

Pastors Attrition Study 2025

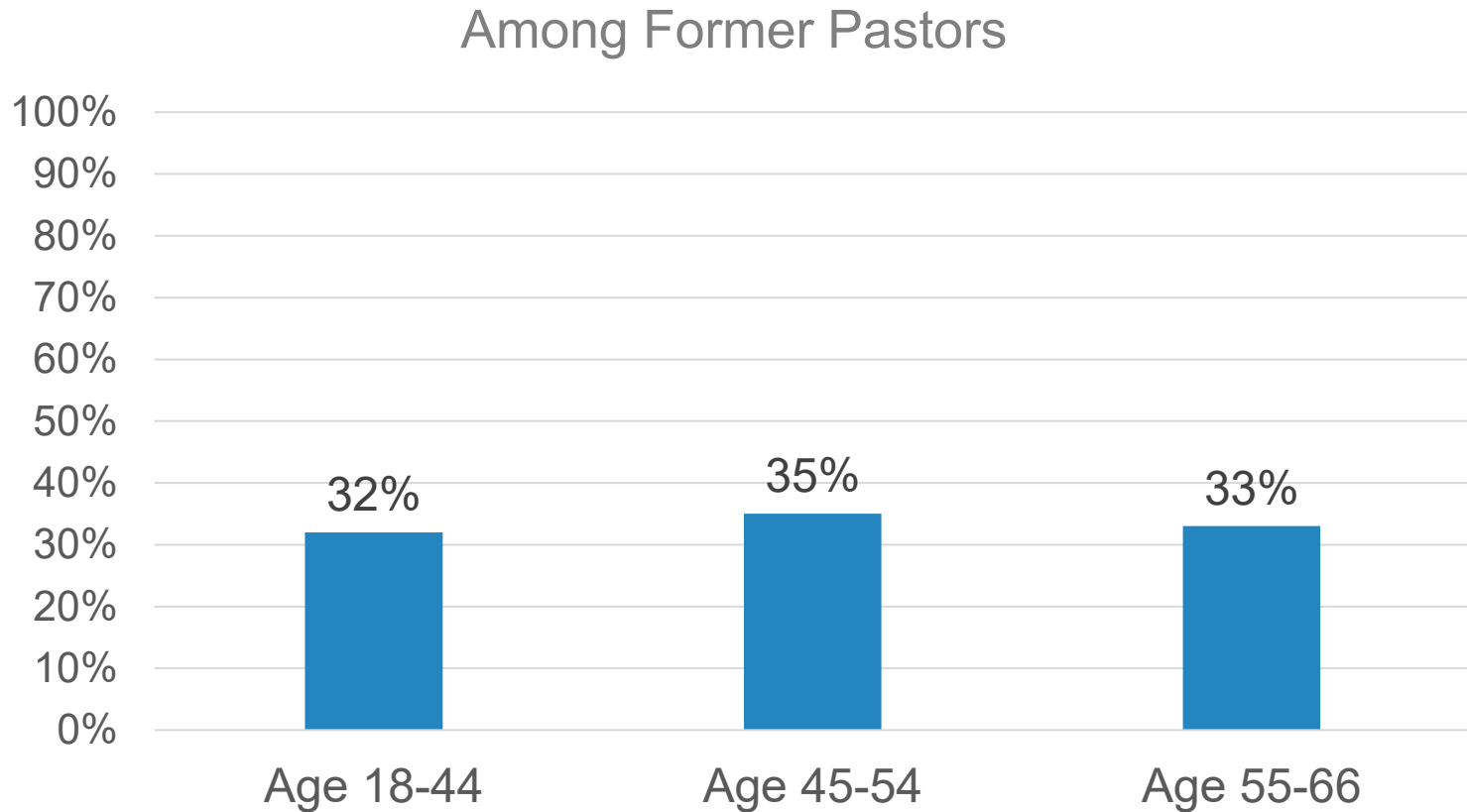
A SURVEY OF 730 PASTORS WHO LEFT THE PASTORATE
BEFORE AGE 67

Lifewayresearch

Methodology

- The study was sponsored by Houston's First Baptist Church and Richard Dockins, MD
- The online survey of former senior pastors was conducted May 6 – July 6, 2025
- The sample lists were created and invitations sent by four Protestant denominations: Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, The Wesleyan Church, and Southern Baptist Convention
- Each survey was completed by an individual who has served as a senior (or sole) pastor but stopped serving as senior pastor prior to age 67
- The completed sample is 730 former pastors

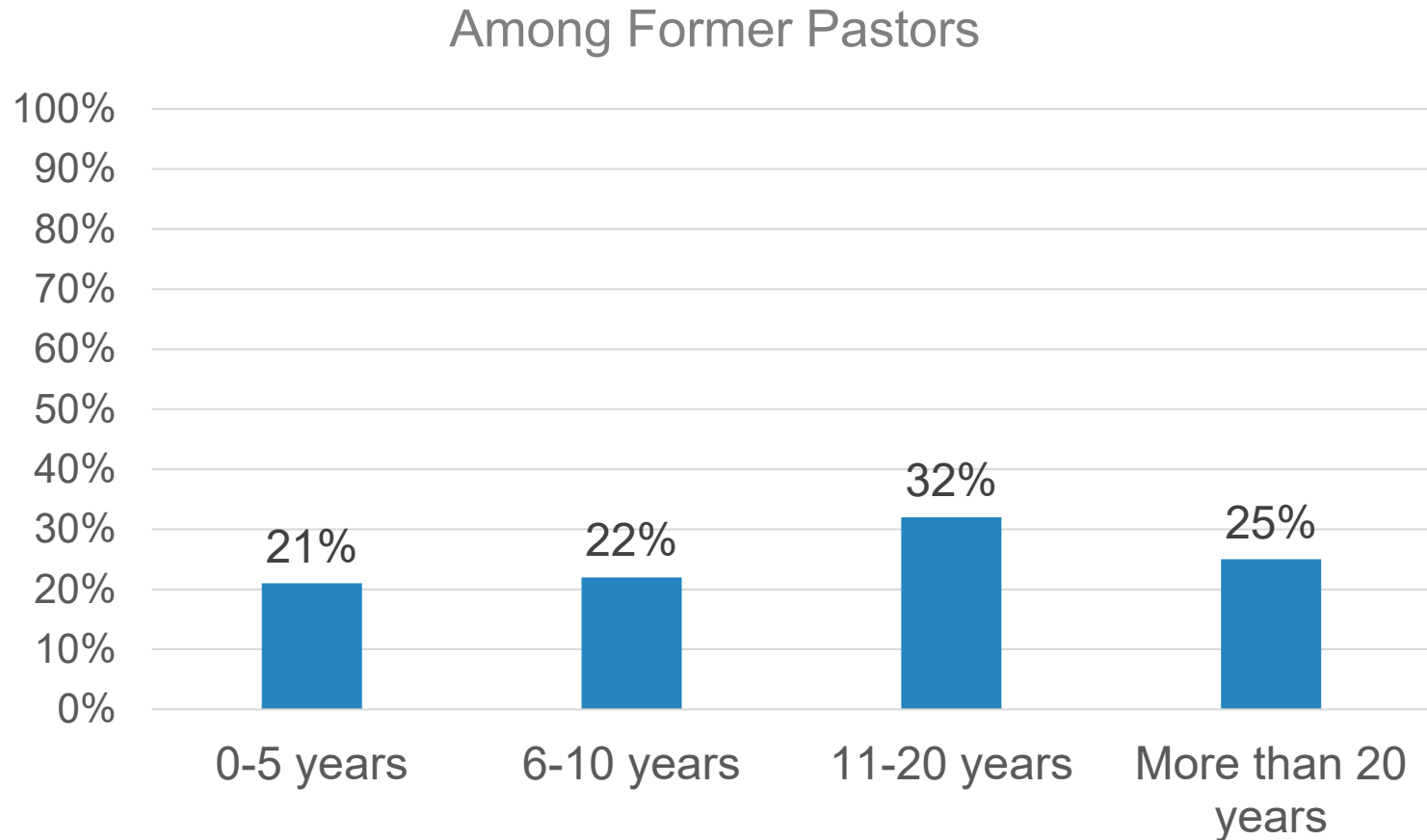
Among those who leave the pastorate before retirement age, 35% leave between ages 45-54



Lifewayresearch

S3: "At what age did you stop serving as a senior pastor?" n=730

43% served as a senior pastor for 10 years or less

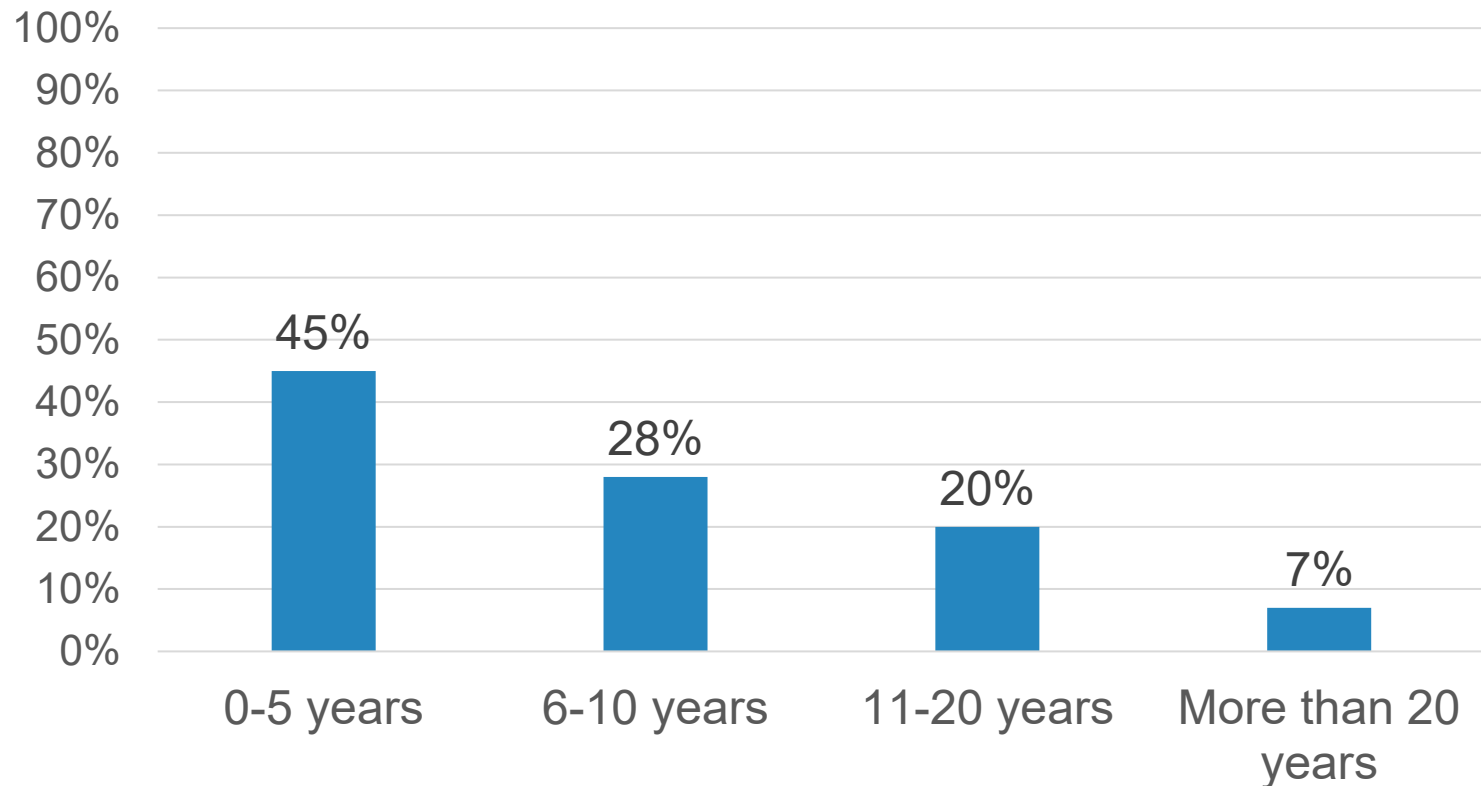


Lifewayresearch

A1: "In total, how many years did you serve as a senior pastor?" n=727

73% served as pastor for 10 years or less at their last church

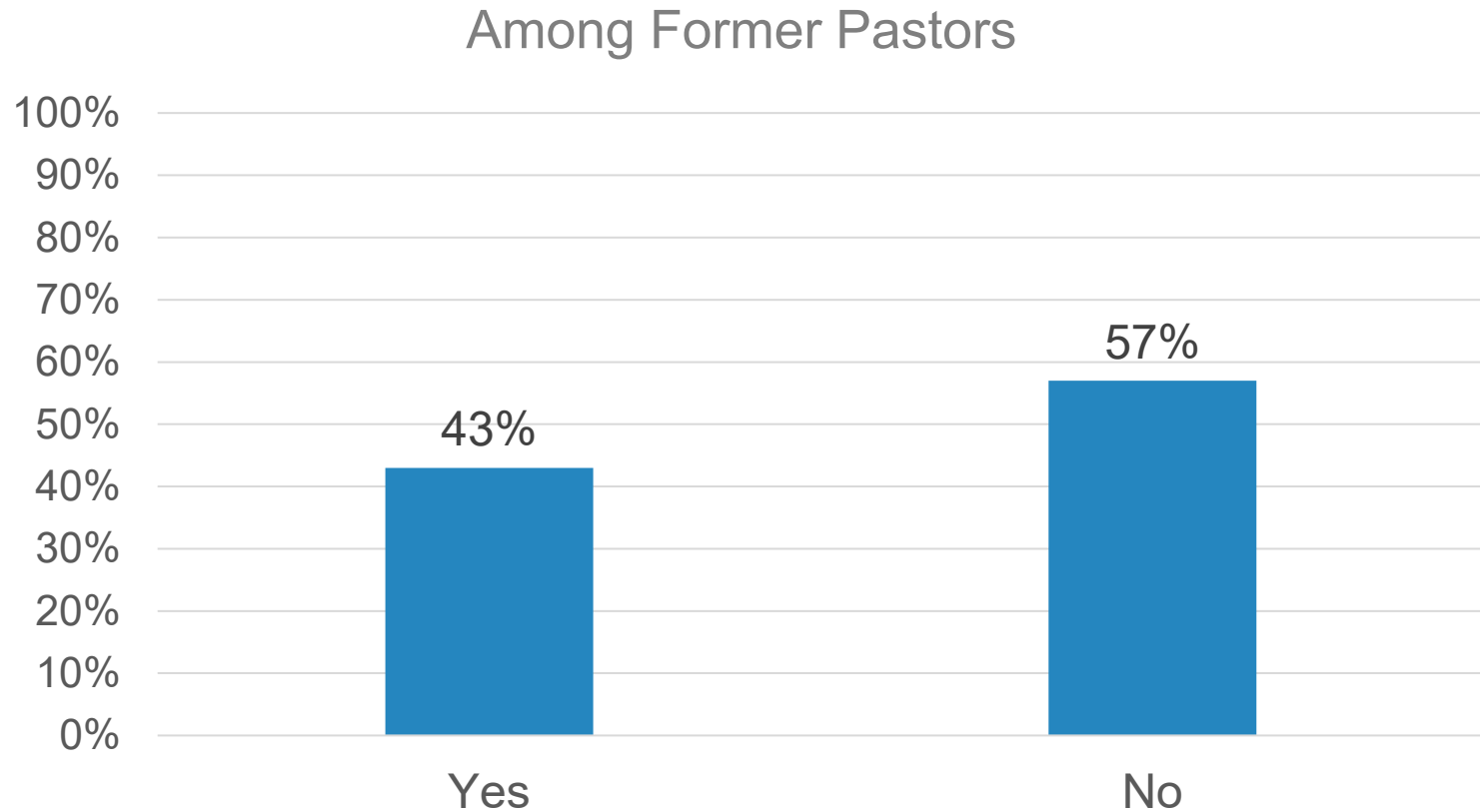
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

A2: "How many years did you pastor at your last church?" n=727

43% said this was the first church they pastored

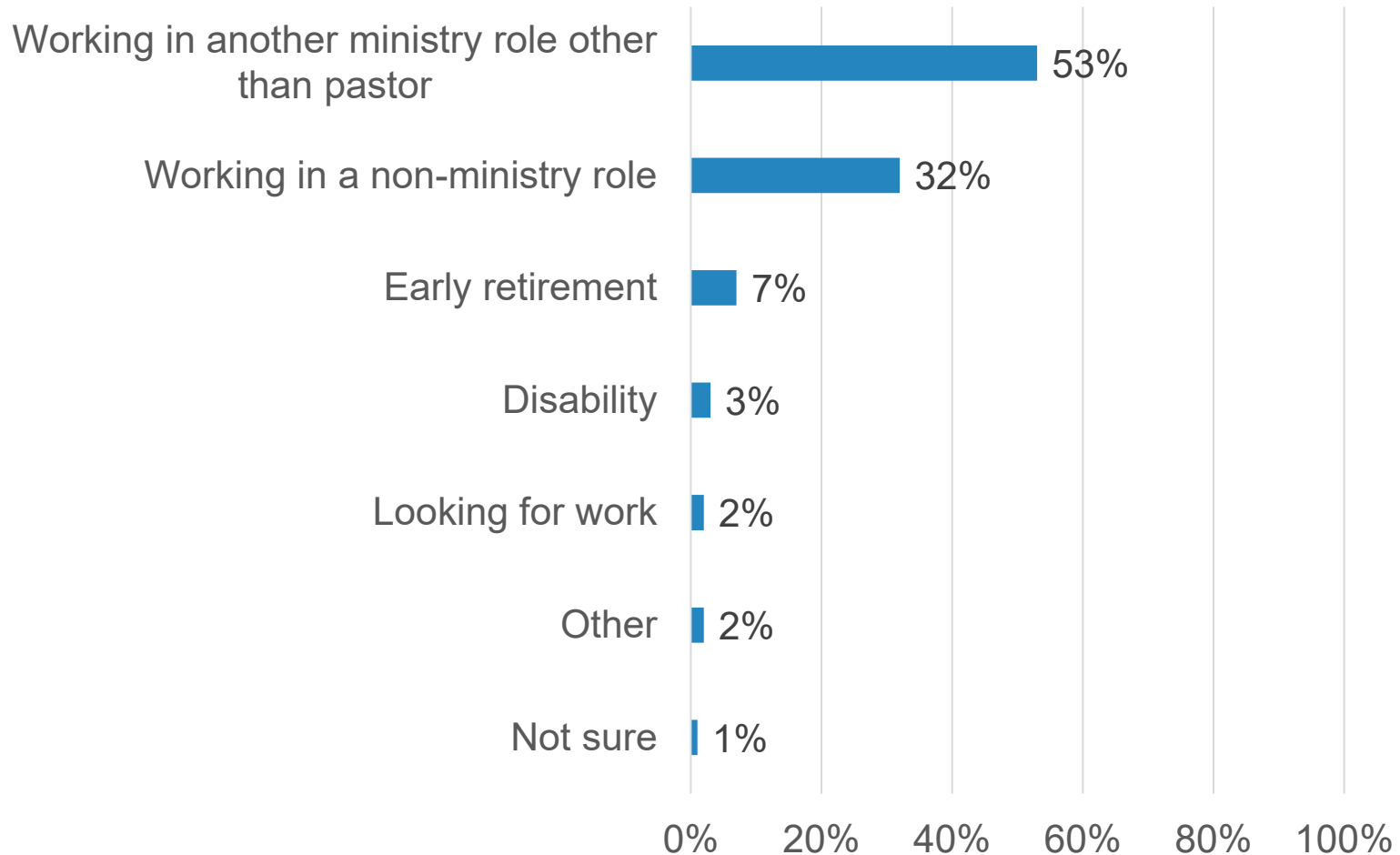


Lifewayresearch

Q3: "Was this the first church you served as senior pastor?" n=730

53% are working in a ministry role other than pastor; 32% are working in a non-ministry role

Among Former Pastors

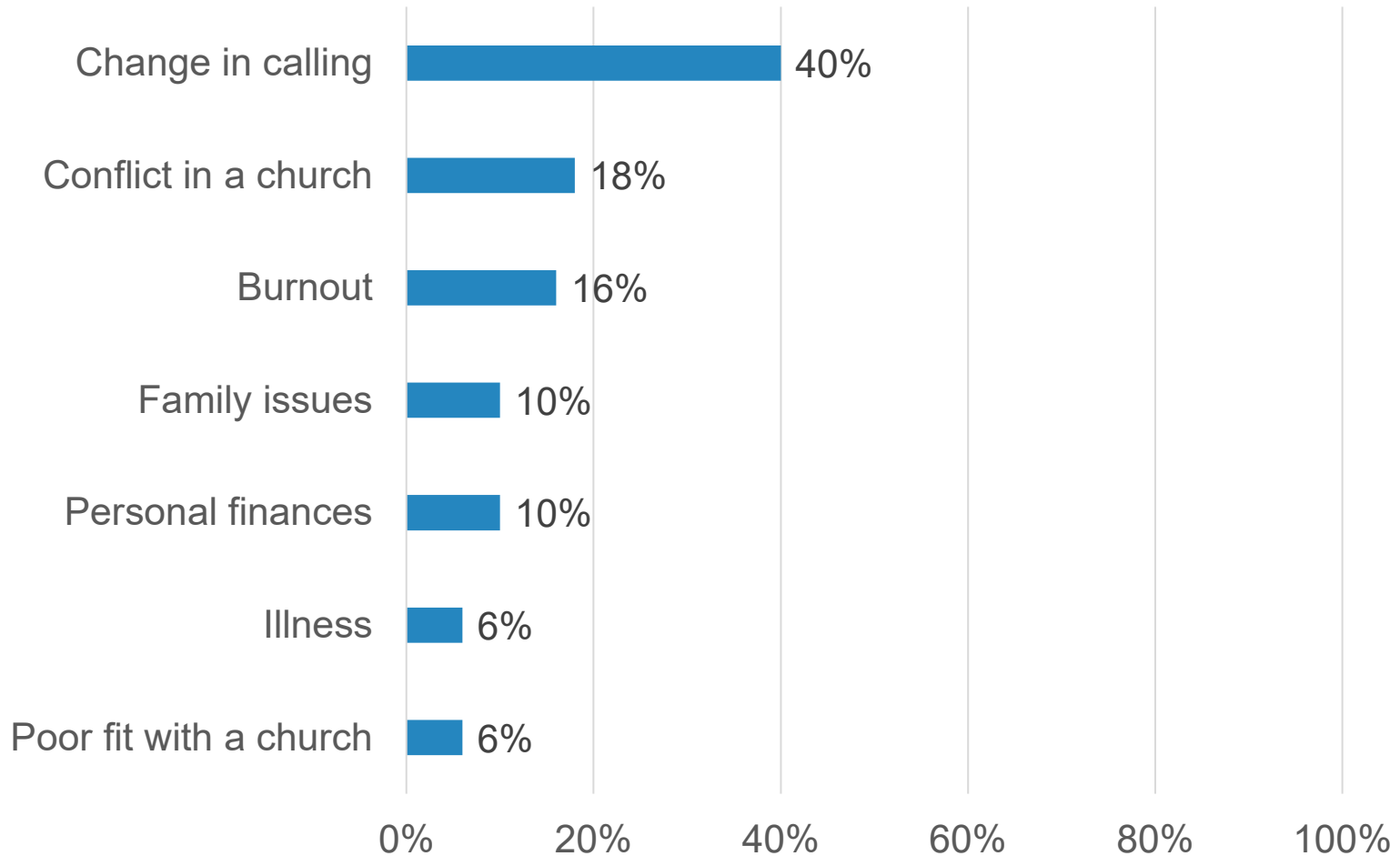


Lifewayresearch

Q5: "Which of the following best describes your work today? (Select One)" n=730

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Among Former Pastors

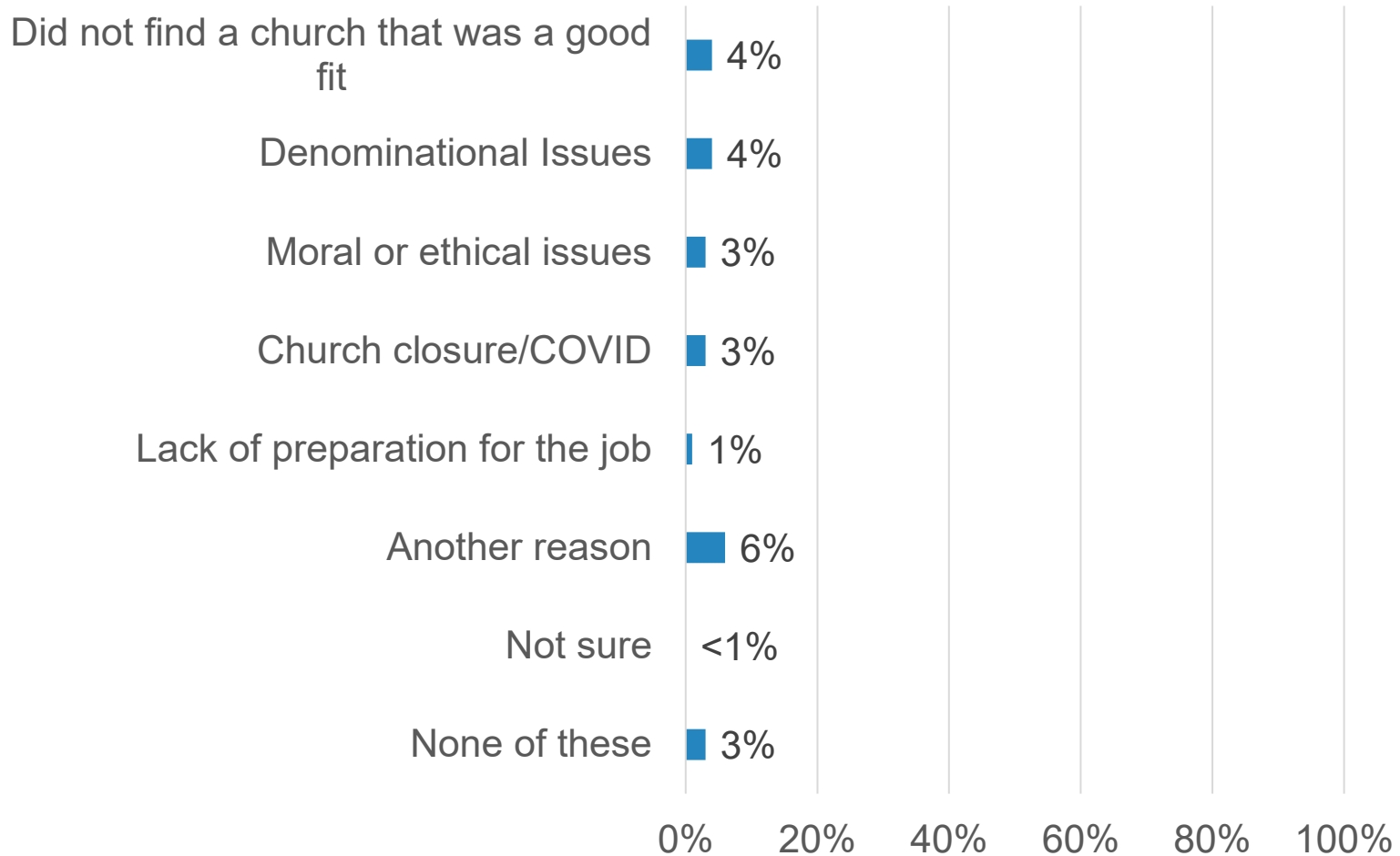


Lifewayresearch

Q6: “Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate? (Select all that apply)” n= 730

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?” *continued*

Among Former Pastors

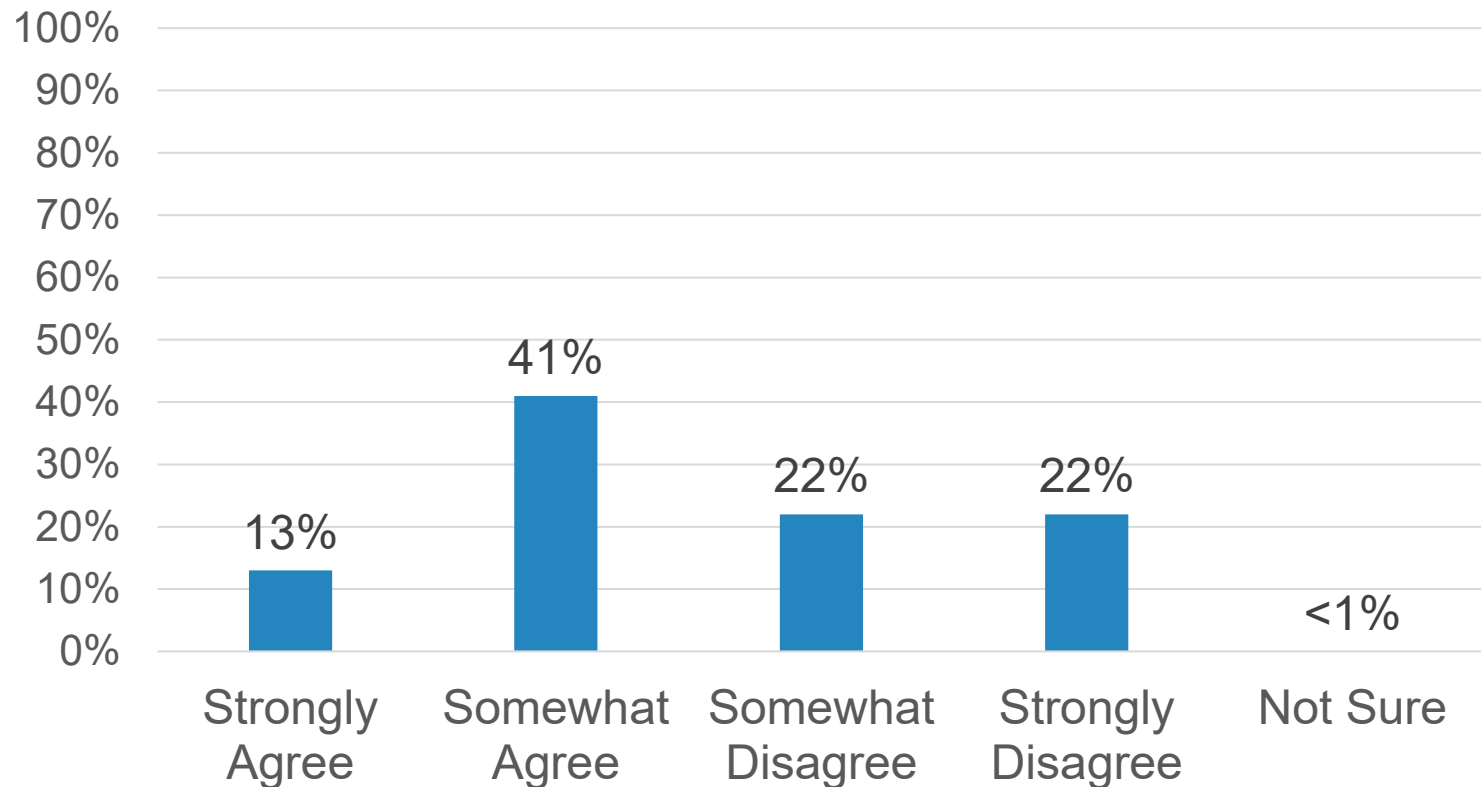


Lifewayresearch

Q6: “Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate? (Select all that apply)” n= 730

55% say their training prepared them to handle the people side of ministry

Among Former Pastors

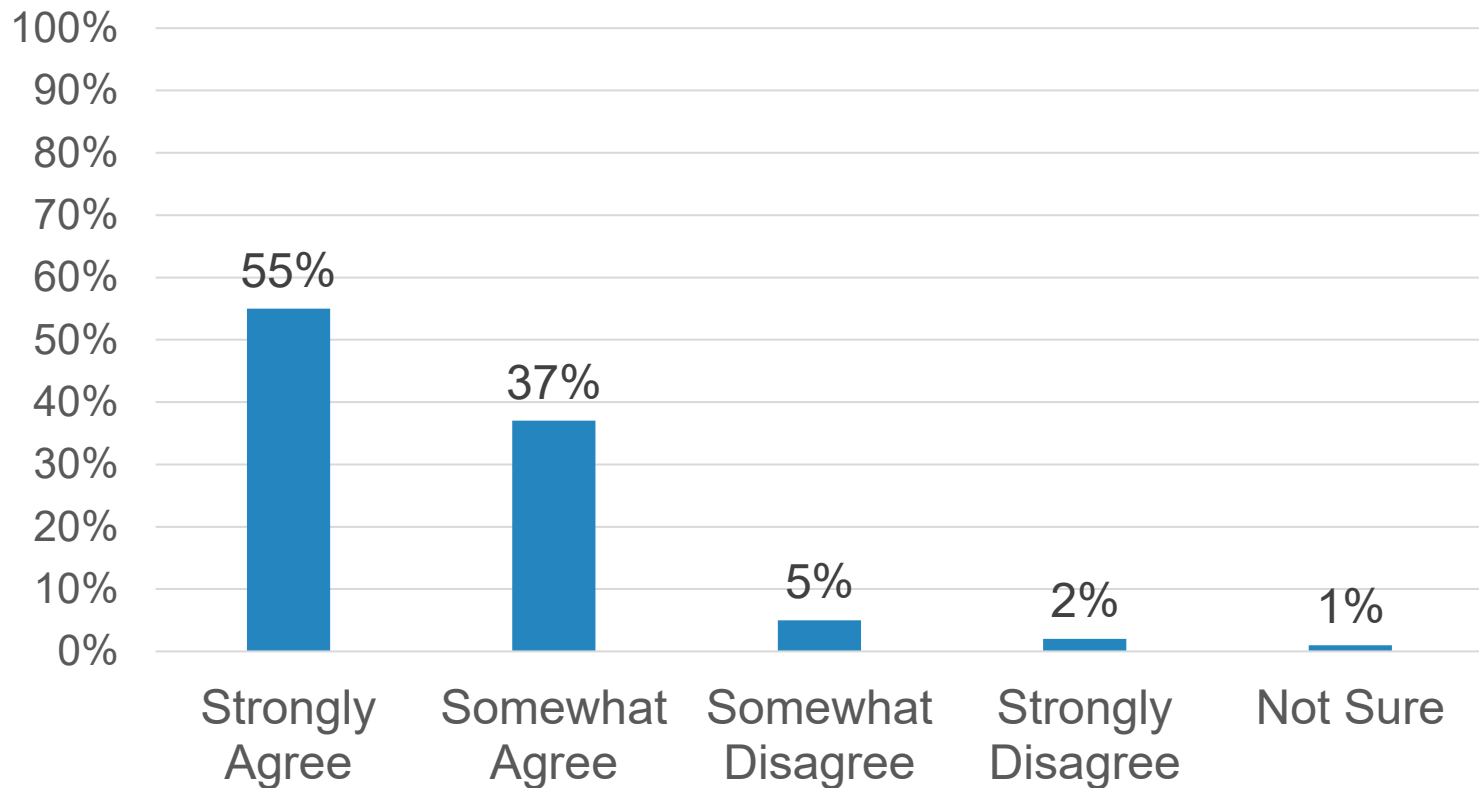


Lifewayresearch

Q7: "My seminary or ministry training prepared me to handle the people side of ministry." n=716

92% expected there would be a need to confront conflict in their church

Among Former Pastors

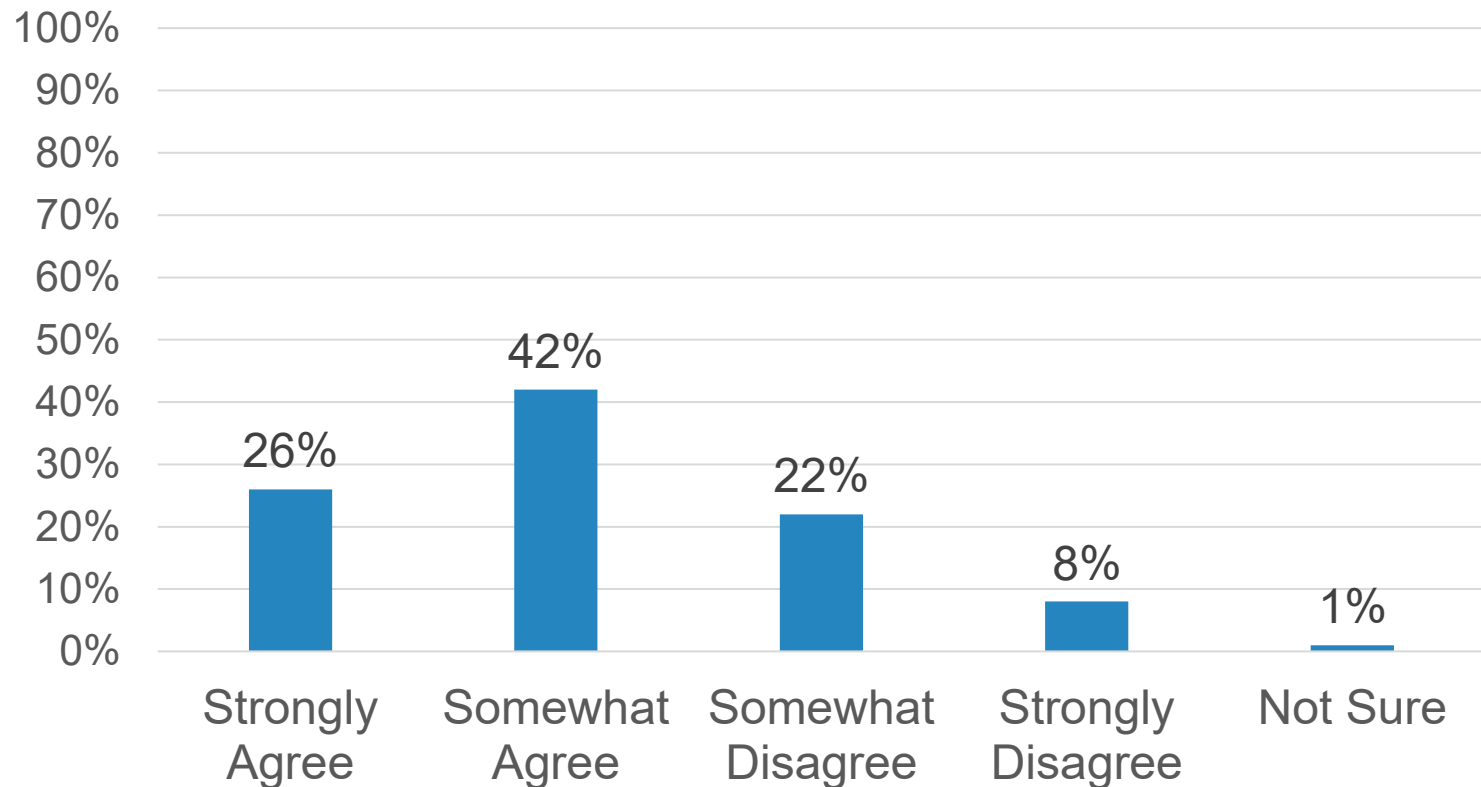


Lifewayresearch

Q8: "I expected there would be a need to confront conflict in my church." n= 730

68% say they consistently put their family first when time conflicts arose

Among Former Pastors

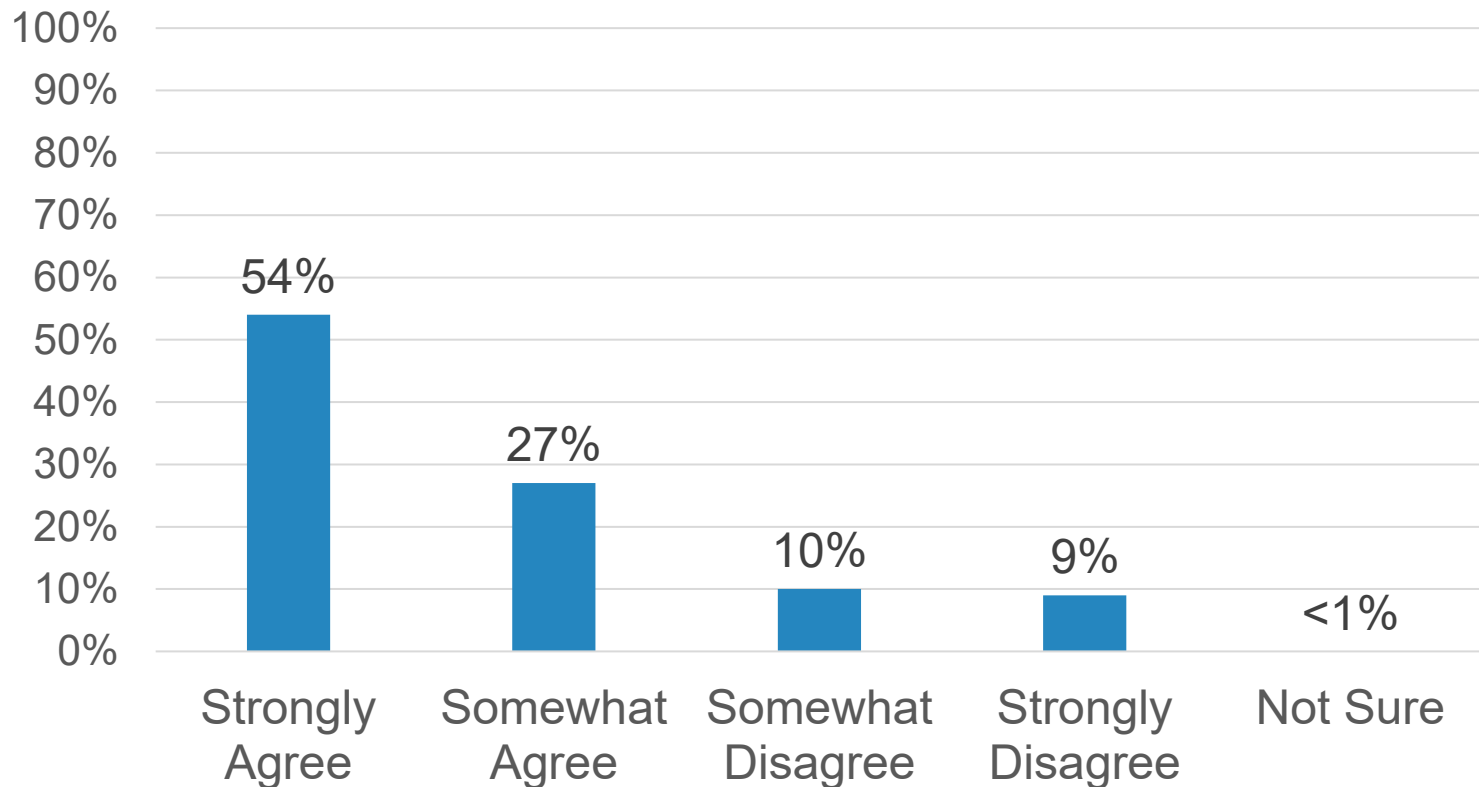


Lifewayresearch

Q9: "When time conflicts arose, I consistently put my family first." n=710

81% were sure they could have stayed at their last church as long as they wanted

Among Former Pastors

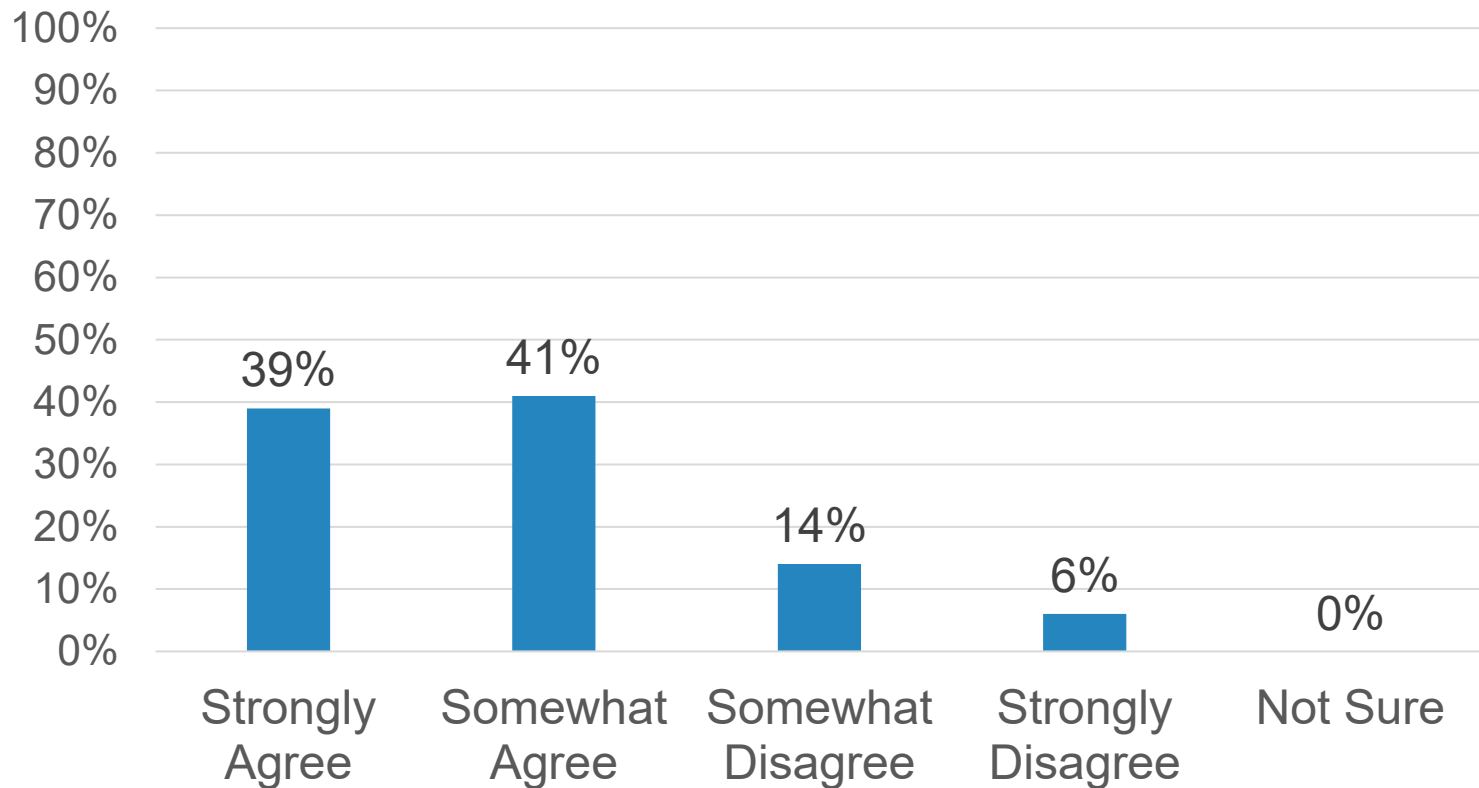


Lifewayresearch

Q10: "During most of my ministry at my last church I was sure I could stay at that church as long as I wanted." n= 730

80% felt they had to be “on-call” 24 hours a day

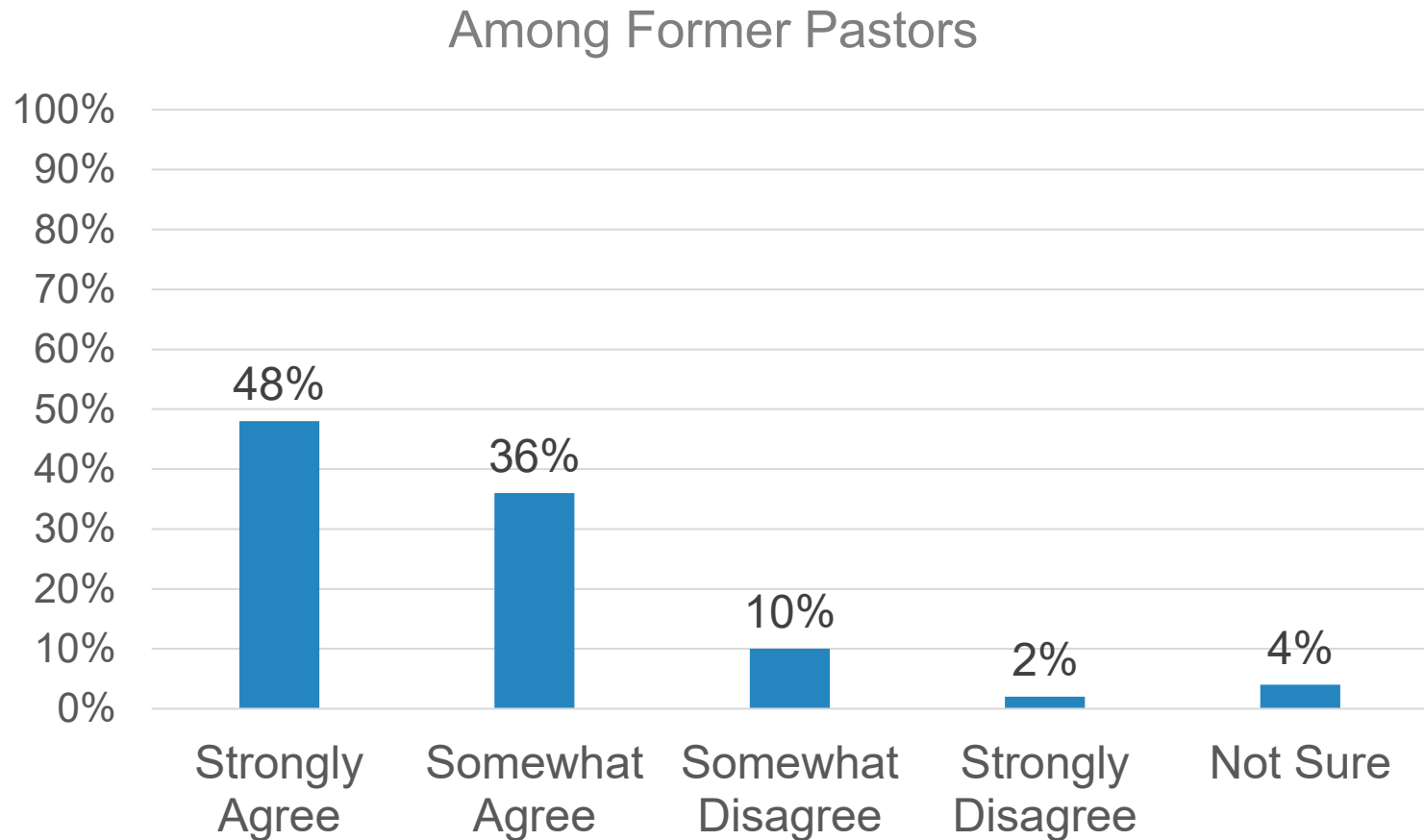
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

Q11: "I felt I must be "on-call" 24 hours a day." n= 730

84% worked hard to protect their image as a pastor

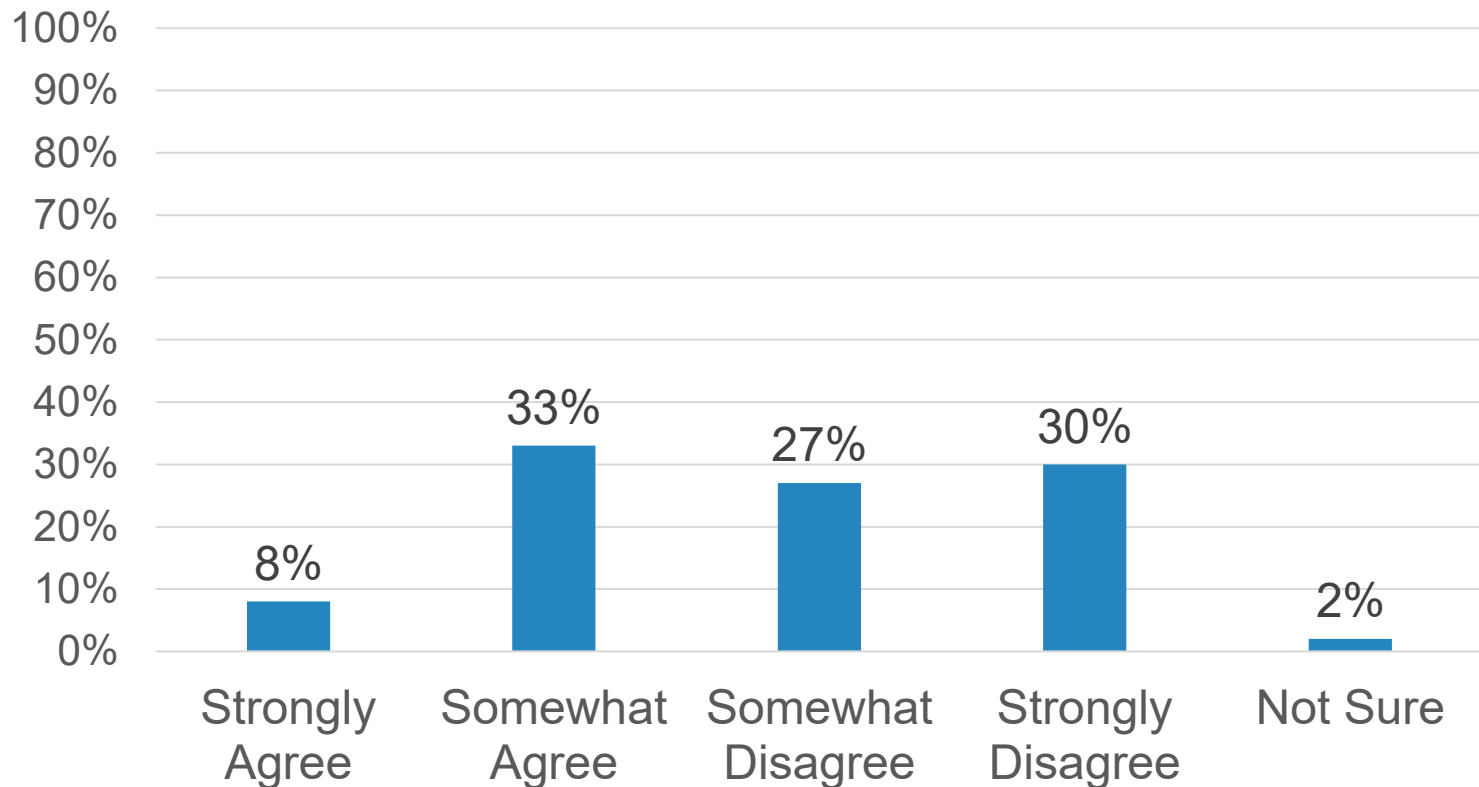


Lifewayresearch

Q12: "I worked hard to protect my image as a pastor." n=730

41% say their family resented the demands of pastoral ministry

Among Former Pastors

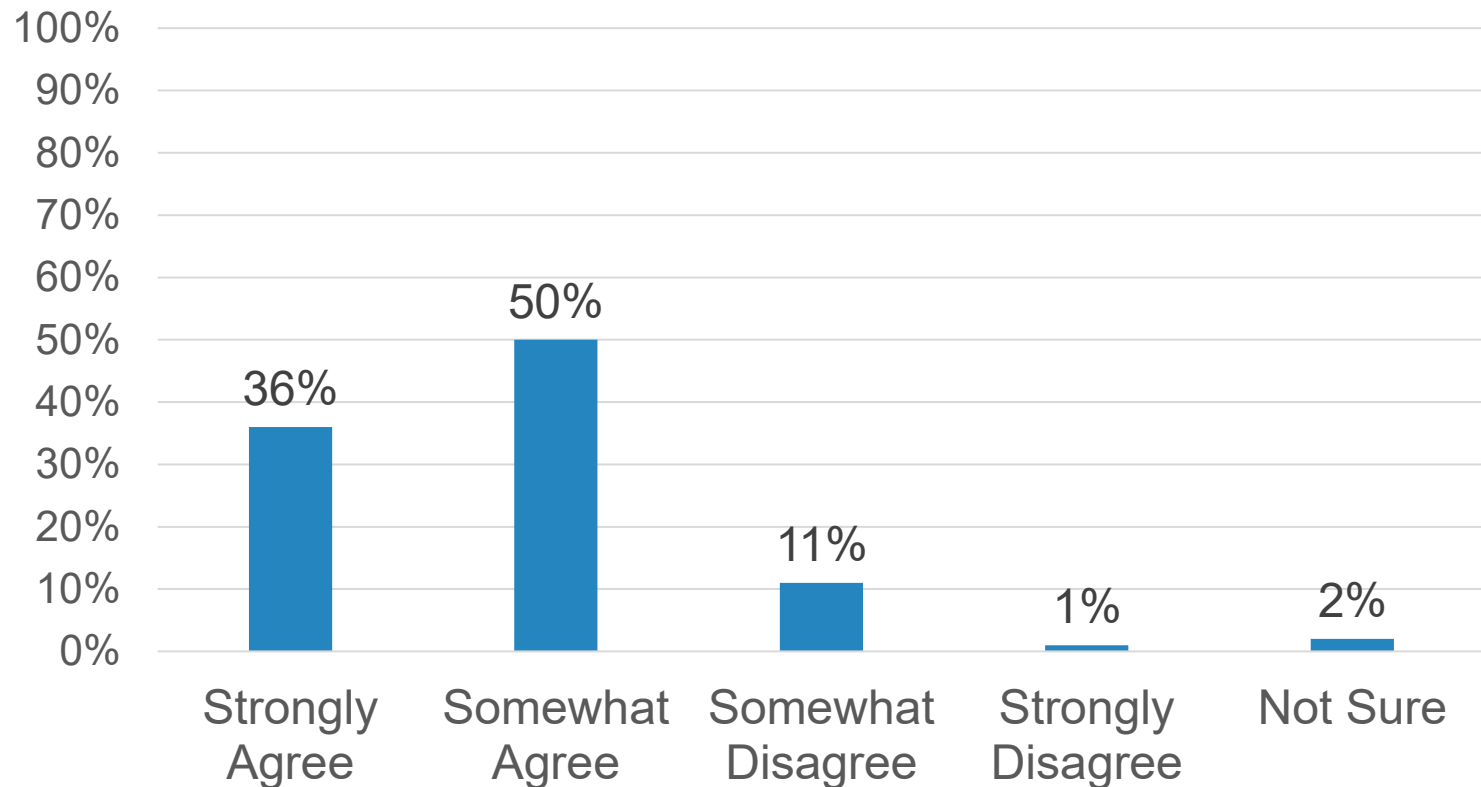


Lifewayresearch

Q13: "My family resented the demands of pastoral ministry." n=708

86% consistently listened to people in their church for signs of conflict

Among Former Pastors

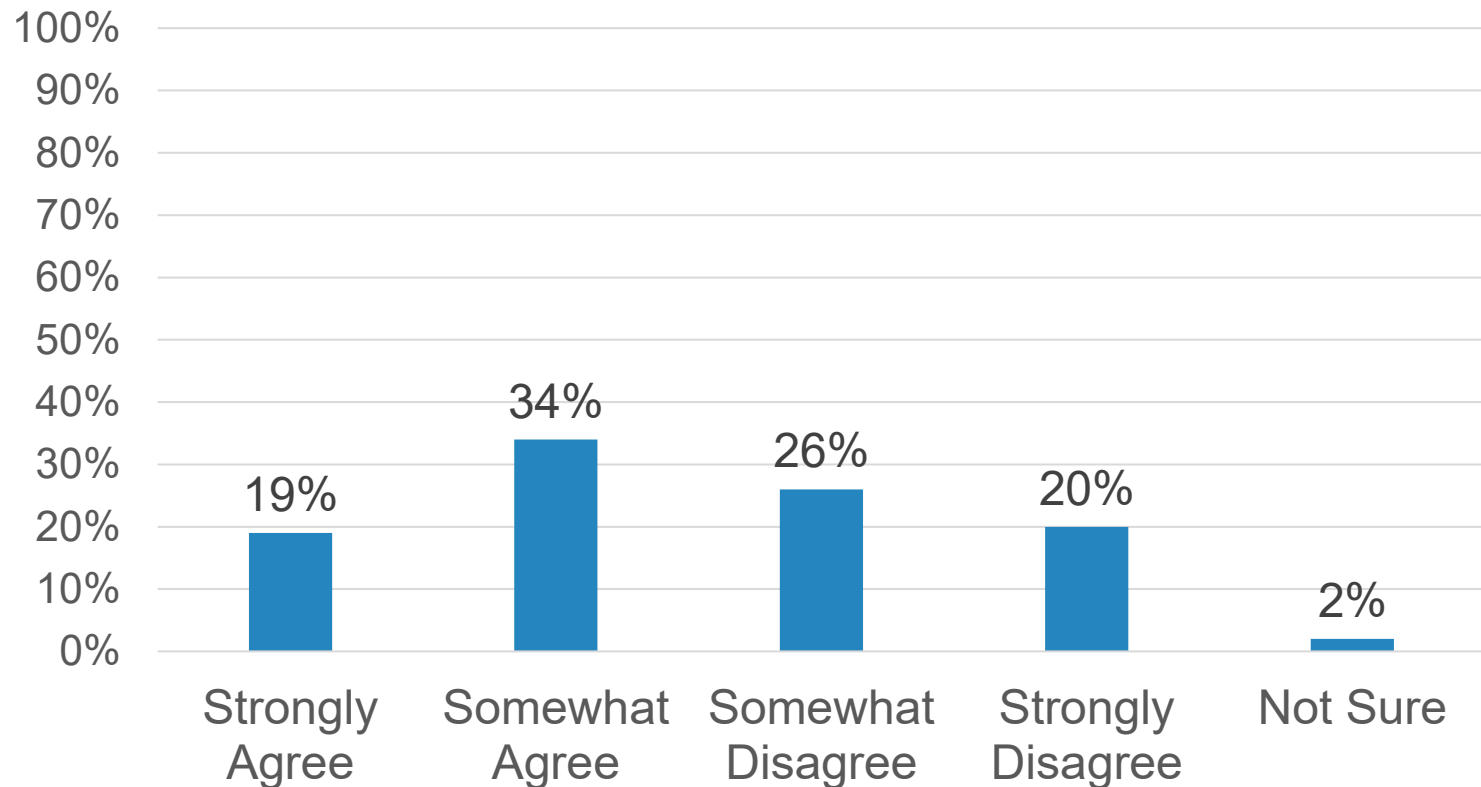


Lifewayresearch

Q14: "I consistently listened to people in our church for signs of conflict." n=

53% felt the demands of ministry were greater than they could handle

Among Former Pastors

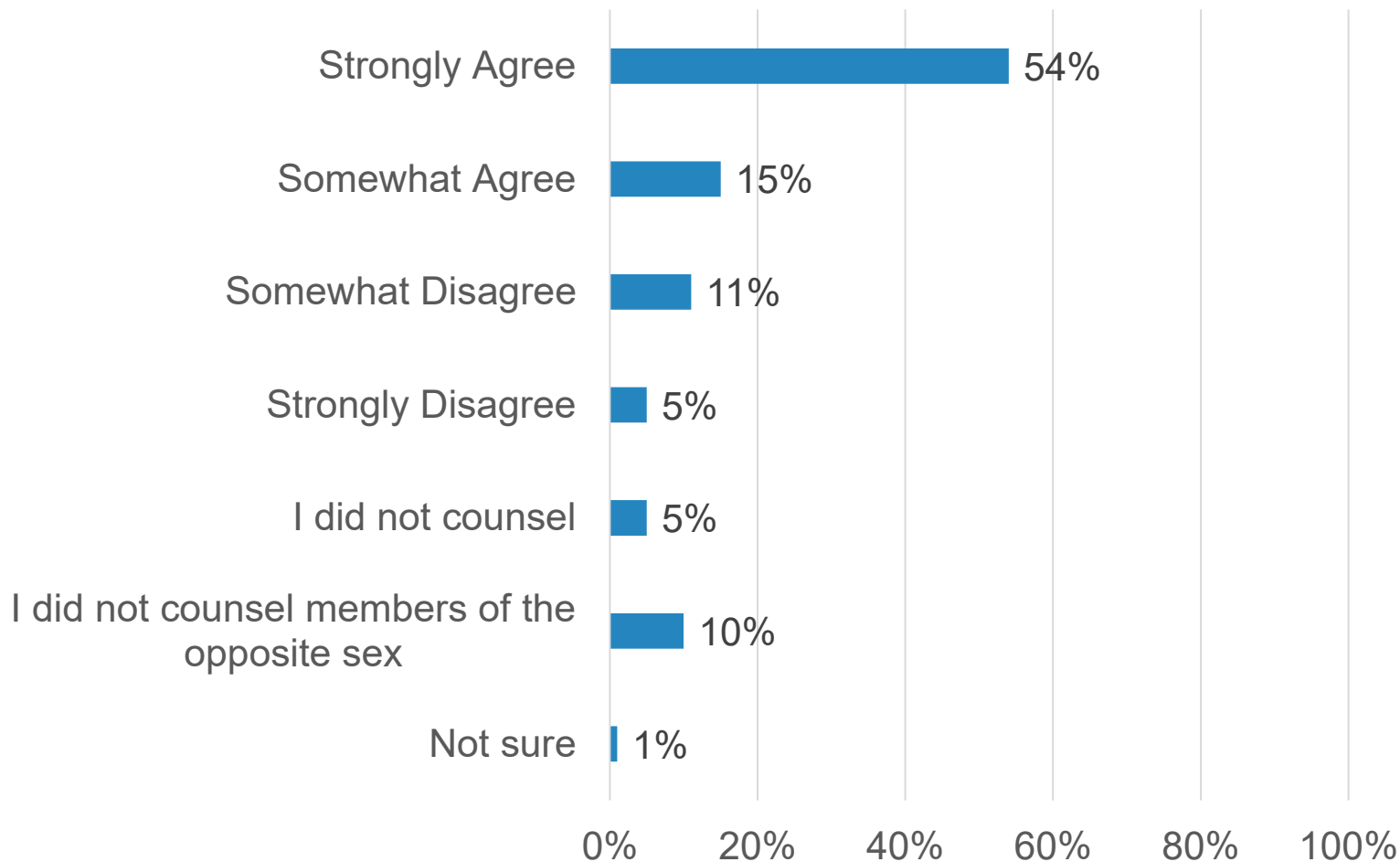


Lifewayresearch

Q15: "I often felt the demands of ministry were greater than I can handle." n=730

68% had another staff member present when counseling church members of the opposite sex

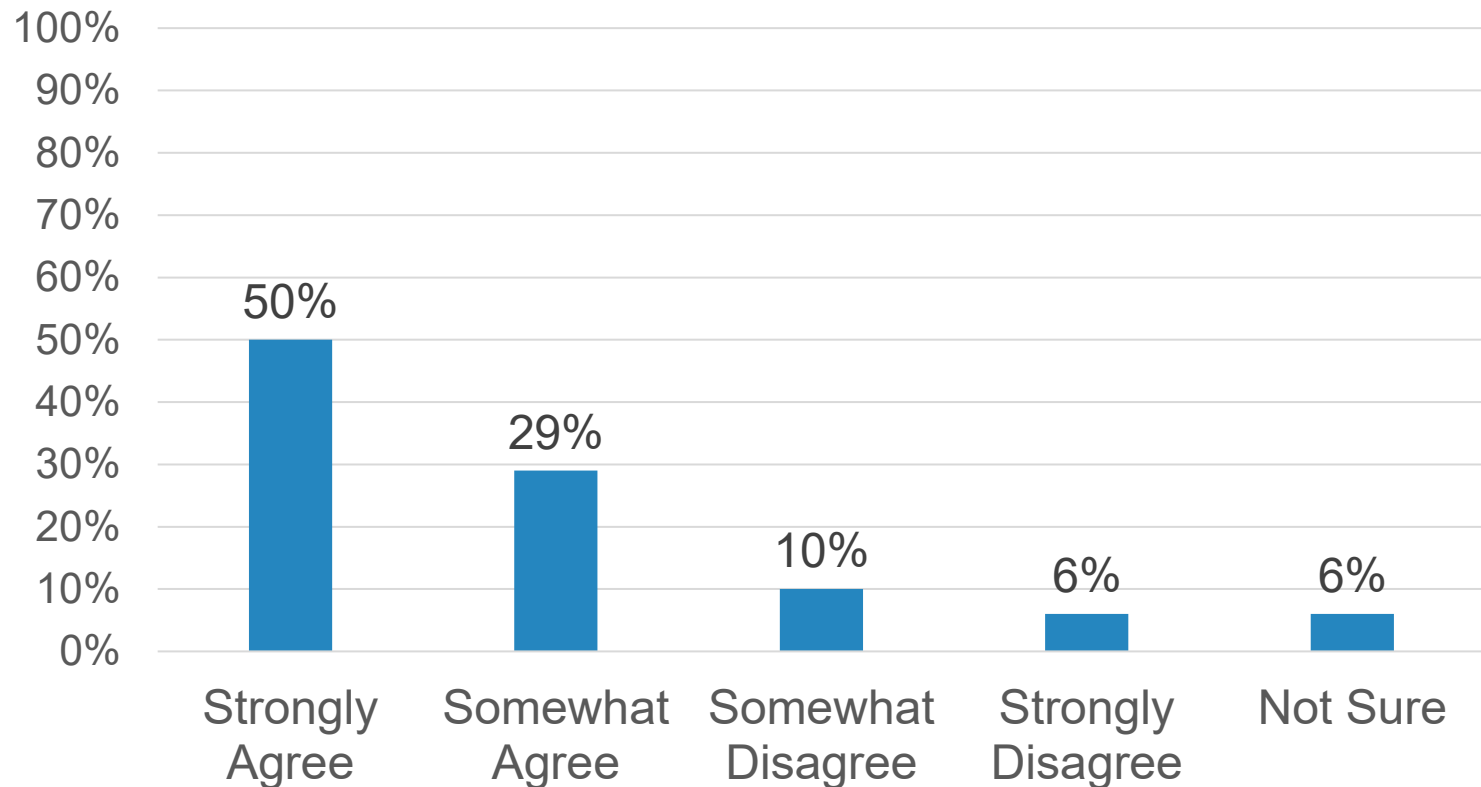
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

78% referred church members to a professional counselor when the situation required more than two sessions

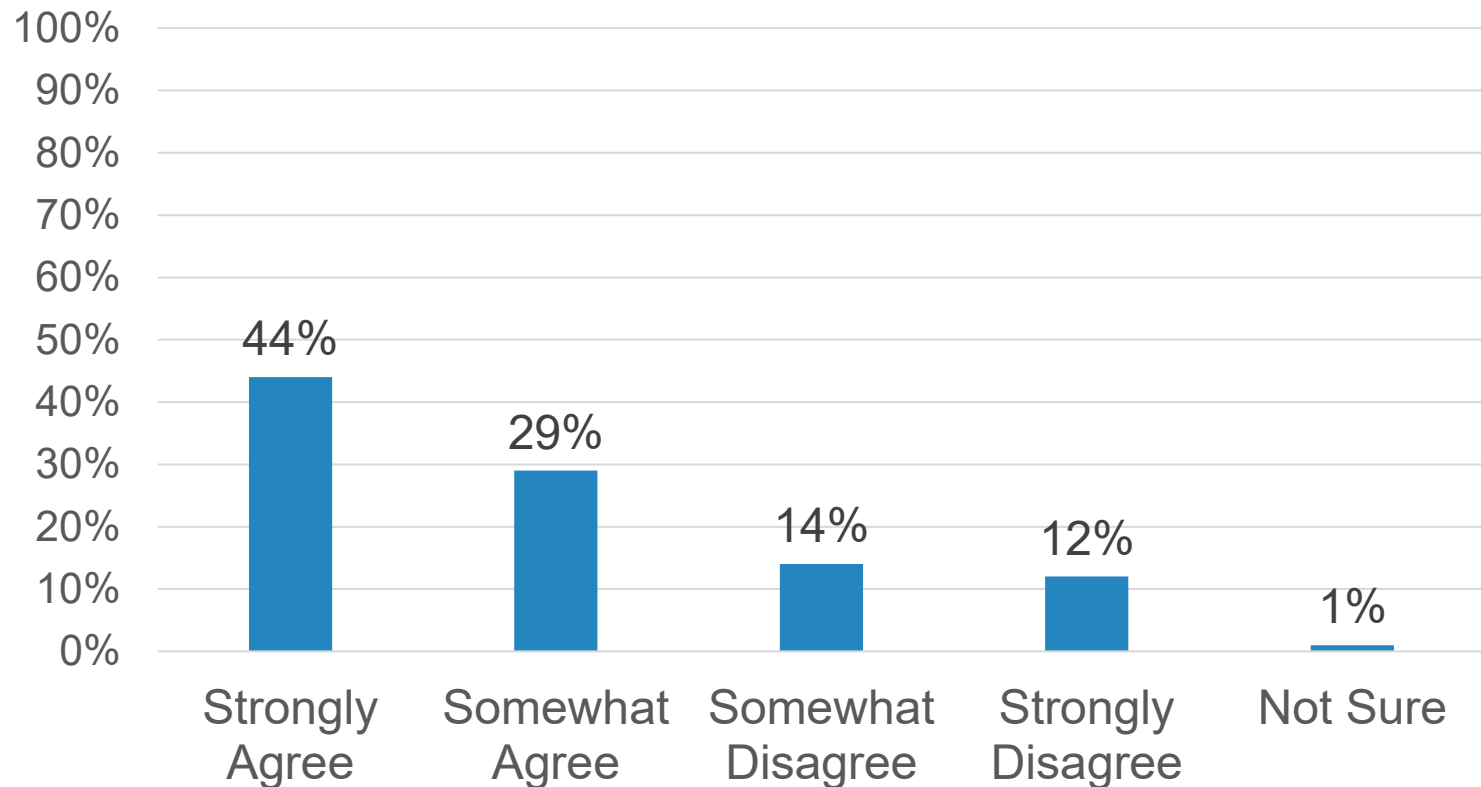
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

73% were often concerned about the financial security of their family

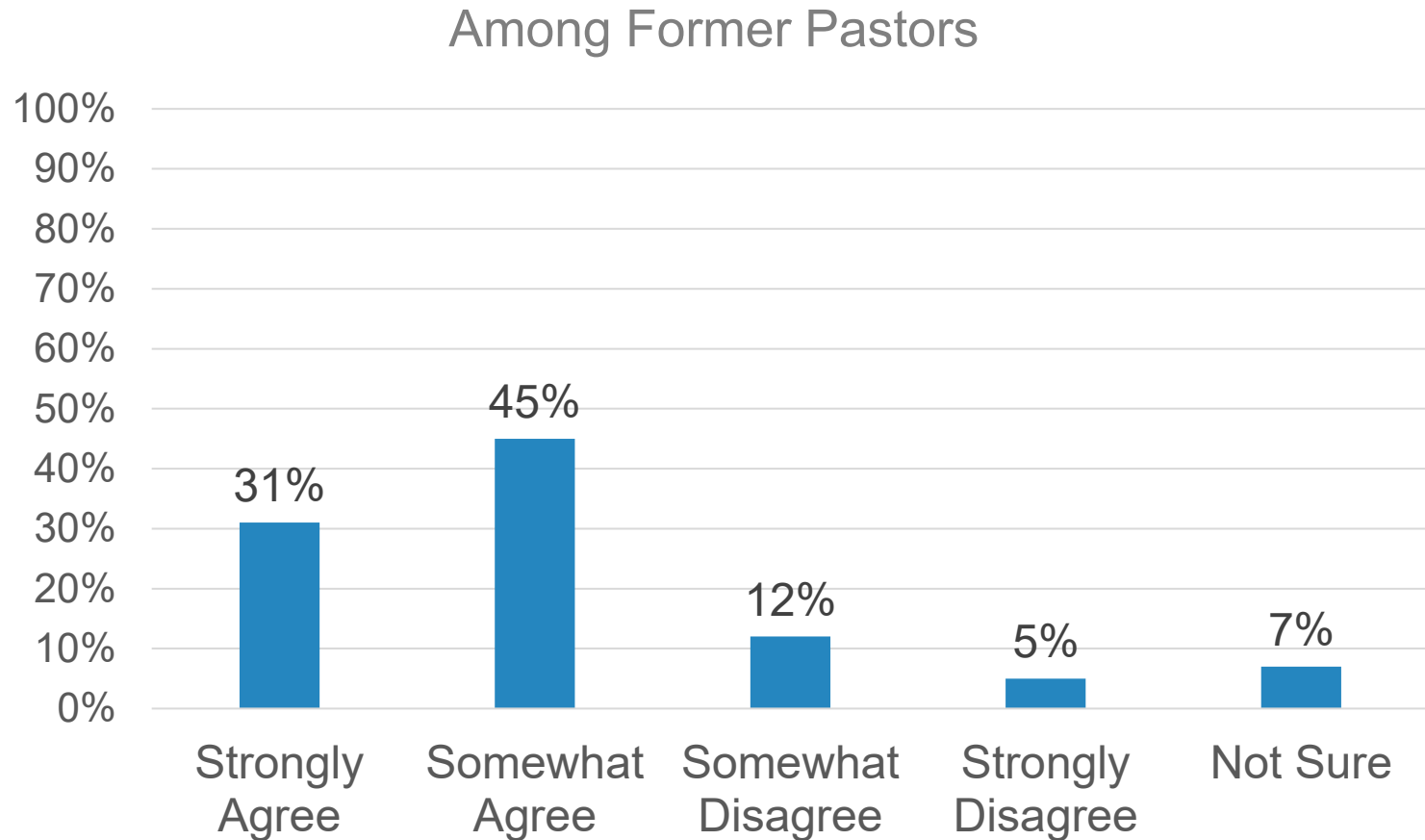
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

Q18: "I was often concerned about the financial security of my family." n=712

75% felt they deserved the respect of their people

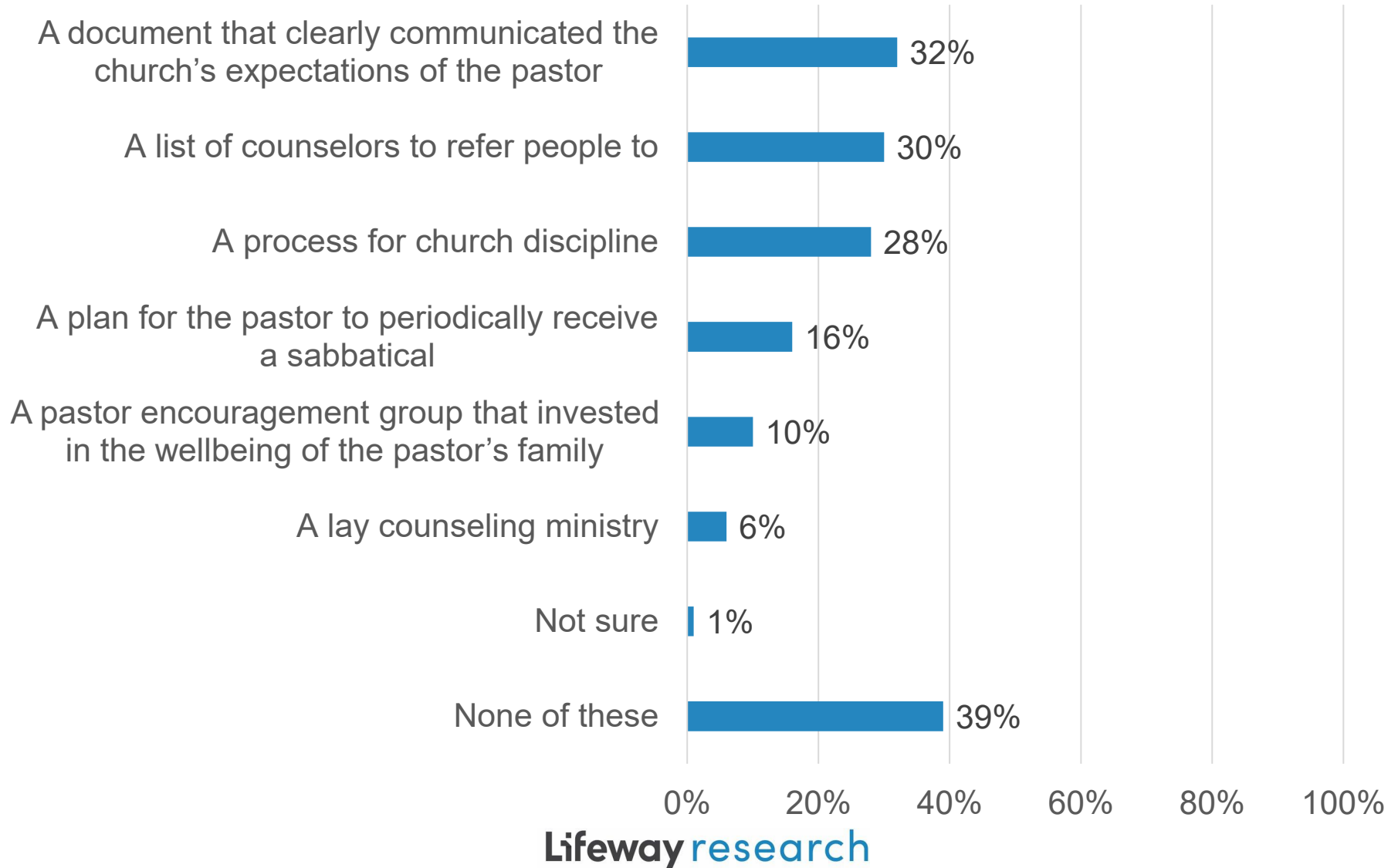


Lifewayresearch

Q19: "I felt I deserved the respect of my people." n=730

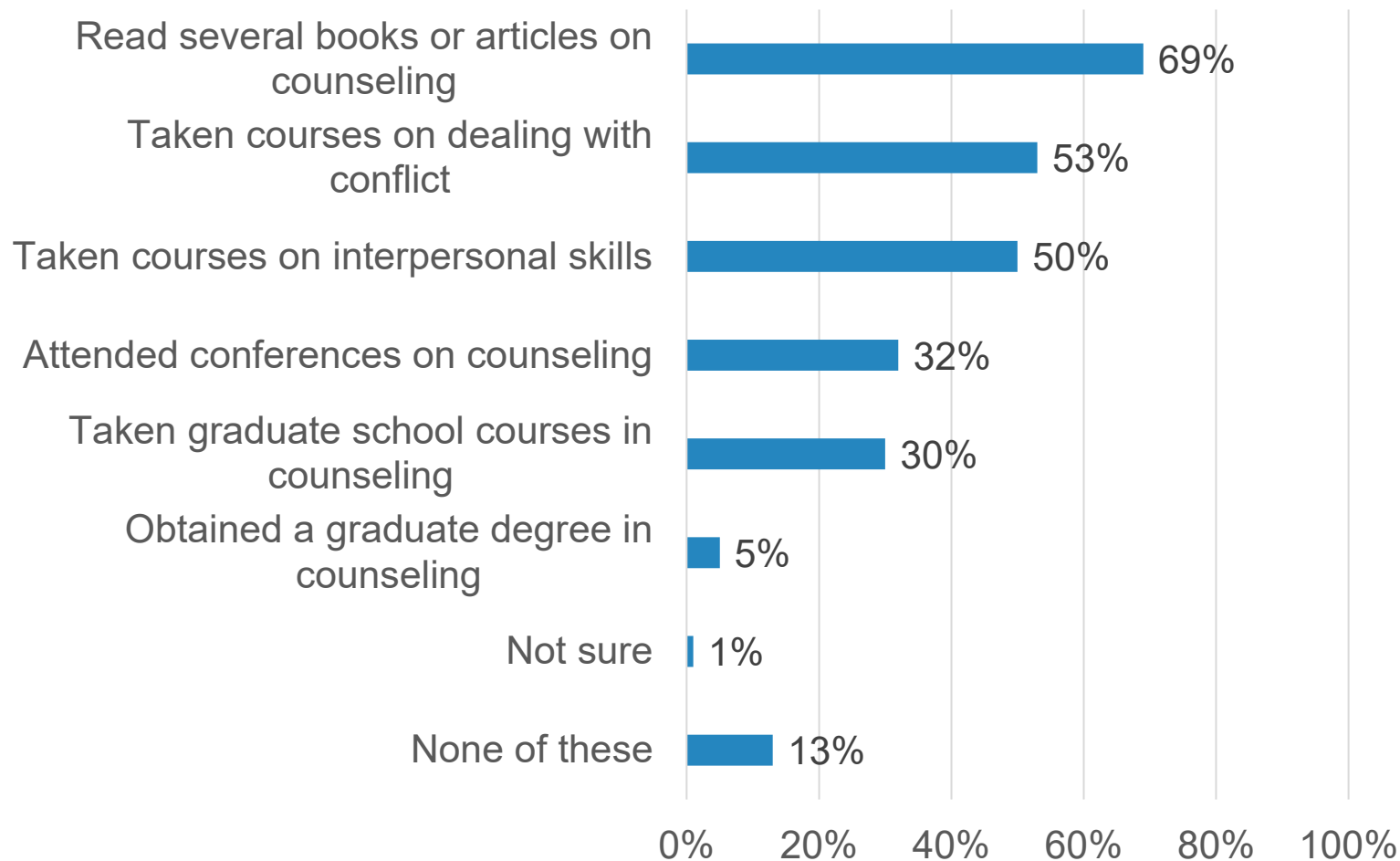
“Which if any of the following did the last church you served as pastor have in place?”

Among Former Pastors



“When you last served as a pastor, which of the following training, if any, had you received?”

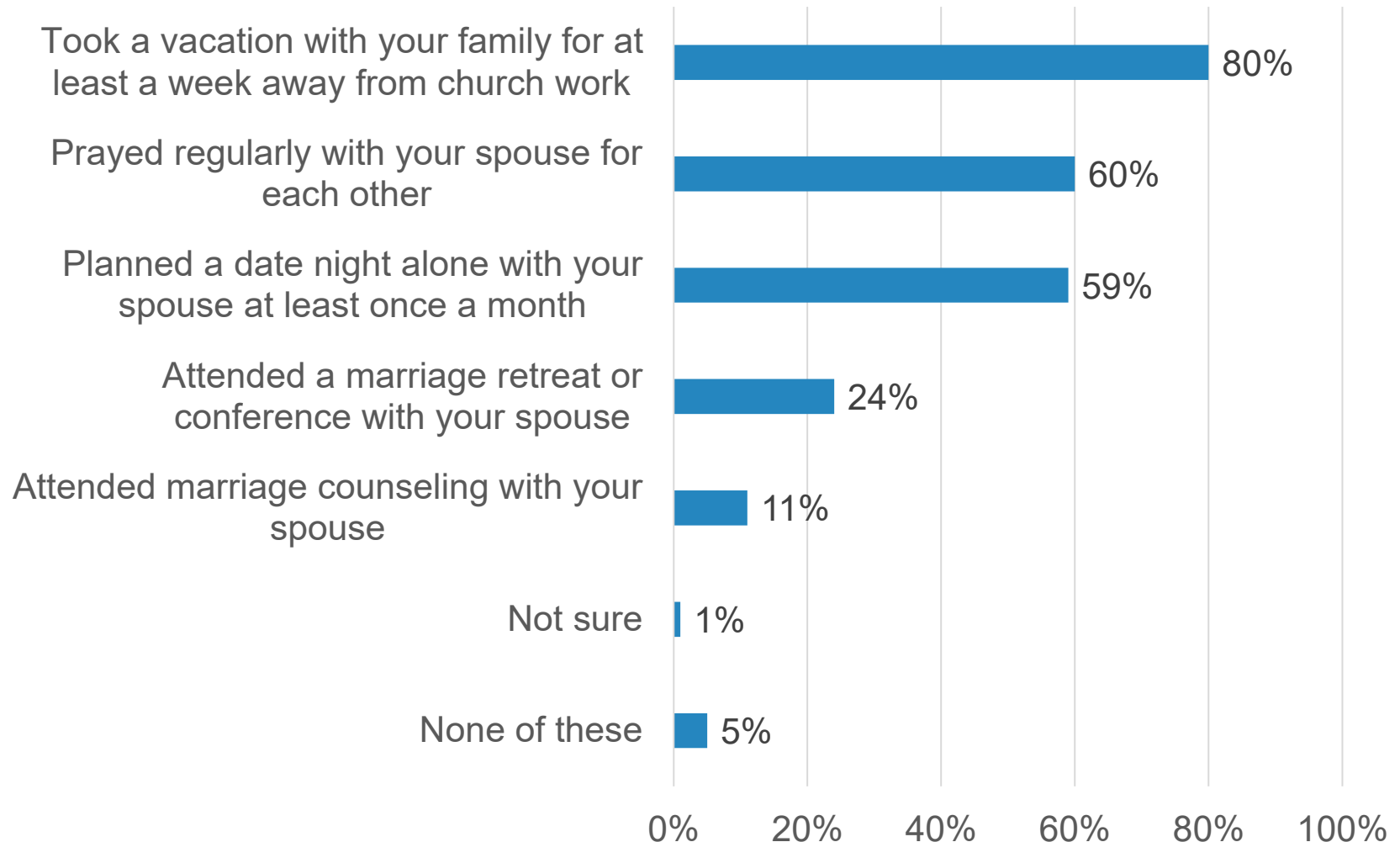
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

“In the last year you served as a pastor, which of the following activities had you done?”

Among Former Pastors Who Are Married

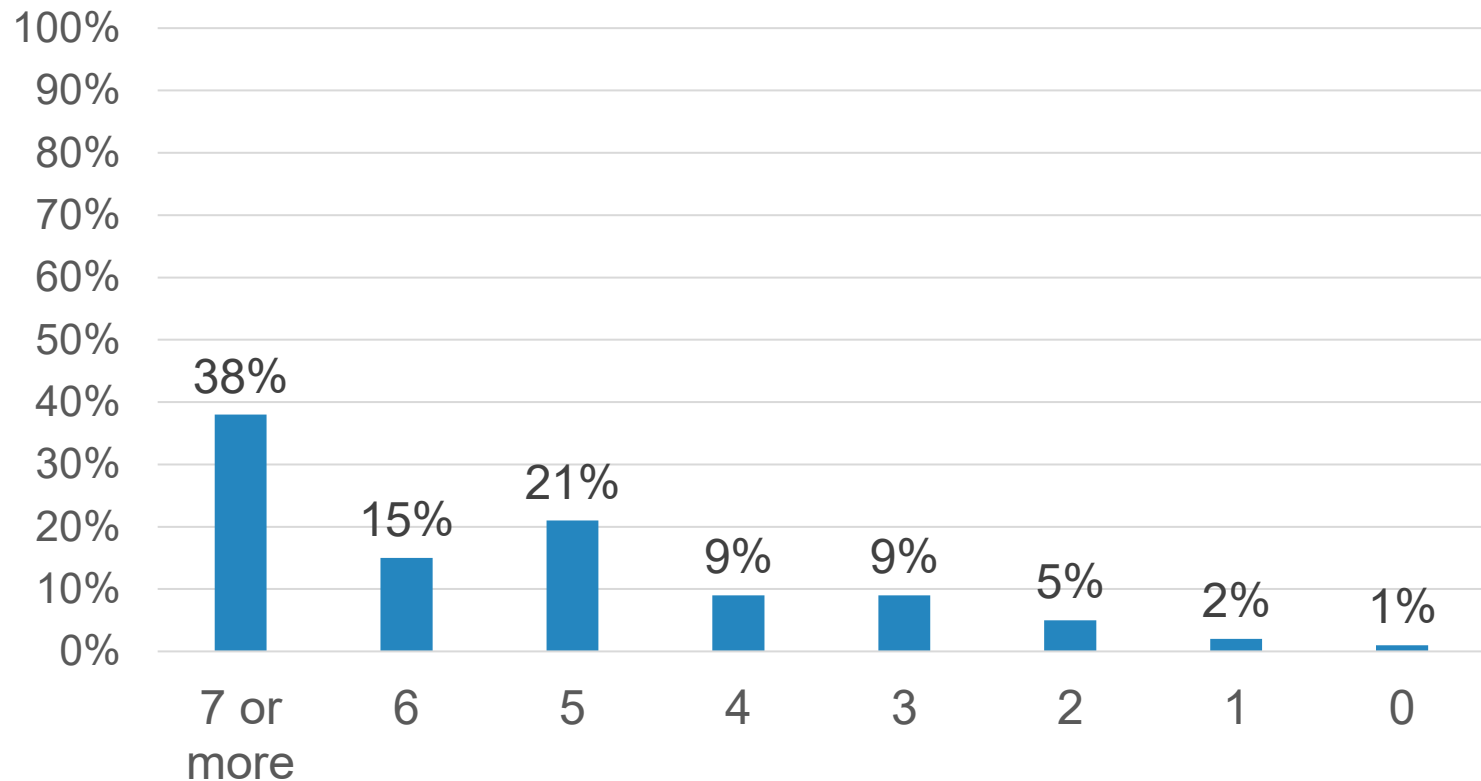


Lifewayresearch

Q23: “In the last year you served as a pastor, which of the following activities had you done?(Select all that apply)” n=687

73% had personal time with the Lord other than sermon or lesson preparation five or more times a week

Among Former Pastors

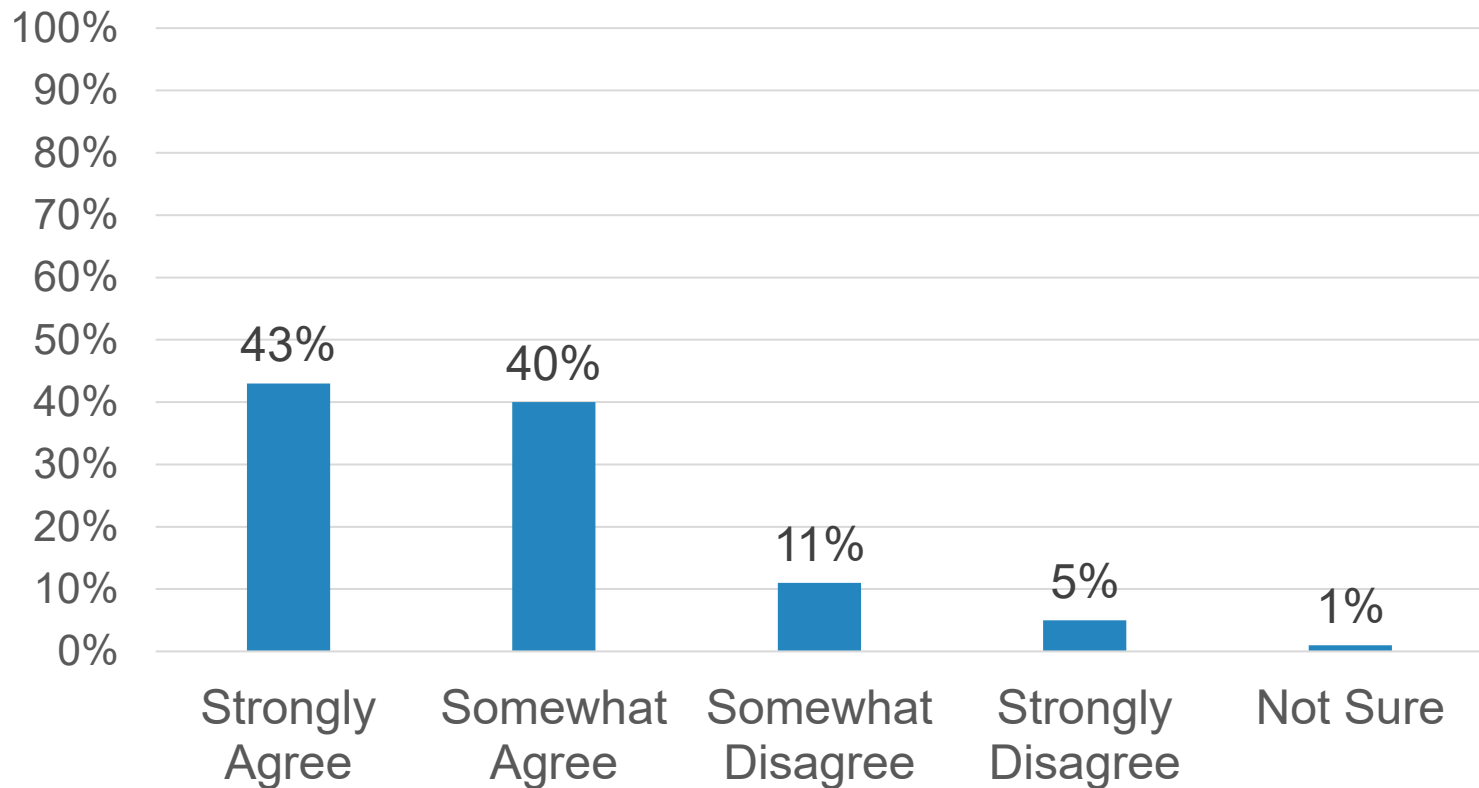


Lifewayresearch

Q24: "When you last served as a pastor, in a typical week how many times did you have personal time alone with the Lord involving Bible study and prayer, other than sermon or lesson preparation?" n=730

83% say their spouse was very satisfied with their marriage

Among Former Pastors Who Are Married

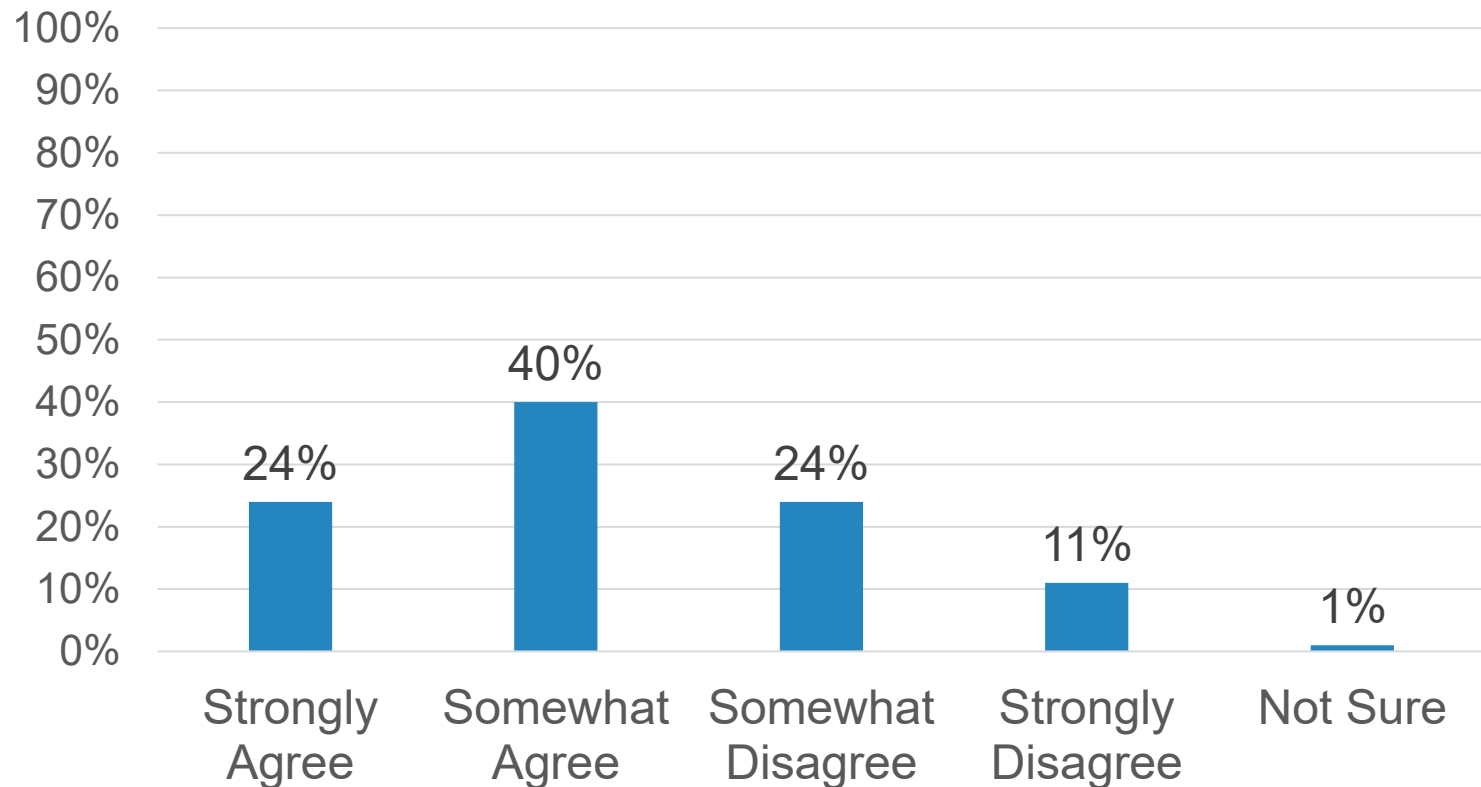


Lifewayresearch

Q25: "My spouse was very satisfied with our marriage." n=687

64% frequently felt overwhelmed with the role of pastor

Among Former Pastors

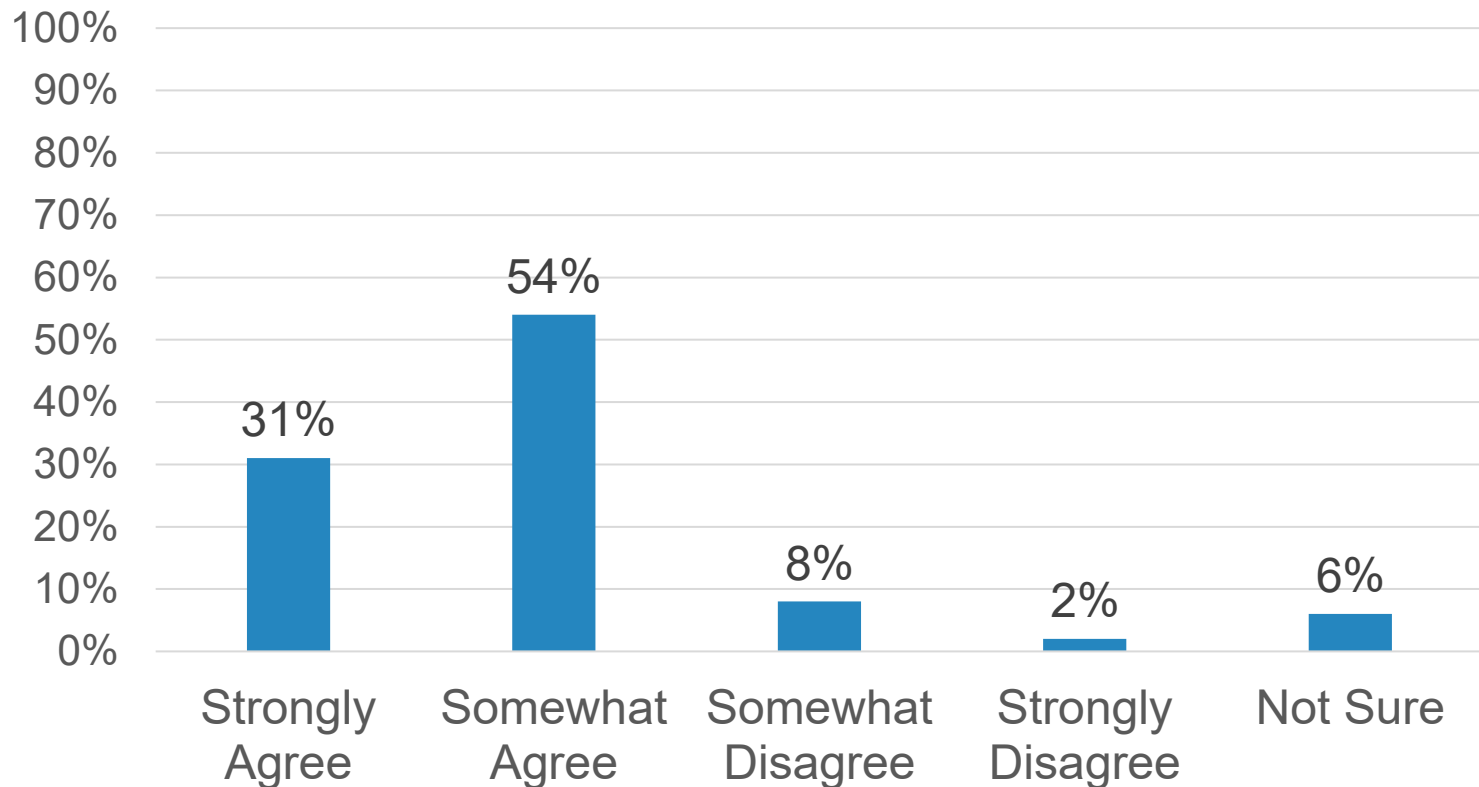


Lifewayresearch

Q26: "I felt the role of being a pastor was frequently overwhelming." n=730

84% invested in processes and behaviors to prevent conflict

Among Former Pastors

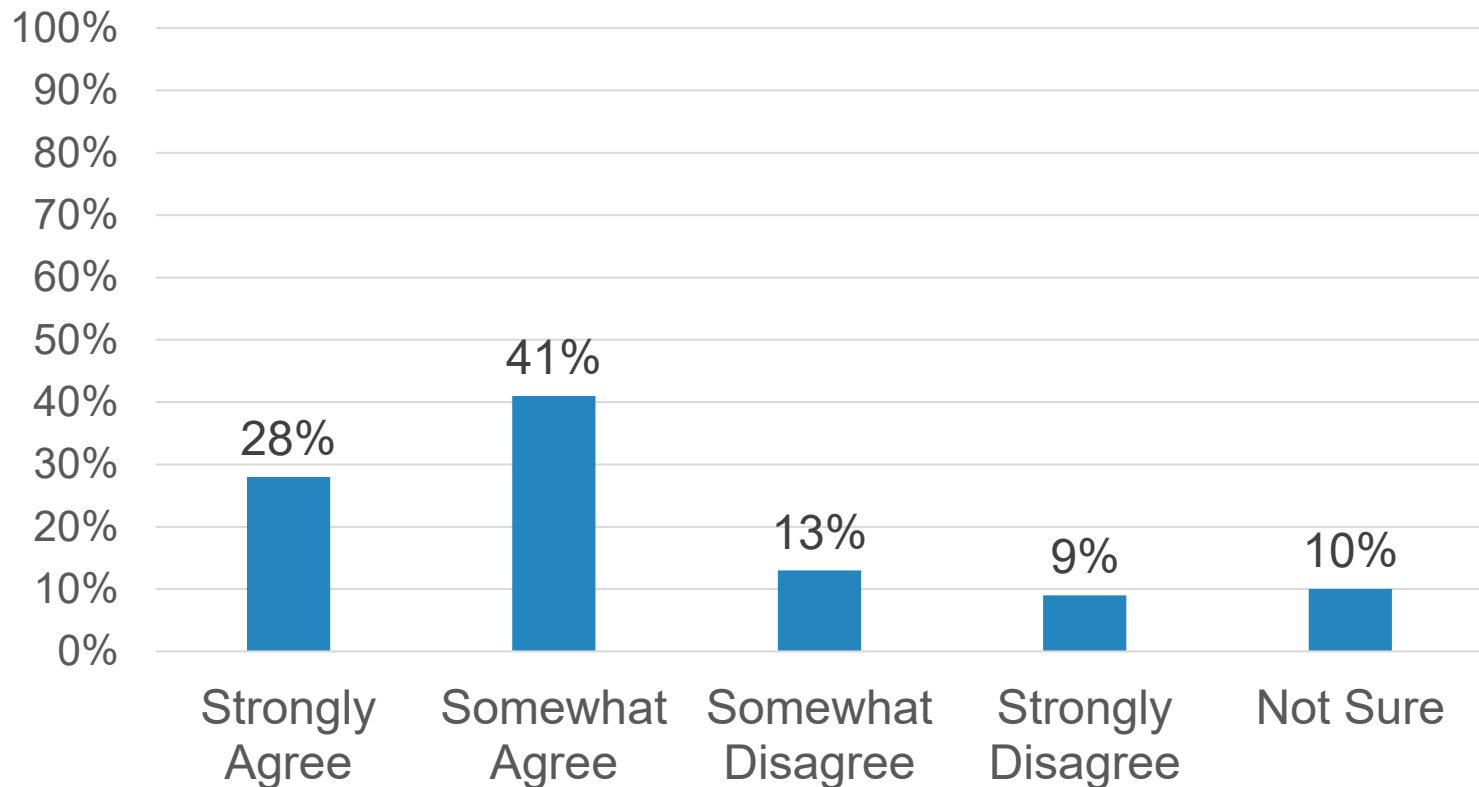


Lifewayresearch

Q27: "I invested in processes and behaviors to prevent conflict." n=730

68% felt their church would not have achieved the progress it had without them

Among Former Pastors

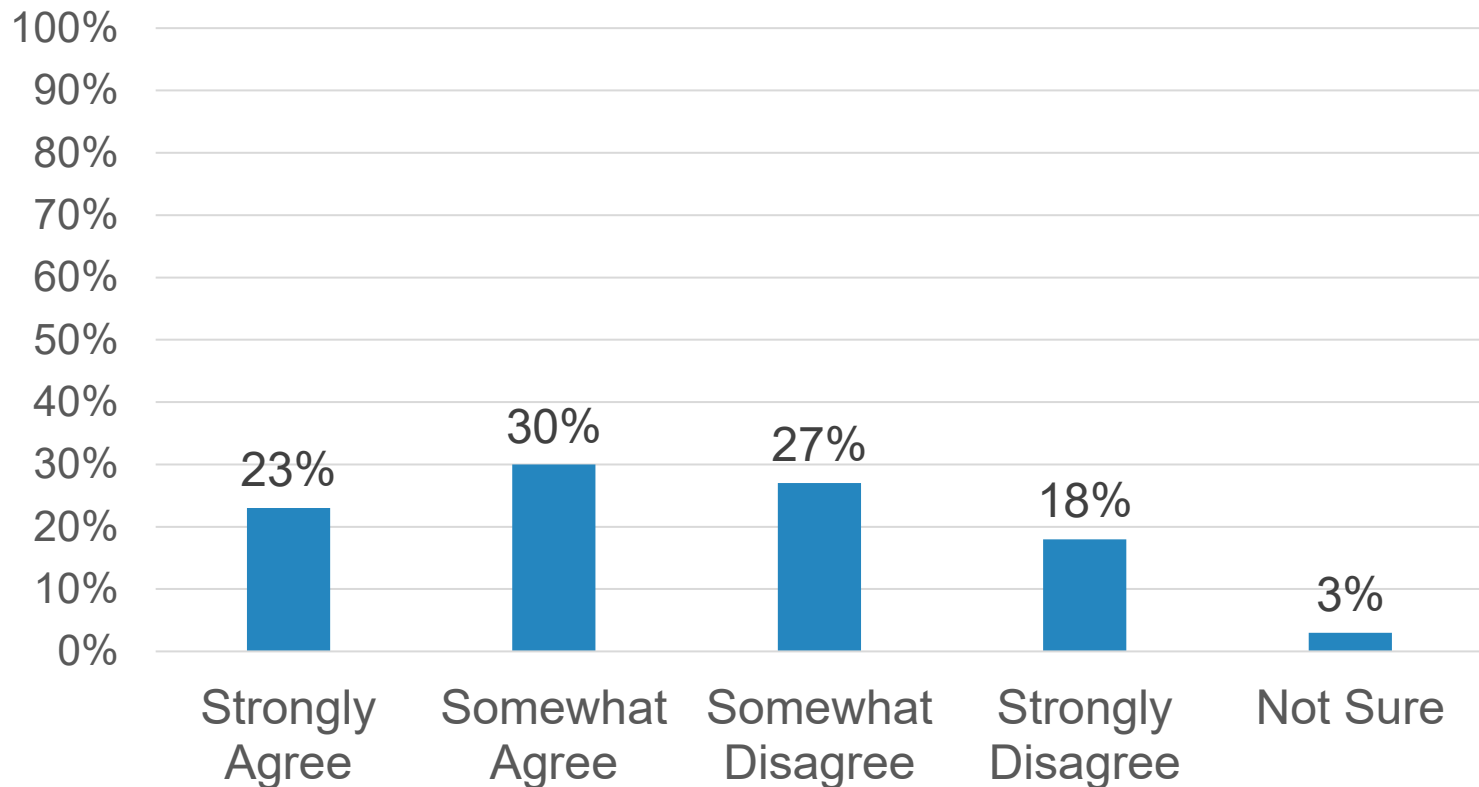


Lifewayresearch

Q28: "I felt my church would not have achieved the progress it had without me." n=730

53% felt the church had unrealistic expectations of them

Among Former Pastors

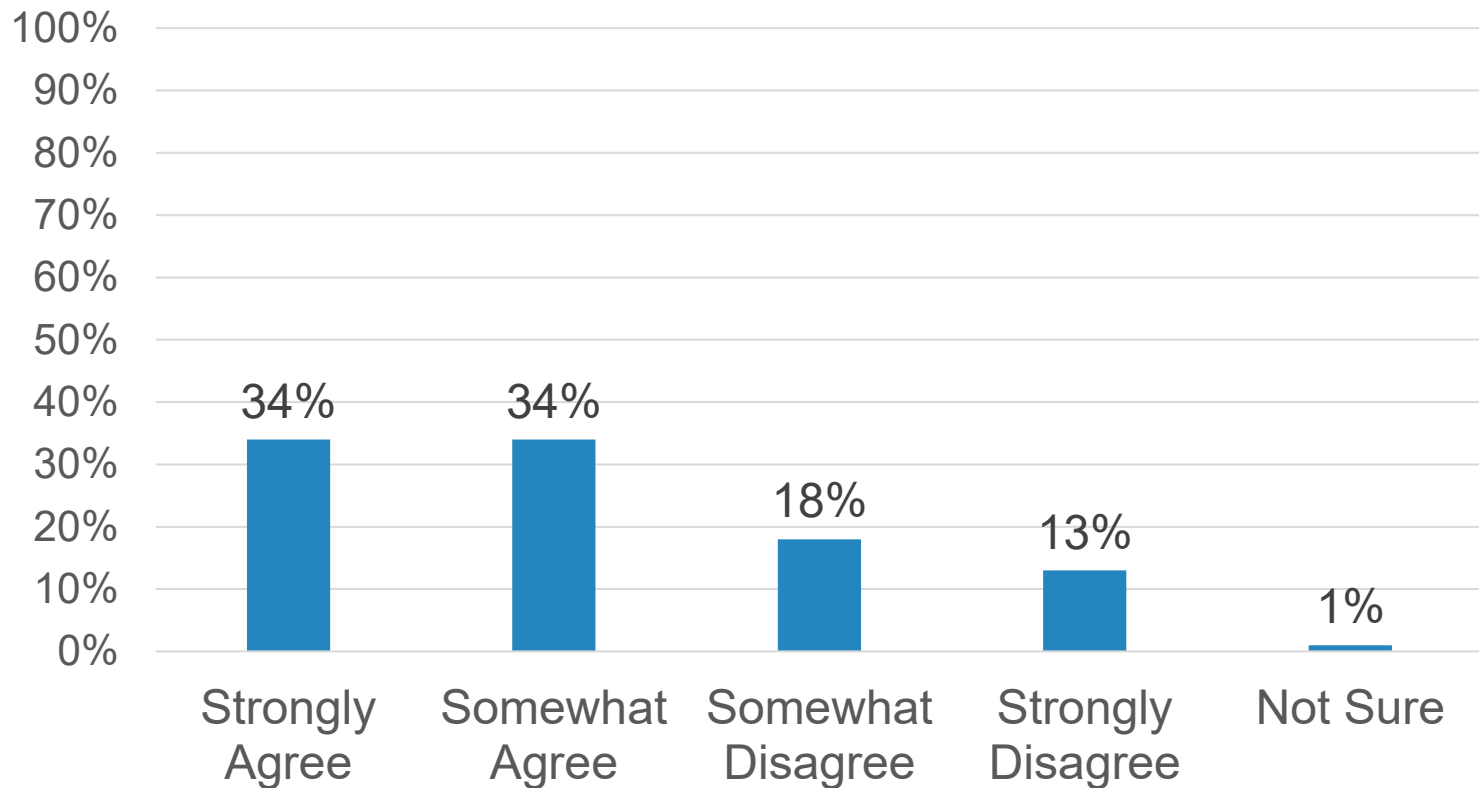


Lifewayresearch

Q29: "I felt my church had unrealistic expectations of me." n=730

68% “unplugged” from ministerial work at least once a week

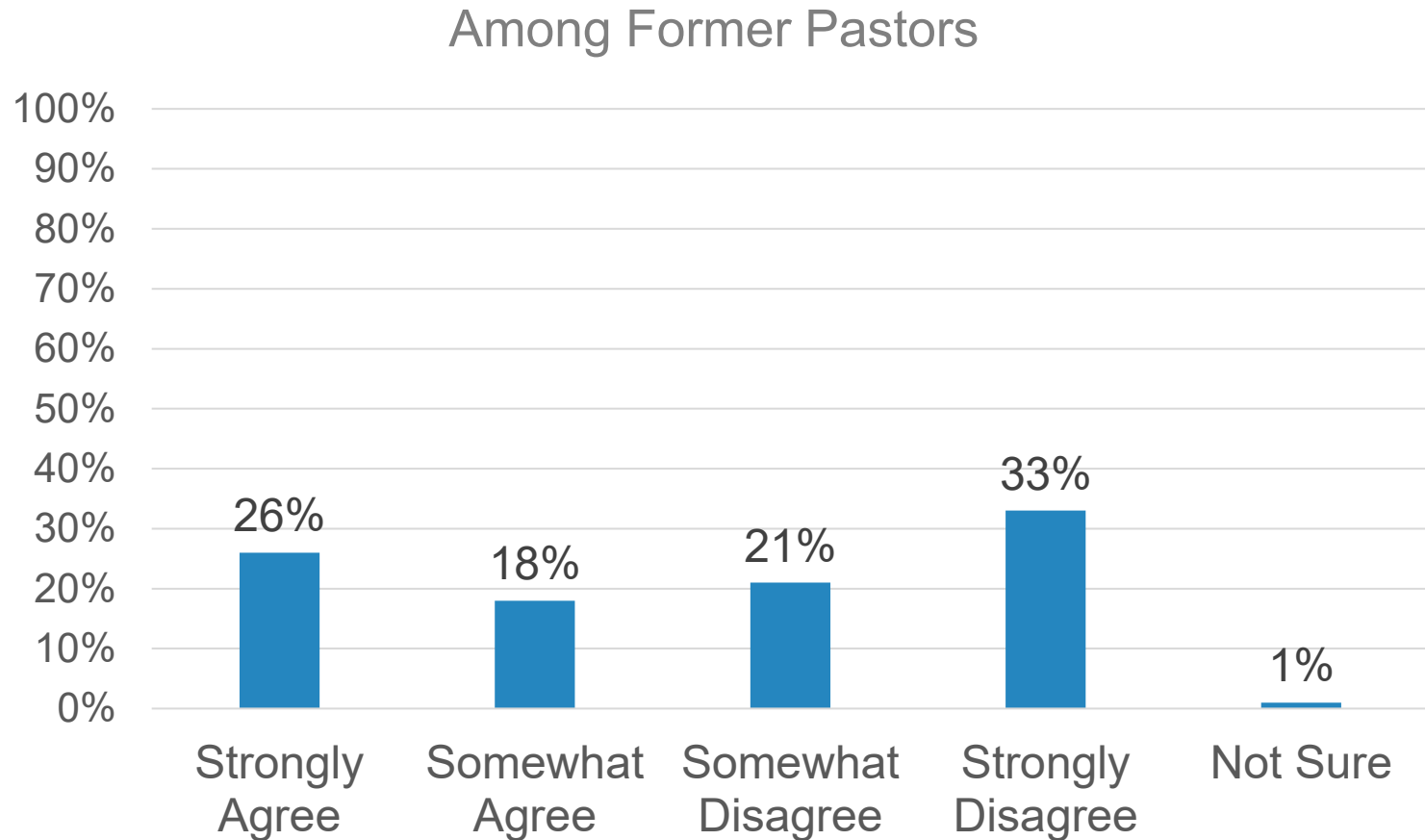
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

Q30: "At least one day a week I "unplugged" from ministerial work and had a day of rest." n=730

45% experienced significant conflict in their church the last year they served as pastor

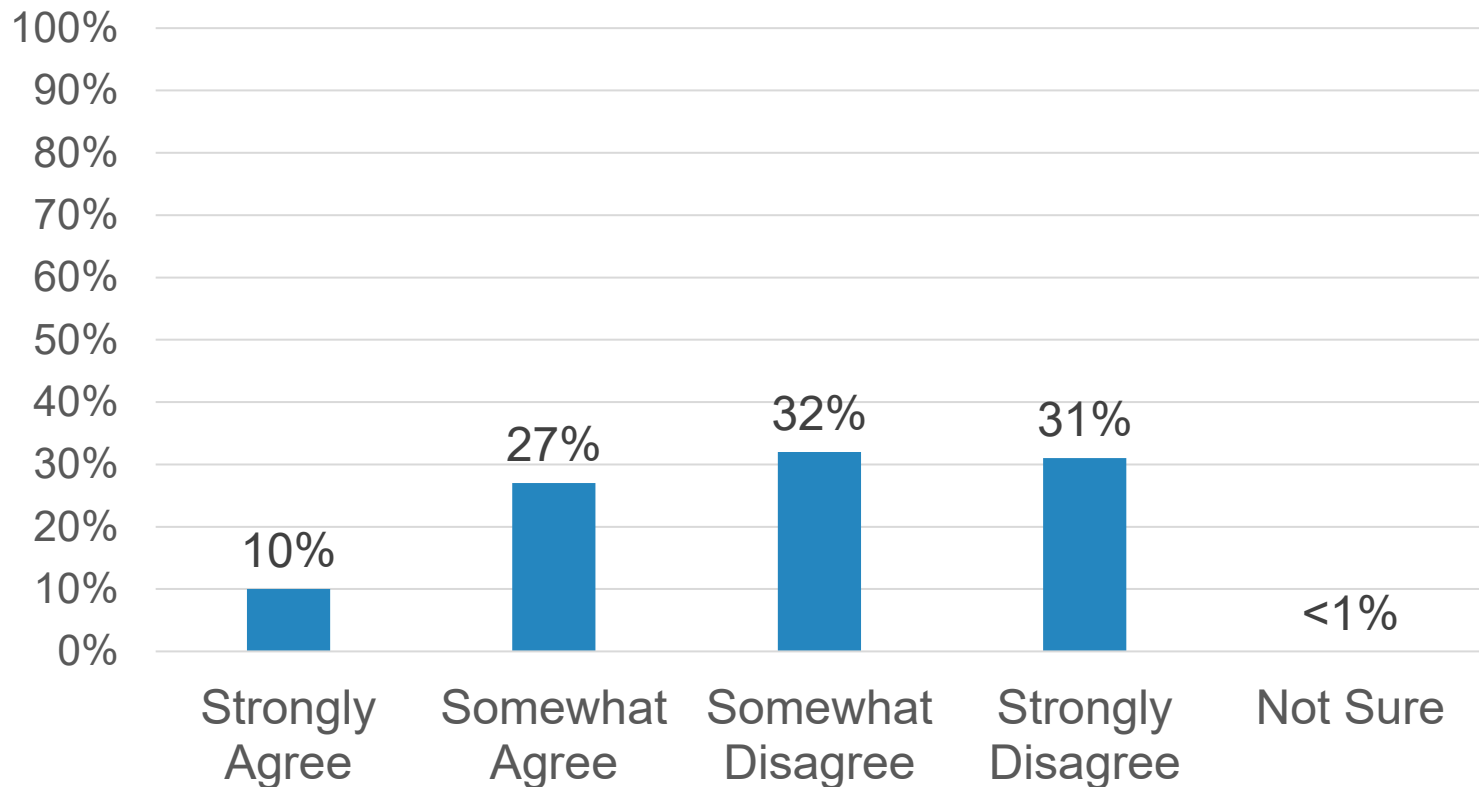


Lifewayresearch

Q31: "In the last year I served as a pastor our church experienced significant conflict." n=730

37% frequently became irritated with people at their church

Among Former Pastors

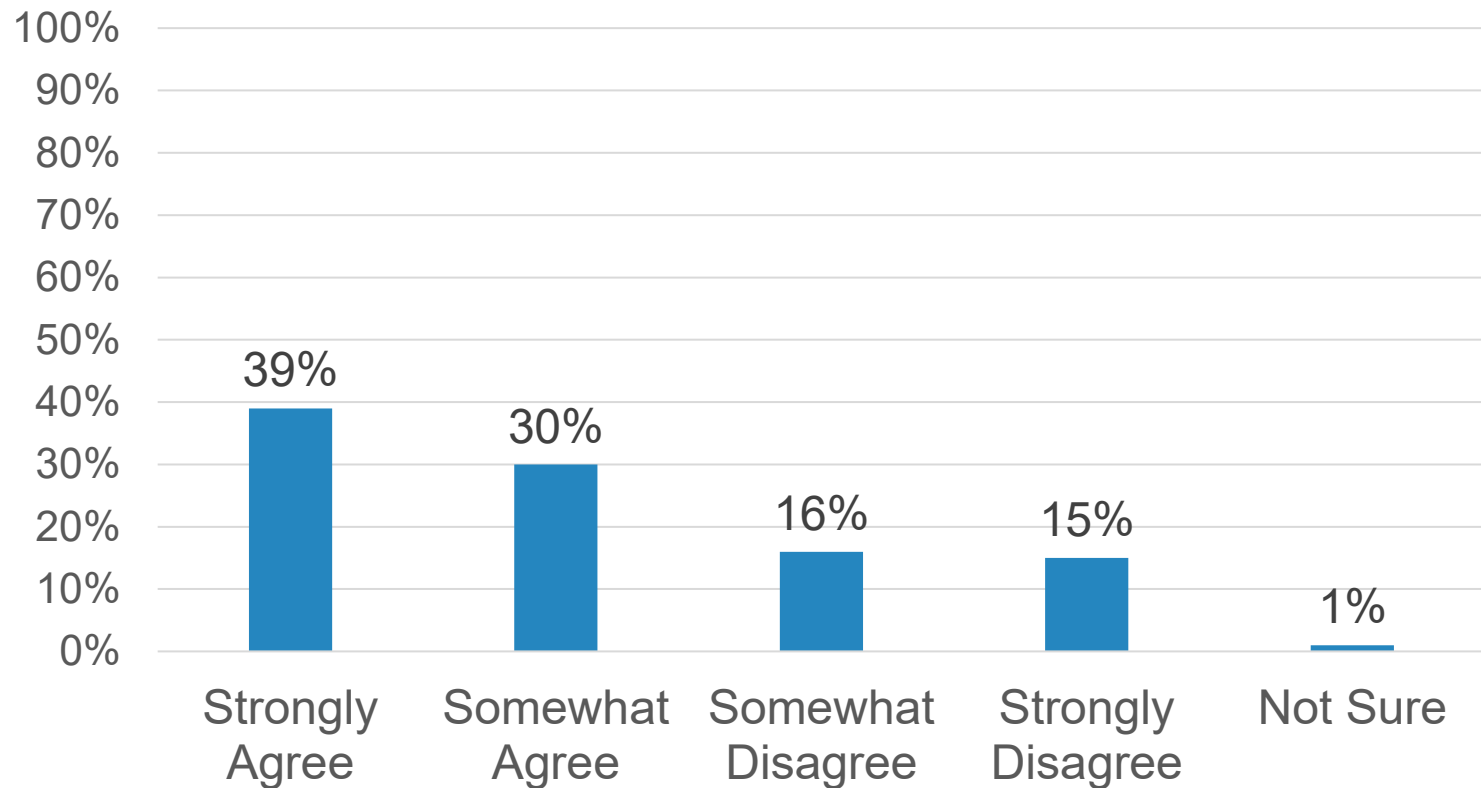


Lifewayresearch

Q32: "I frequently became irritated with people at my church." n=730

68% felt isolated as a pastor

Among Former Pastors

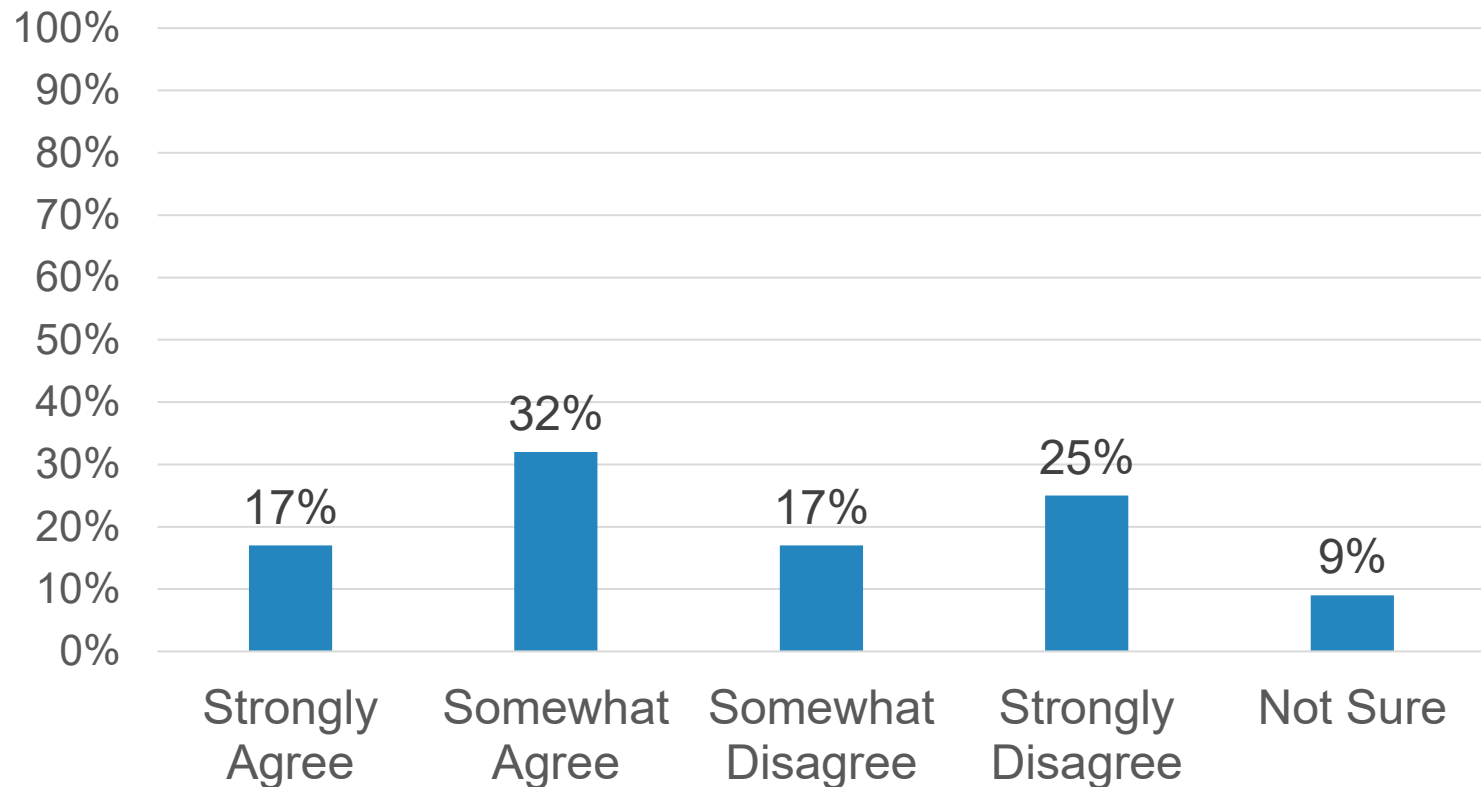


Lifewayresearch

Q33: "I felt isolated as a pastor." n=730

49% say the search team or leaders accurately described the church before they arrived

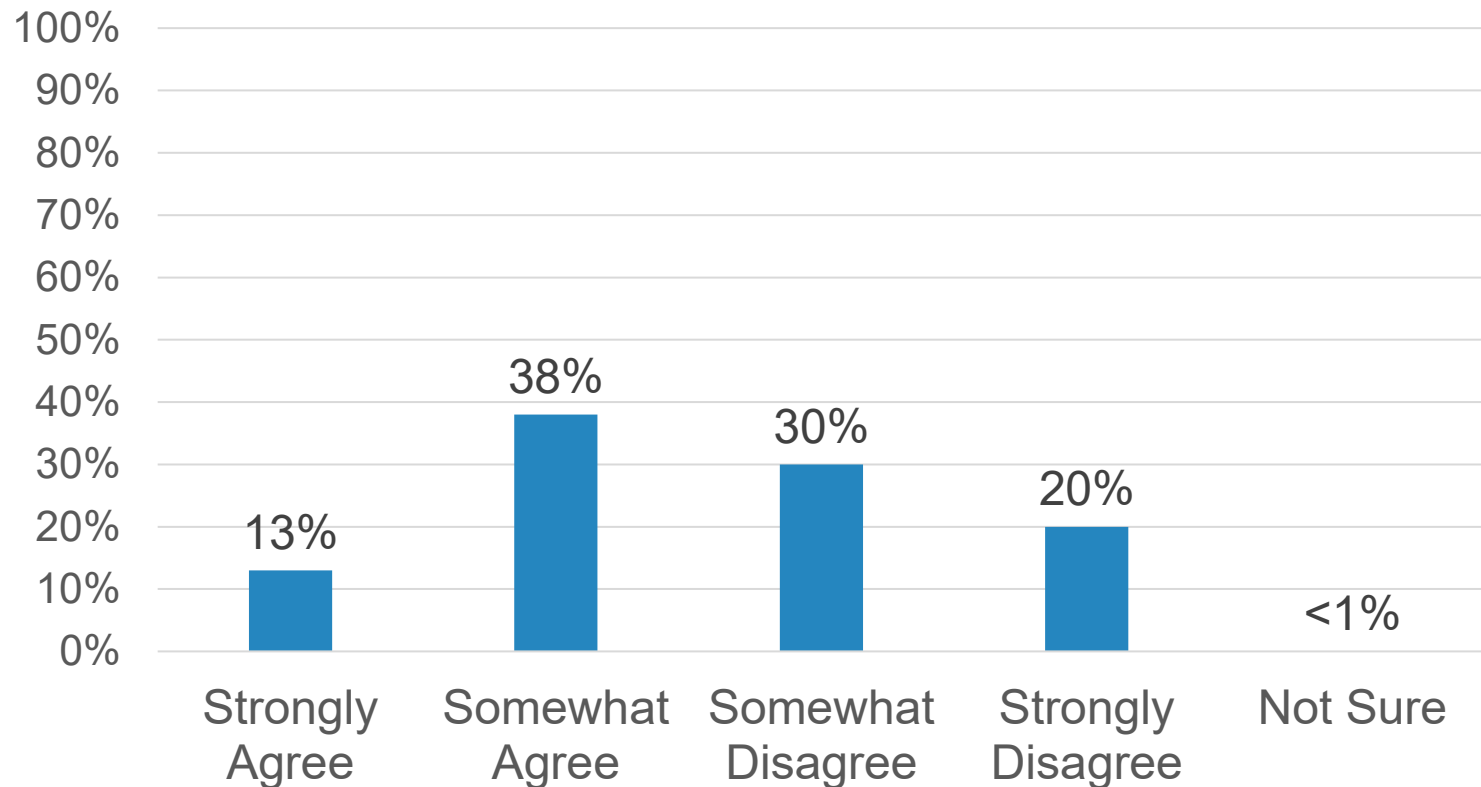
Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

50% believe the demands of ministry kept them from spending time with their family

Among Former Pastors

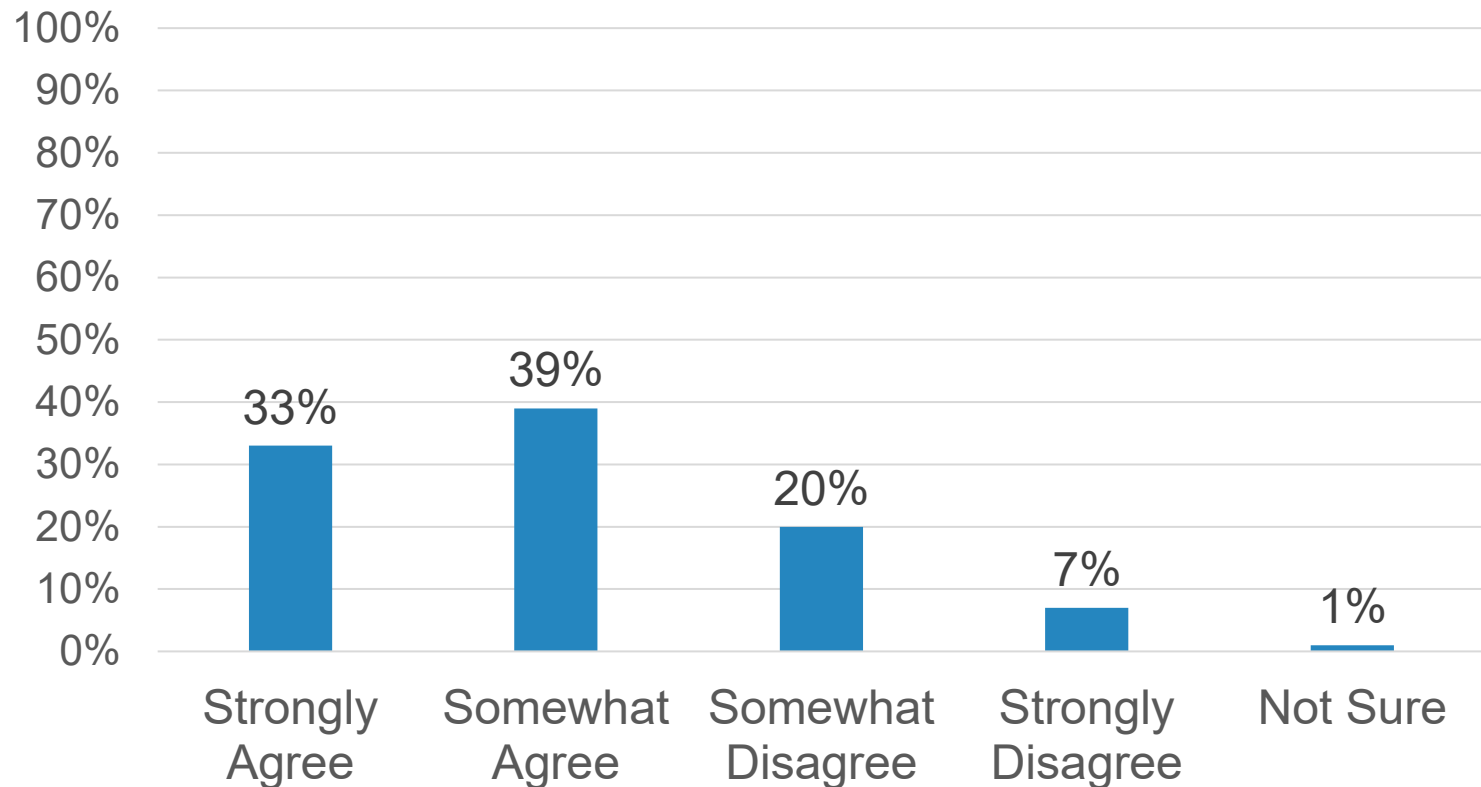


Lifewayresearch

Q35: "The demands of ministry kept me from spending time with my family." n=707

72% agree that their spouse was enthusiastic about their life in ministry together

Among Former Pastors Who Are Married

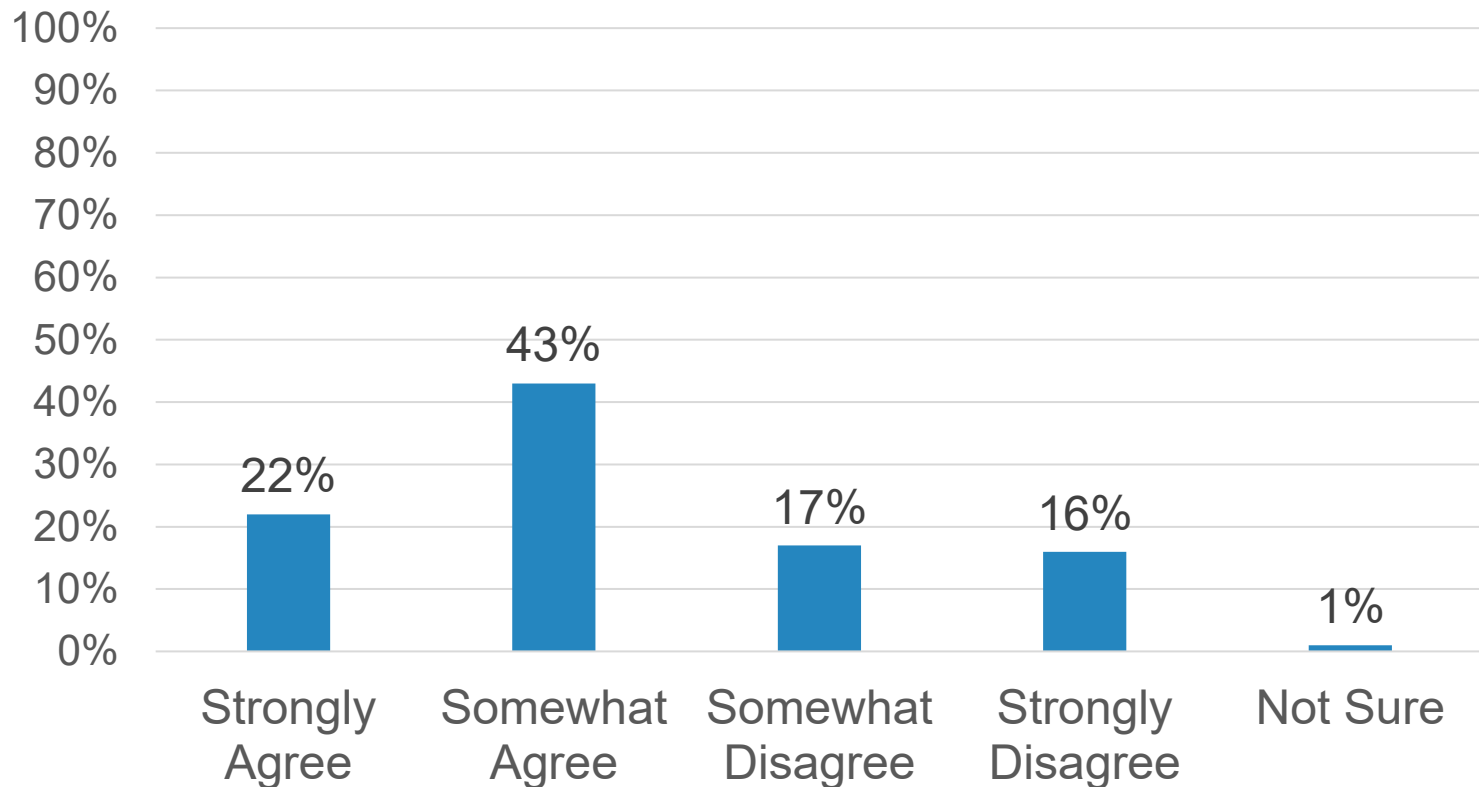


Lifewayresearch

Q36: "My spouse was enthusiastic about our life in ministry together." n=687

65% say their last congregation regularly provided their family with genuine encouragement

Among Former Pastors

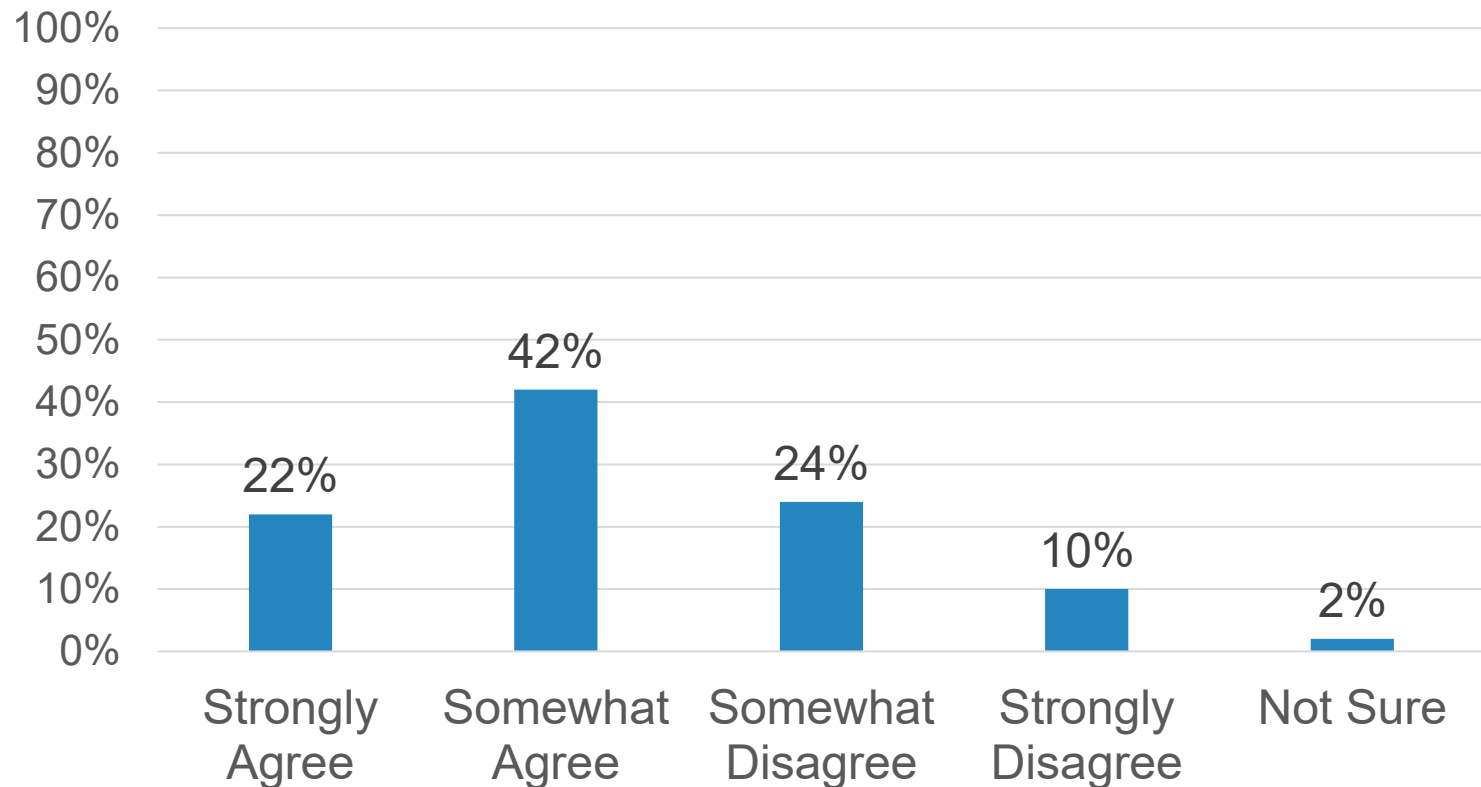


Lifewayresearch

Q37: "The last congregation I pastored regularly provided my family with genuine encouragement." n=715

64% felt free to say “no” when expectations of them were unrealistic

Among Former Pastors

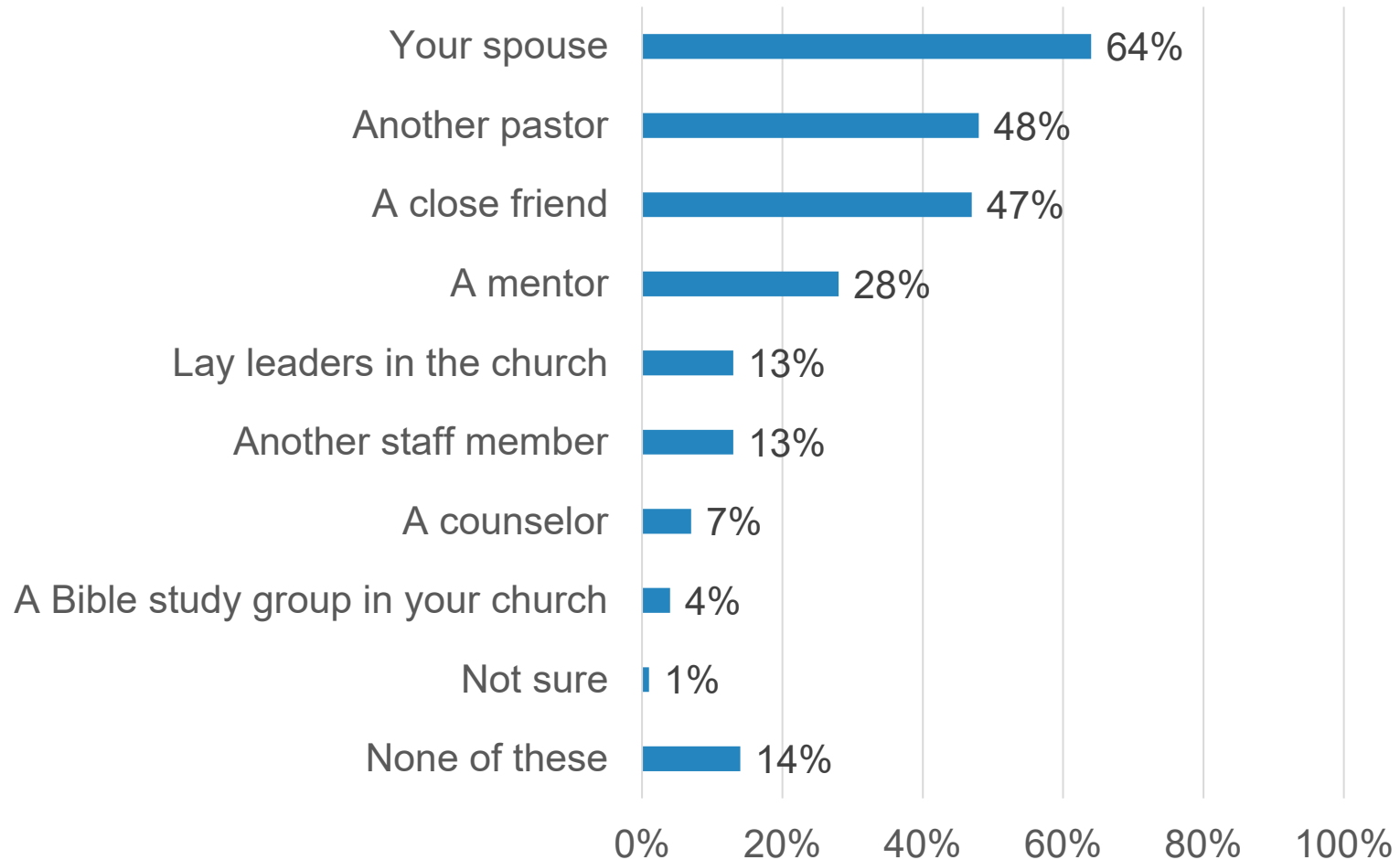


Lifewayresearch

Q38: “I felt free to say “no” when expectations of me were unrealistic.” n=730

“During your last pastorate, did you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?”

Among Former Pastors

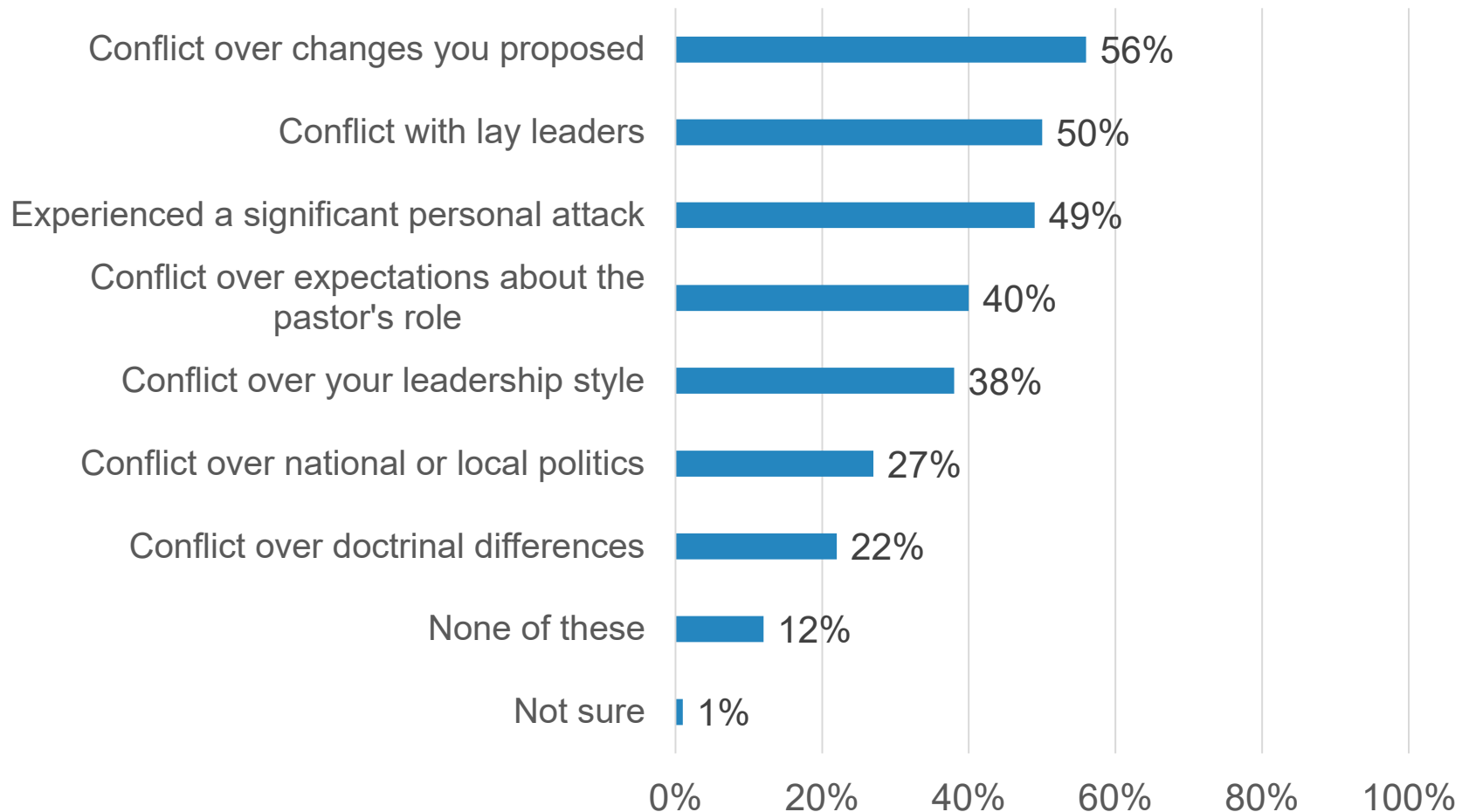


Lifewayresearch

Q39: “During your last pastorate, did you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?
(Select all that apply)” n=730

87% experienced conflict in their last church

Among Former Pastors



Lifewayresearch

Q41: "Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church? (Select all that apply)" n=730

“What advice do you have for **current pastors** to help them thrive in ministry?”

Among Former Pastors

Prioritize your marriage and family	20%
Spend time with God/Read God's Word	16%
Remember your calling/Trust God	14%
Pray	9%
Keep a Sabbath/Take a sabbatical and/or vacation	8%
Surround yourself with trustworthy people/friends	8%
Love God/Love others	8%
Put God first	8%
Care for yourself	7%
Meet with a mentor	7%
Connect/meet with other pastors	6%
Do not go it alone	4%
Meet with a counselor	4%
Set boundaries	3%
Caution with denomination	3%
Learn how to deal with conflict	3%
Patience	3%

“What advice do you have for **current pastors** to help them thrive in ministry?” *continued*

Among Former Pastors

Develop leaders	3%
Listen to and communicate with others/the congregation	3%
Honesty	2%
Leave the ministry	2%
Do not give up/Remain strong	2%
Financial planning	2%
Preach biblical sermons	1%
Serve bi-vocationally	1%
Humility	1%
Be sure the search committee represent church accurately	1%
Focus on obedience	1%
Serve elder-led churches	1%
Avoid politics	<1%
Be authentic/genuine	<1%
Do not know/None	1%

“What advice do you have for churches for how they could best help their pastor thrive in ministry?”

Among Former Pastors

Love and respect their family	14%
Pray for them	14%
Give them time off and protect it	12%
Encourage them/Care for them	11%
Be supportive	10%
Have clear and realistic expectations	10%
Respect and honor them	9%
Provide for them	8%
Remember pastors are human	7%
Serve/Volunteer	7%
Love them	7%
Invest in them	4%
Cooperate with them	3%
Move to be elder-led	<1%
None	2%

Lifewayresearch

Q43: “What advice do you have for churches for how they could best help their pastor thrive in ministry?” n=634

Adverse Childhood Experiences Questions

Pastors were presented 10 questions about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) asking which they had experienced prior to their 18th birthday

Much research has shown that ACEs are strongly associated with some of the most common and serious health conditions facing Americans today including nine of the 10 leading causes of death in the U.S., as well as earlier mortality.

The ACE Questionnaire for Adults in English was used

4% of Former pastors taking the survey opted not to answer the ACE questions

Lifewayresearch

1. <https://www.acesaware.org/ace-fundamentals/the-science-of-aces-toxic-stress/>
2. <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ACE-Questionnaire-for-Adults-Identified-English-rev.7.26.22.pdf>

Adverse Childhood Experiences prior to pastor's 18th birthday

Among Former Pastors	
Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	31%
Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?	20%
Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?	20%
Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?	19%
Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?	16%
Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?	15%
Did you experience unwanted sexual contact?	11%
Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?	11%
Did you feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?	6%
Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?	5%

Lifewayresearch

Q44: "Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday. (Select all that apply)" n=704

Adverse Childhood Experiences Score

Percentage experiencing this number of ACE's	Former Pastors
0	45%
1	20%
2	12%
3	8%
4	6%
5	4%
6	2%
7	2%
8	1%
9	1%
10	<1%

Lifewayresearch

Q44: "Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday. (Select all that apply)" n=704

Adverse Childhood Experiences Score

Percentage experiencing this number of ACE's	Former Pastors	U.S. Adults
0	45%	36%
1	20%	23%
2 - 3	19%	24%
4 or more	16%	17%

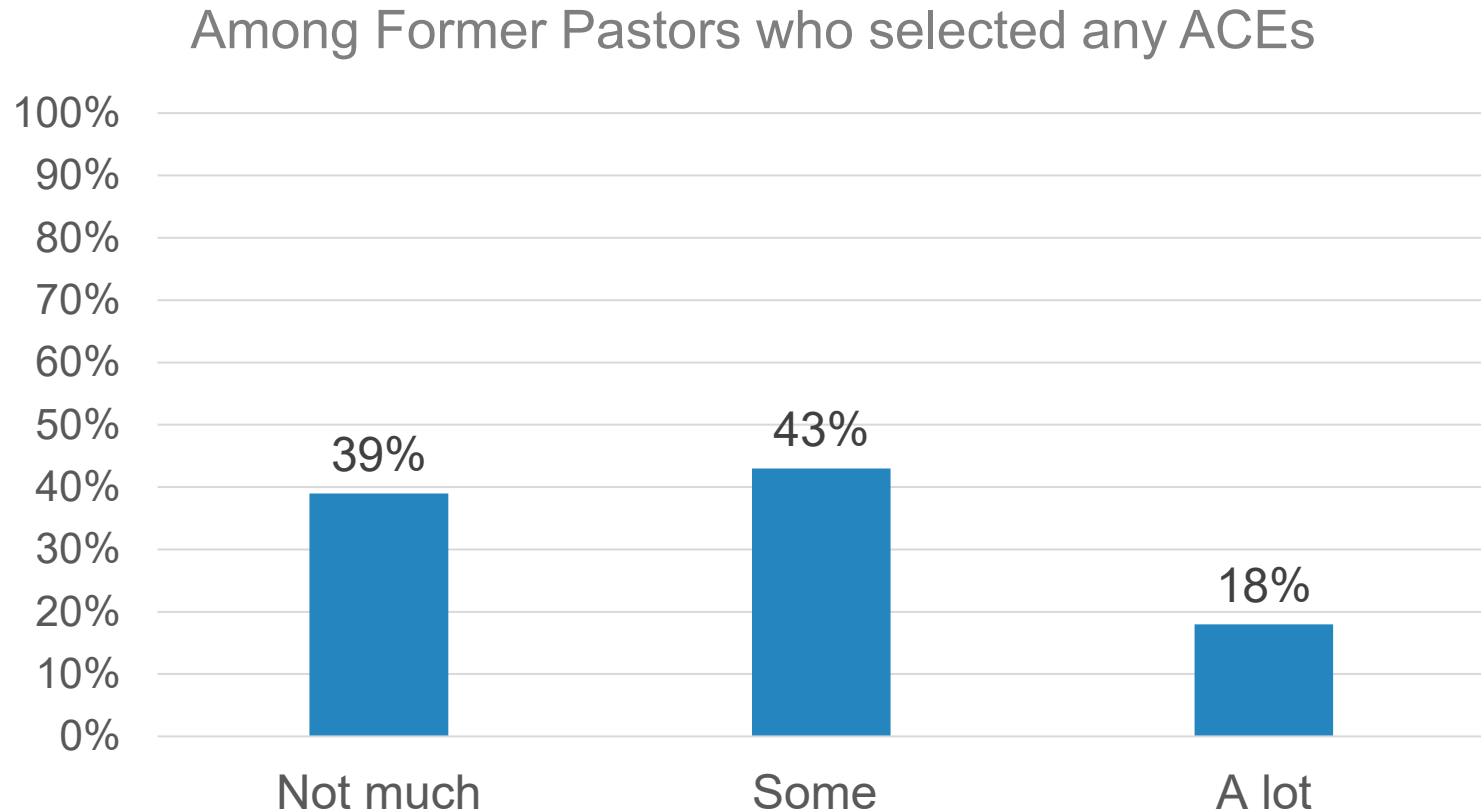
Mean number of experiences: 1.54

Median number of experiences: 1

Lifewayresearch

Q44: "Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday. (Select all that apply)" n=704
Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, United States 2011-2020 n=264,882

18% of pastors experiencing an Adverse Childhood Experience believe these affected their health a lot



Lifewayresearch

Q45: "Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health?" n=384

Significant Differences

Pastor's Gender

Pastor's Ethnicity

Age Stopped Serving as Senior Pastor

Pastor's Education Level

Church Size

Church Location

Significant Differences

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among, gender, ethnicity, and age stopped serving as senior pastor.

PASTOR GENDER	PASTOR ETHNICITY	AGE STOPPED SERVING AS SENIOR PASTOR
Male	White	18-44
Female	Other Ethnicities	45-54
		55-66

Significant Statistical Differences

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among the education level, average weekend attendance, and church location.

PASTOR EDUCATION LEVEL	CHURCH ATTENDANCE	CHURCH LOCATION
No college degree	0-49	Large City (100,000 people or more)
Bachelor's Degree	50-99	Small city (less than 100,000 people)
Master's Degree	100-249	Suburbs
Doctoral Degree	250+	Rural Area

“In total, how many years did you serve as a senior pastor?”

- Males are more likely to select “More than 20 years” than females (26% v. 9%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to select “0-5 years” (44%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select “More than 20 years” (54%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select “More than 20 years” (41%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select “More than 20 years” (51%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to select “0-5 years” (37%)
- Those at churches in a large city (28%) or a rural area (22%) are more likely to select “0-5 years” than those at church in a suburb (12%)

“How many years did you pastor at your last church?”

- White pastors are more likely to select “0-5 years” than pastors of Other Ethnicities (46% v. 30%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to select “0-5 years” (64%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select “More than 20 years” (18%)
- Those with a Bachelor’s Degree (48%) or a Master’s Degree (50%) are more likely to select “0-5 years” than those with a Doctoral Degree (35%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select “More than 20 years” (19%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (57%) and 50-99 (52%) are more likely to select “0-5 years” than those with attendance of 100-249 (38%) and 250+ (24%)

“Was this the first church you served as senior pastor?”

- Females are more likely to select Yes than males (71% v. 41%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to select Yes (60%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the least likely to select Yes (29%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (53%) or 50-99 (49%) are more likely to select Yes than those with church attendance of 100-249 (36%) or 250+ (26%)
- Those at churches in a large city (50%) are more likely to select Yes than those at church in a small city (39%)

“Which of the following best describes your work today?”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the least likely to select “Working in a non-ministry role” (24%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select “Early retirement” (16%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select “Working in another ministry role other than pastor” (67%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (62%) and 250+ (60%) are more likely to select “Working in another ministry role other than pastor” than those with church attendance of 0-49 (48%) and 50-99 (47%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (39%) are more likely to select “Working in a non-ministry role” than those with church attendance of 100-249 (26%) and 250+ (26%)

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Conflict in a church

- Those with a Bachelor's Degree (19%) or a Master's Degree (22%) are more likely to select than those with a Doctoral Degree (11%)
- Those with church attendance of 50-99 (23%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (14%)

Burnout

- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the least likely to select (8%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (20%) and 100-249 (19%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 250+ (9%)

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Moral or ethical issues

- No meaningful significant differences

Illness

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select (12%)

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Change in calling

- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select (52%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select (61%)

Family issues

- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (12%) and 50-99 (14%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 250+ (4%)

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Personal finances

- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (14%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 100-249 (6%) and 250+ (4%)

Poor fit with a church

- No meaningful significant differences

Lack of preparation for the job

- No meaningful significant differences

“Which, if any, of the following describe why you left the pastorate?”

Did not find a new church that was a good fit

- No meaningful significant differences

Denominational issues

- No meaningful significant differences

Church closure/COVID

- Females are more likely to select than males (18% v. 2%)

“My seminary or ministry training prepared me to handle the people side of ministry.”

- Those with a Doctoral Degree (62%) are more likely to Agree than those with no college degree (47%) or a Bachelor's Degree (47%)

“I expected there would be a need to confront conflict in my church.”

- No meaningful significant differences

“When time conflicts arose, I consistently put my family first.”

- Males are more likely to Agree than females (69% v. 51%)

“During most of my ministry at my last church I was sure I could stay at that church as long as I wanted.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 (86%) are more likely to Agree than those who stopped serving at age 18-44 (75%)
- Those with no college degree (89%) are more likely to Agree than those with Master's Degree (77%) or a Doctoral Degree (79%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (87%) and 250+ (88%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (73%) and 50-99 (79%)

“I felt I must be ‘on-call’ 24 hours a day.”

- Those with church attendance of 50-99 (85%) and 100-249 (84%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (74%) and 250+ (74%)

“I worked hard to protect my image as a pastor.”

- Females are more likely to Disagree than males (22% v. 11%)

“My family resented the demands of pastoral ministry.”

- Those with a Bachelor's Degree (48%) are more likely to Agree than those with a Master's Degree (38%) or a Doctoral Degree (35%)

“I consistently listened to people in our church for signs of conflict.”

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to Disagree than White pastors (21% v. 11%)

“I often felt the demands of ministry were greater than I can handle.”

- Those at churches in a large city (55%) or a rural area (56%) are more likely to Agree than those at church in a small city (45%)

“I had another staff member present when counseling church members of the opposite sex.”

- Males are more likely to Agree than females (69% v. 51%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to Agree (81%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to answer, “I do not counsel members of the opposite sex” (17%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree (23%) are more likely to Disagree than those with no college degree (9%) or a Bachelor’s Degree (12%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (19%) and 250+ (21%) are more likely to Disagree than those with church attendance of 50-99 (10%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (16%) are more likely to answer “I do not counsel members of the opposite sex” than those with church attendance of 100-249 (6%) and 250+ (4%)

“I referred church members to a professional counselor when the situation required more than two sessions.”

- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to Agree (91%)
- Those at churches in a small city (84%) are more likely to Agree than those at church in a large city (74%) or a rural area (76%)

“I was often concerned about the financial security of my family.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to Disagree (34%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (79%) and 100-249 (74%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 250+ (63%)

“I felt I deserved the respect of my people.”

- Those with no college degree are the most likely to Disagree (31%)

“Which if any of the following did the last church you served as pastor have in place?”

A plan for the pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical

- Those with a Doctoral Degree (23%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (9%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to select (9%)

A pastor encouragement group that invested in the wellbeing of the pastor's family

- No meaningful significant differences

“Which if any of the following did the last church you served as pastor have in place?”

A list of counselors to refer people to

- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select (41%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select (63%)
- Those at churches in a large city (36%) or a small city (36%) are more likely to select than those at church in a rural area (22%)

A document that clearly communicated the church's expectations of the pastor

- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select (41%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (42%) and 250+ (45%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (20%) and 50-99 (29%)

“Which if any of the following did the last church you served as pastor have in place?”

A lay counseling ministry

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (18% v. 6%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select (15%)

“Which if any of the following did the last church you served as pastor have in place?”

A process for church discipline

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select (39%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree (35%) are more likely to select than those with a Master's Degree (25%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (38%) and 250+ (45%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (17%) and 50-99 (21%)
- Those at churches in a large city (33%) or a small city (31%) are more likely to select than those at church in a rural area (23%)

“When you last served as a pastor, which of the following training, if any, had you received?”

Taken graduate school courses in counseling

- Those with a Master’s Degree (43%) or a Doctoral Degree (46%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (2%) or a Bachelor’s Degree (9%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to select (20%)
- Those at churches in a suburb (41%) are more likely to select than those at church in a small city (27%) and a rural area (27%)

Obtained a graduate degree in counseling

- No meaningful significant differences

Read several books or articles on counseling

- No meaningful significant differences

“When you last served as a pastor, which of the following training, if any, had you received?”

Attended conferences on counseling

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the least likely to select (24%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (37%) and 250+ (41%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (25%)

Taken courses on interpersonal skills

- Females are more likely to select than males (67% v. 49%)
- Those with no college degree are the least likely to select (36%)

Taken courses on dealing with conflict

- No meaningful significant differences

“In the last year you served as a pastor, which of the following activities had you done?”

Planned a date night alone with your spouse at least once a month

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the least likely to select (50%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (68%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (53%) and 50-99 (54%)
- Those at churches in a large city (63%) or a small city (63%) are more likely to select than those at church in a rural area (53%)

Attended a marriage retreat or conference with your spouse

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (36% v. 23%)

“In the last year you served as a pastor, which of the following activities had you done?”

Attended marriage counseling with your spouse

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (21% v. 11%)

Took a vacation with your family for at least a week away from church work

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 (86%) are more likely to select than those who stopped serving at age 18-44 (73%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree (88%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (75%) or a Master's Degree (77%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select (94%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to select (66%)

“In the last year you served as a pastor, which of the following activities had you done?”

Prayed regularly with your spouse for each other

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 (66%) are more likely to select than those who stopped serving at age 18-44 (52%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree (66%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (51%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to select (50%)

“When you last served as a pastor, in a typical week how many times did you have personal time alone with the Lord involving Bible study and prayer, other than sermon or lesson preparation?”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to select “7 or more” (46%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to select “3” (15%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (26%) are more likely to select “5” than those with church attendance of 50-99 (16%)

“My spouse was very satisfied with our marriage.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to Agree (91%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to Disagree (25%)

“I felt the role of being a pastor was frequently overwhelming.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 (69%) are more likely to Agree than those who stopped serving at age 55-66 (59%)
- Those with no college degree are the most likely to Agree (78%)

“I invested in processes and behaviors to prevent conflict.”

- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to Agree (93%)

“I felt my church would not have achieved the progress it had without me.”

- Those with a Bachelor's Degree (71%) are more likely to Agree than those with no college degree (58%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to Agree (60%)

“I felt my church had unrealistic expectations of me.”

- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (61%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (50%) and 250+ (43%)

“At least one day a week I ‘unplugged’ from ministerial work and had a day of rest.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to Agree (74%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (40%) are more likely to Disagree than those with church attendance of 50-99 (29%) and 250+ (21%)

“In the last year I served as a pastor our church experienced significant conflict.”

- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (50%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (40%) and 250+ (38%)

“I frequently became irritated with people at my church.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 45-54 (41%) are more likely to Agree than those who stopped serving at age 55-66 (31%)

“I felt isolated as a pastor.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 are the most likely to Agree (77%)
- Those with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to Disagree (41%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (77%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 50-99 (64%) and 250+ (60%)

“The search team or leaders who invited me to the last church I pastored accurately described the church before I arrived.”

- Female pastors are more likely to answer Not sure than male pastors (22% v. 8%)
- White pastors are more likely to Agree than pastors of Other Ethnicities (51% v. 36%)
- Those with a Master’s Degree (46%) are more likely to Disagree than those with no college degree (31%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (54%) and 250+ (57%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (42%)
- Those at churches in a small city (54%) are more likely to Agree than those at church in a suburb (41%)

“The demands of ministry kept me from spending time with my family.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 (57%) are more likely to Agree than those who stopped serving at age 55-66 (43%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ are the most likely to Disagree (60%)

“My spouse was enthusiastic about our life in ministry together.”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the most likely to Agree (82%)
- Those at churches in a rural area (75%) are more likely to Agree than those at church in a large city (65%)

“The last congregation I pastored regularly provided my family with genuine encouragement.”

- Those with a Doctoral Degree (74%) are more likely to Agree than those with a Master's Degree (61%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (74%) 250+ (70%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (58%)
- Those at churches in a small city (70%) are more likely to Agree than those at church in a large city (60%)

“I felt free to say ‘no’ when expectations of me were unrealistic.”

- Females are more likely to Disagree than males (49% v. 34%)
- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 (43%) are more likely to Disagree than those who stopped serving at age 55-66 (26%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (72%) are more likely to Agree than those with church attendance of 0-49 (59%)

“During your last pastorate, did you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?”

A mentor

- Those with church attendance of 250+ (41%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (26%) and 50-99 (22%)

A counselor

- No meaningful significant differences

A close friend

- Those with a Doctoral Degree (53%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (38%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (58%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (40%) and 50-99 (43%)

“During your last pastorate, did you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?”

Lay leaders in the church

- No meaningful significant differences

Another staff member

- Those with Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select (20%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (22%) and 250+ (24%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (3%) and 50-99 (8%)

Your spouse

- No meaningful significant differences

“During your last pastorate, did you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?”

Another pastor

- Males are more likely to select than females (49% v. 33%)

A Bible study group in your church

- No meaningful significant differences

“Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church?”

Conflict with lay leaders

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the least likely to select (43%)
- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (55%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (43%) and 250+ (44%)

Conflict over doctrinal differences

- No meaningful significant differences

“Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church?”

Conflict over changes you proposed

- Male pastors are more likely to select than female pastors (57% v. 40%)
- White pastors are more likely to select than pastors of Other Ethnicities (58% v. 43%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (64%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (52%)
- Those at churches in a large city (61%) or a rural area (60%) are more likely to select than those at church in a suburb (47%)

“Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church?”

Conflict over expectations about the pastor’s role

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 55-66 are the least likely to select (33%)
- Those with no college degree (51%) are more likely to select than those with a Master’s Degree (38%) or a Doctoral Degree (37%)
- Those at churches in a rural area (44%) are more likely to select than those at church in a suburb (30%)

Conflict over your leadership style

- Males are more likely to select than females (40% v. 18%)

“Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church?”

Experienced a significant personal attack

- Those with church attendance of 100-249 (58%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (41%)

Conflict over national or local politics

- Those with a Master’s Degree (28%) or Doctoral Degree (31%) are more likely to select than those with no college degree (17%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (34%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 0-49 (22%)

“Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday.”

Did you feel that you didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?

- Females are more likely to select than males (18% v. 5%)

Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (33% v. 19%)

“Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday.”

Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?

- Females are more likely to select than males (32% v. 18%)

Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?

- Females are more likely to select than males (32% v. 15%)
- Those with no college degree (25%) or a Bachelor's Degree (22%) are more likely to select than those with a Master's Degree (13%) or a Doctoral Degree (13%)

“Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday.”

Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?

- Females are more likely to select than males (25% v. 14%)
- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (30% v. 14%)
- Those at churches in a large city (18%) are more likely to select than those at church in a suburb (7%)

Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?

- No meaningful significant differences

“Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday.”

Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?

- Those with church attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to select (40%)

Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?

- Pastors of Other Ethnicities are more likely to select than White pastors (37% v. 18%)
- Those with church attendance of 0-49 (26%) are more likely to select than those with church attendance of 250+ (13%)

“Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday.”

Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?

- Females are more likely to select than males (27% v. 10%)
- Those with Doctoral Degree are the least likely to select (5%)

Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or oral/anal/vaginal intercourse/penetration)?

- Females are more likely to select than males (25% v. 10%)

“Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health?”

- Those who stopped serving as Senior Pastor at age 18-44 (27%) are more likely to select “A lot” than those who stopped serving at age 55-66 (10%)
- Those with a Bachelor’s Degree (26%) are more likely to select “A lot” than those with no college degree (11%) or a Doctoral Degree (7%)
- Those with church attendance of 250+ (54%) are more likely to select “Not much” than those with church attendance of 0-49 (33%) and 50-99 (36%)
- Those at churches in a small city (46%) are more likely to select “Not much” than those at church in a rural area (33%)

Pastors Attrition Study 2025

A SURVEY OF 730 PASTORS WHO LEFT THE PASTORATE
BEFORE AGE 67

Lifewayresearch