Training



Physically Assaulted:



Stage of Career Assaulted:



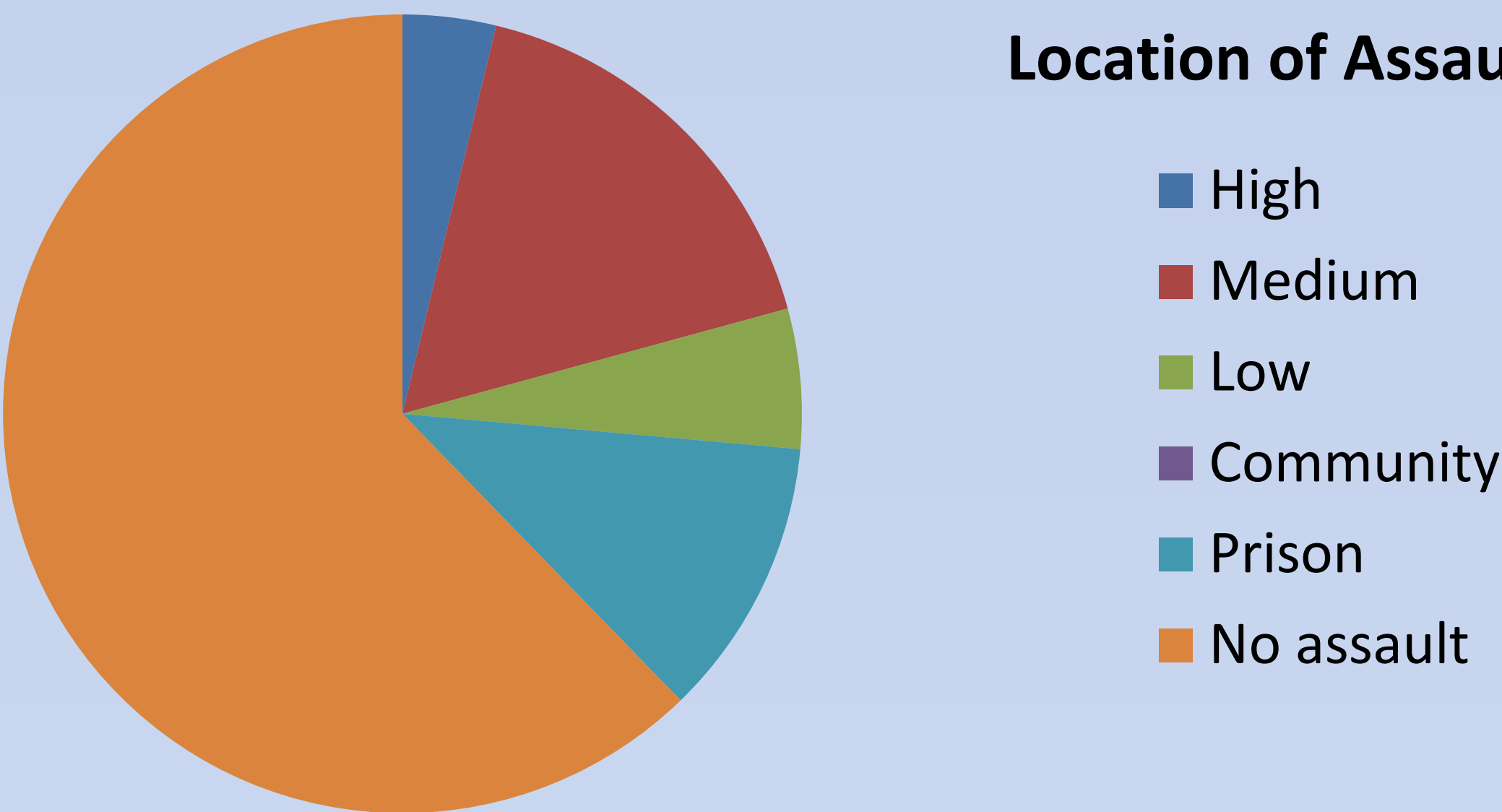
RESULTS (CONT):

45% of assaults were registered in medium secure placements and 30% in prison. There were no reported incidents in the community, and 10% and 15% in high secure and low secure respectively.

56% of respondents reported they very rarely felt at significant risk of physical harm in their current role. A further 40% reported occasionally feeling at significant risk whilst 6% felt they were often at risk.

81% of respondents felt there were appropriate security measures currently in place to maintain their safety at work. Worryingly however, that means nearly 20% do not feel safe in their current workplace.

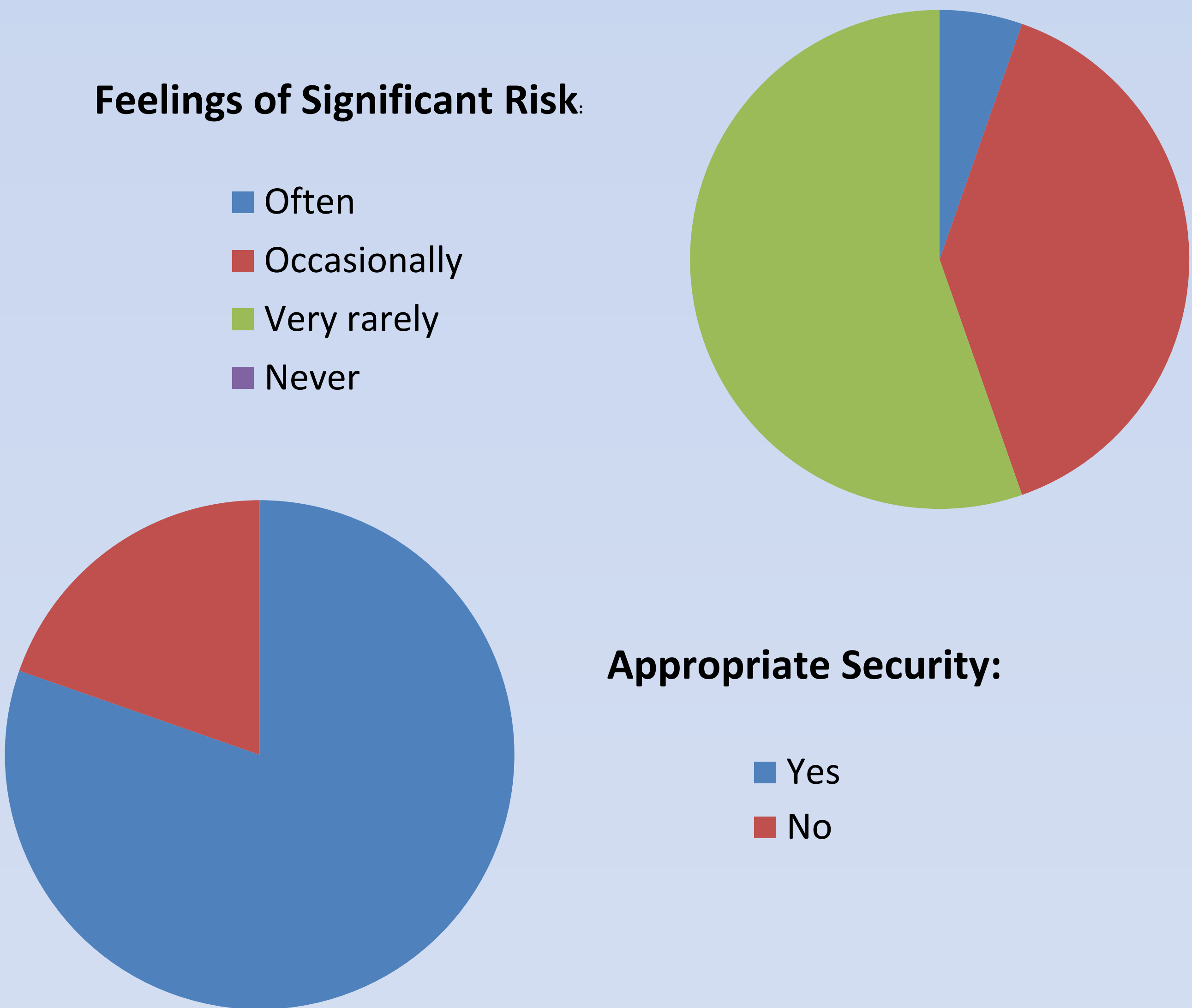
Location of Assault:



Feelings of Significant Risk



Appropriate Security:



CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

Reassuringly, the majority of respondents had not been subjected to physical assaults at work and more than 80% stated they felt appropriate security protocols were in place in their workplace.

However, it is notable that over a third of respondents had been the victim of an assault at some point during their career, and one factor influencing medical students and core trainees alike in not pursuing forensic psychiatry. Responder bias may however be an important factor to consider.

Although just a snapshot, this simple data provides a useful reference to call upon when one is asked “how safe is forensic psychiatry?” by those who may be considering a career in the field.

Our wish is to extend this research to address the small proportion of respondents who reported that they “often” feel at significant risk in their workplace and consider the specific factors that contribute to this and what, if any, measures could be taken to ameliorate this.