



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
JUSTICE RESEARCH INITIATIVE

VERMONT PRISON CLIMATE SURVEY

2024

Prison Research
and Innovation
Network (PRIN)

go.uvm.edu/justiceresearch



ABOUT - 2024

The Vermont Prison Climate Surveys were developed as part of the **Prison Research and Innovation Network (PRIN)** - a consortium of 5 states, each working to establish a model of transparency, accountability, and innovation in prisons. The 5 states participating in the PRIN project are: Vermont, Delaware, Iowa, Missouri, and Colorado.

The purpose of PRIN is to better understand prison environments; enhance prisons' data collection capacities to promote transparency and accountability; and design, implement, and evaluate evidence-based programs and policies to improve conditions for individuals incarcerated in and working in prisons. PRIN is a 4.5 year project taking place from January 2020 to June 2024.

Phase I (January 2020 – December 2021). Researchers at the University of Vermont developed two Prison Climate Surveys - one for correctional staff and one for incarcerated persons. Both surveys were developed using participatory research methods, elevating the voices and perspectives of correctional staff and incarcerated individuals. Surveys were developed and administered in Southern State Correctional Facility (SSCF), the PRIN pilot facility. In June 2021, just over one year into the Covid-19 pandemic, baseline surveys were administered. More than 70% of SSCF staff and incarcerated persons completed the surveys.

Phase II (January 2022 – June 2024). The Vermont Department of Corrections launched an innovation process using findings from phase I to identify priority areas for change and implement and test changes in the pilot facility to make prison environments more humane and rehabilitative. As part of this effort, the Vermont Prison Climate Surveys were administered for a second time in June 2022 (midpoint) and for a third time in March 2024 (final). These follow-up data provide the opportunity to understand the impact of changes over time. **Results of the 2024 correctional staff and incarcerated persons surveys are presented in this report.**



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www.doc.vermont.gov

This work was completed under the Urban Institute's Prison Research and Innovation Initiative (PRII), supported by Arnold Ventures—a five-year effort to leverage research and evidence to shine a much-needed light on prison conditions and pilot strategies to promote the wellbeing of people who are confined and work behind bars. The views expressed here are those of the author/authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, Arnold Ventures, its trustees, or its funders.

www.urban.org/features/prison-research-and-innovation-initiative

PRIN Surveys - 2024 Overview

This report details the full 2024 survey results for the VT-PRIN study. To help highlight areas of potential change we have flagged each question on the 2024 survey results where there was a statistically significant, or trend towards statistical significance, change from the 2021 (baseline) results.

-  There is a red box next to the questions where there was a trend towards negative change (i.e., things got worse). These flags are based on average scale differences between the years, and may or may not represent meaningful changes.
-  There is a green box next to the questions where there was a trend towards positive change (i.e., things got better). These flags are based on average scale differences between the years, and may or may not represent meaningful changes.

Survey questions are presented in the order that they were asked on the survey itself. It's important to note that the survey was largely unchanged between 2021 and 2024, with the exception of the removal of reporting on questions related to Covid-19 in 2024.

Overall, staff perceptions of facility climate have trended in a positive direction while amongst incarcerated persons, there have been little to no changes.

It is important to bear in mind that these results express opinions, feelings, and perceptions of facility climate. To better understand the context of these findings, it is important to engage with the SSCF staff and incarcerated individuals.

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Kathy Fox kfox@uvm.edu



2024: SURVEY RESPONDENTS - STAFF



70%

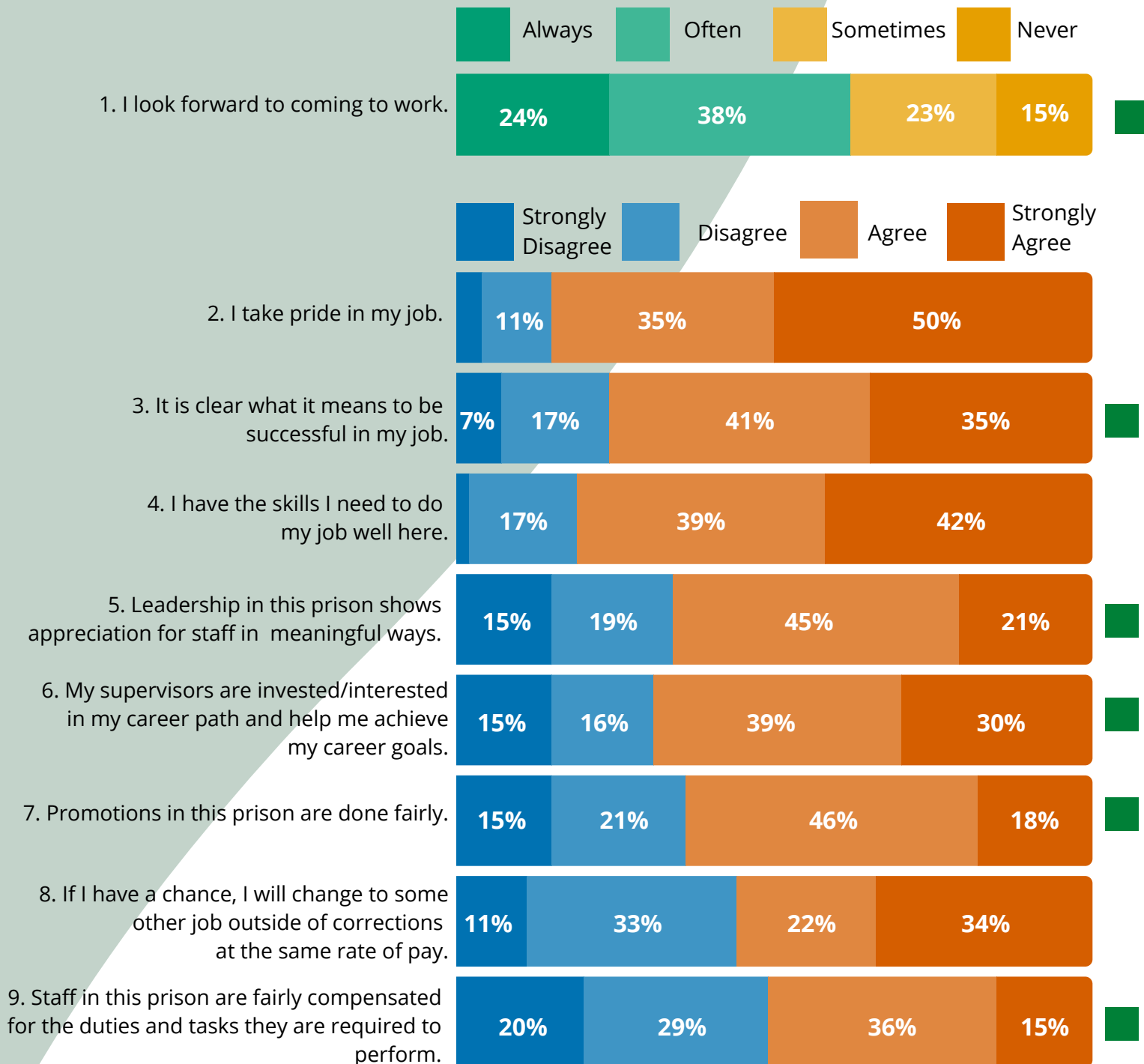
of correctional staff completed the survey.

- Age: 39 years (median)
- Race: 83% white
- Ethnicity: 80% white
- Gender identity: 24% female, 74% male
- Employer: 91% corrections, 9% contractor
- # Years working at SSCF
 - 63% 0-5 years, 37% 6+ years
- # Years working in Corrections
 - 57% 0-5 years, 43% 6+ years

The Correctional Staff Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to staff working in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in March 2024. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 120 eligible correctional staff, 84 completed the survey (70% response rate). The demographic data presented here are self-reported.

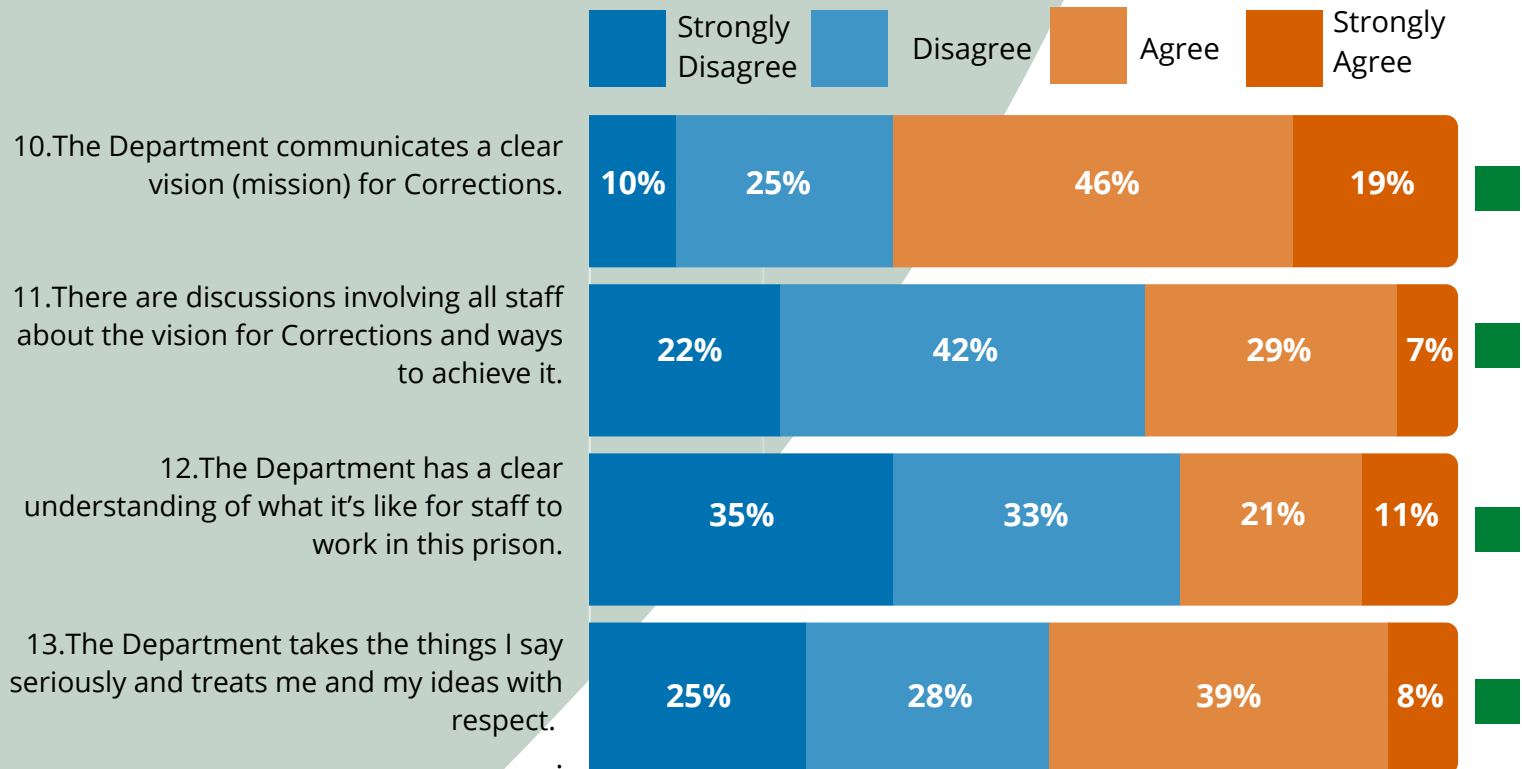


JOB SATISFACTION



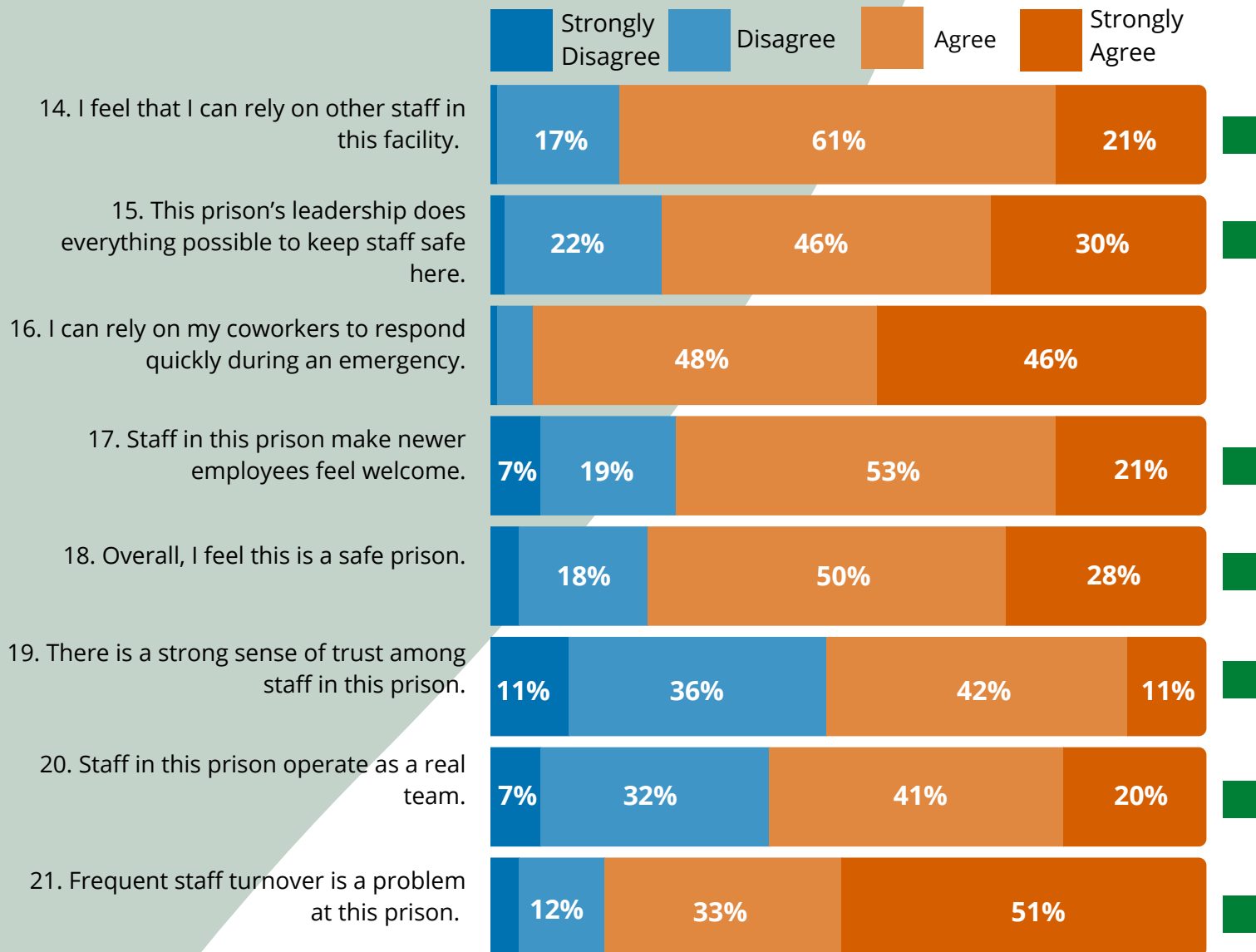


THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS ("CENTRAL OFFICE")



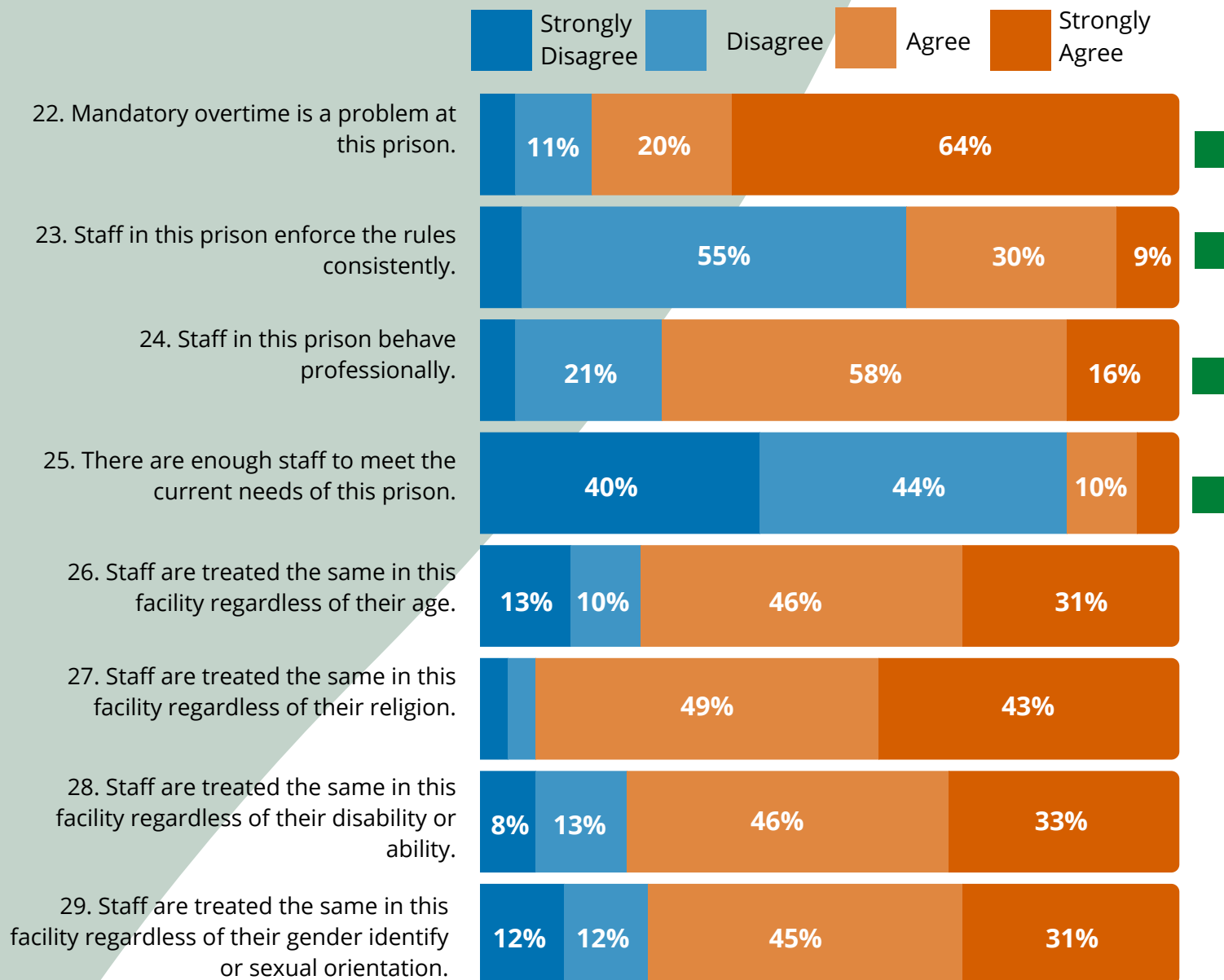


WORKPLACE CULTURE (1/4)



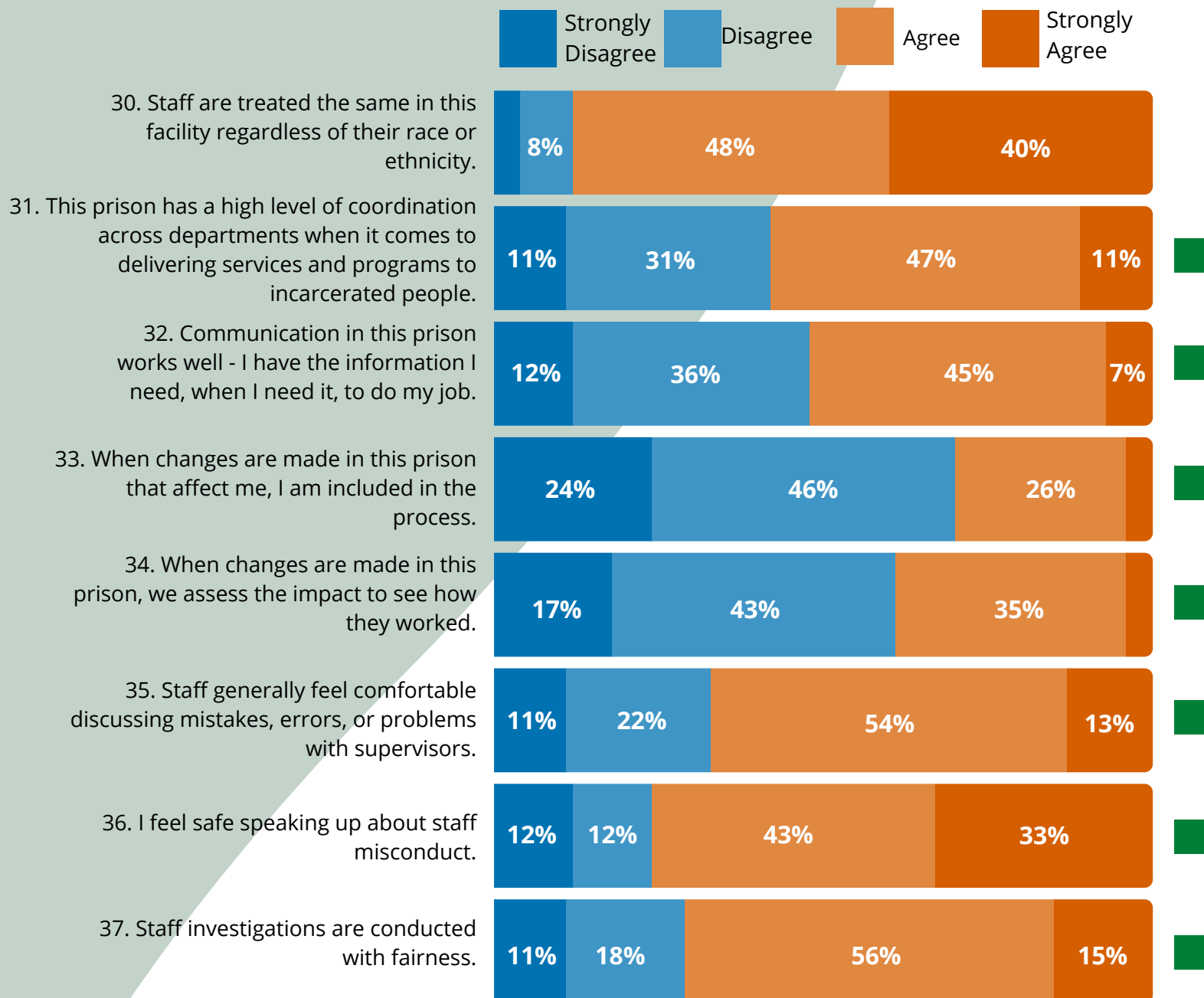


WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (2/4)



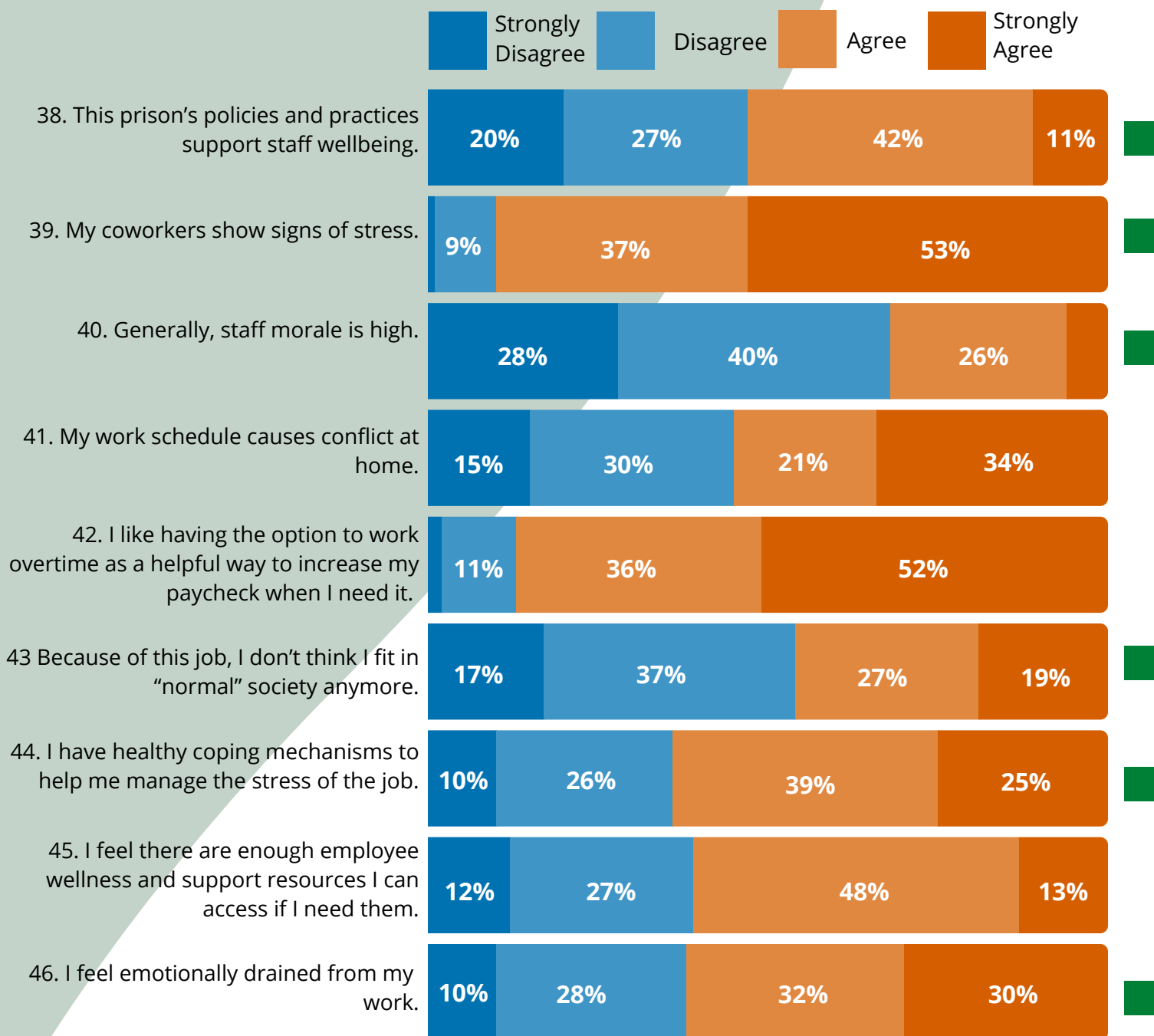


WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (3/4)






WORKPLACE CULTURE, Continued (4/4)

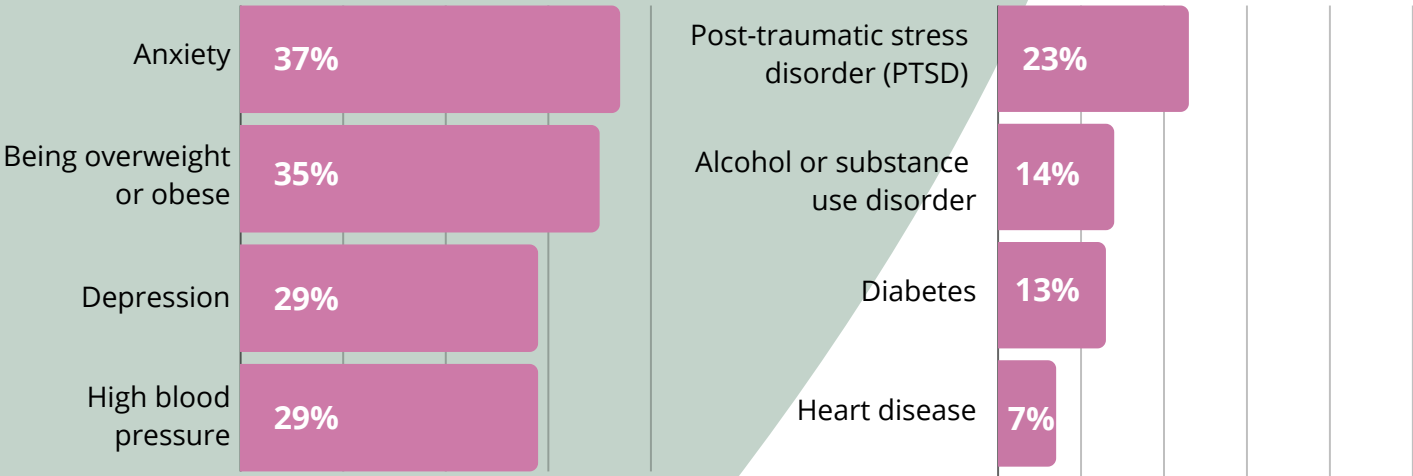




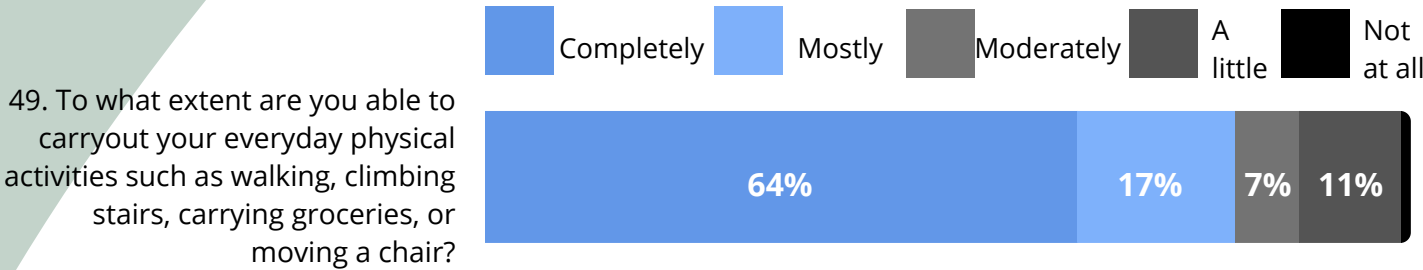
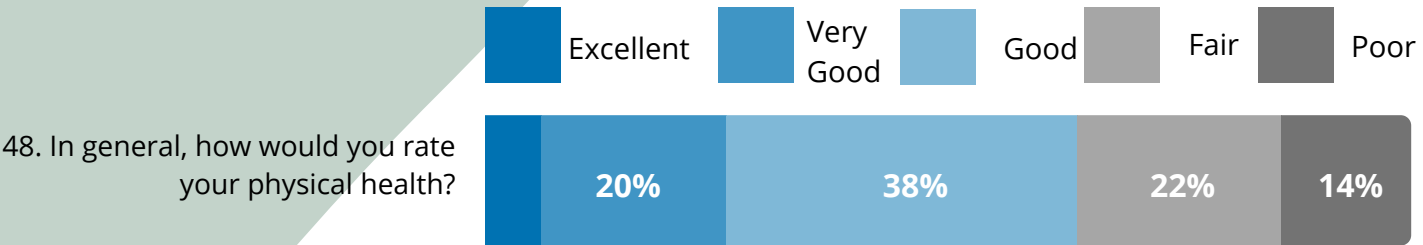
STAFF HEALTH

47. Since starting work in corrections, I have developed the following health conditions (check all that apply):

 % Yes



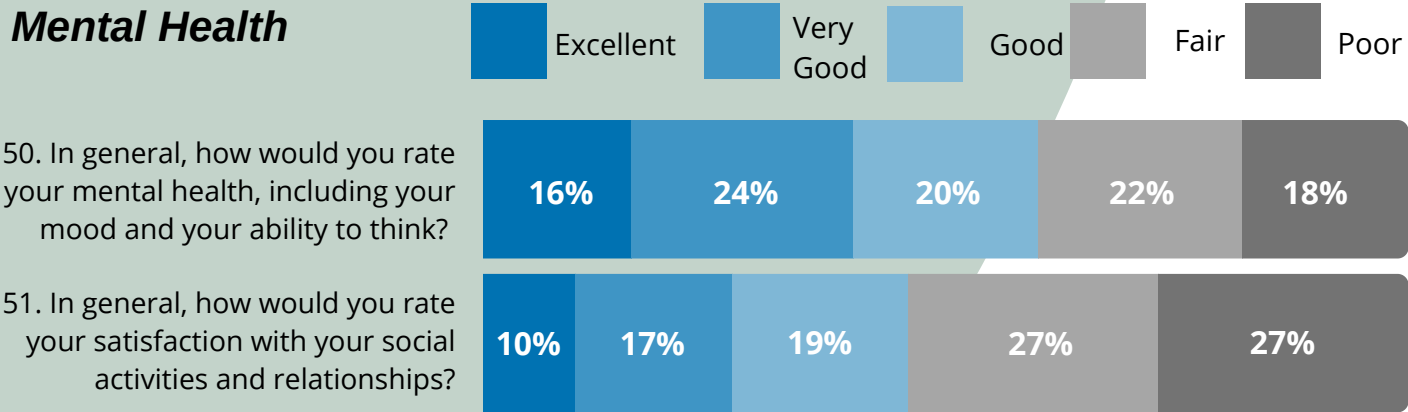
Physical Health



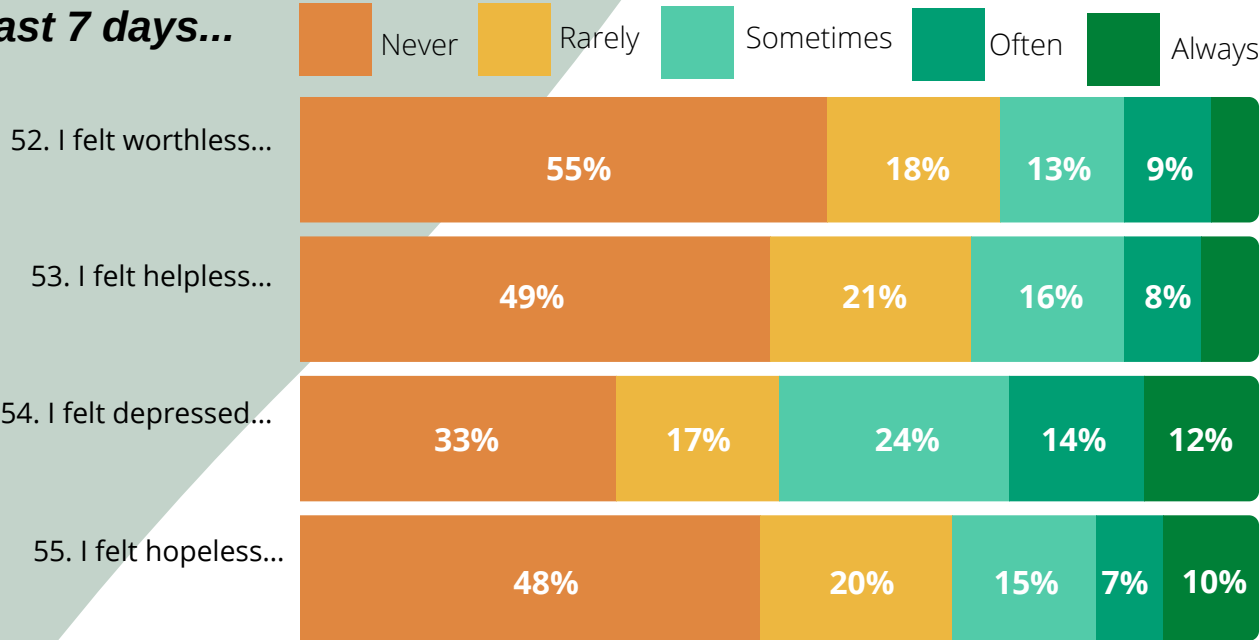


STAFF HEALTH, Continued

Mental Health



In the past 7 days...



Suicidal Thoughts

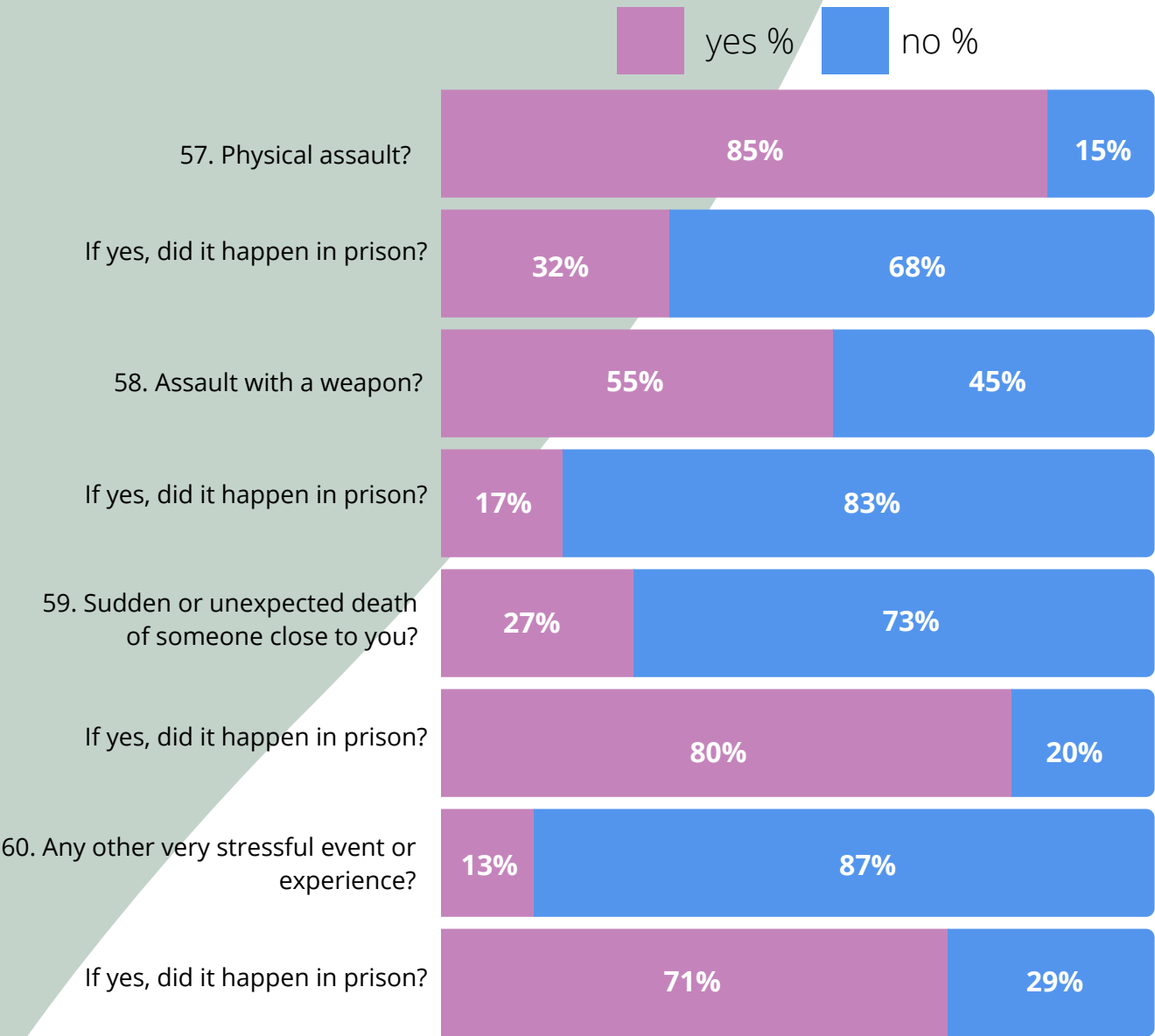
56. At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?





TRAUMA

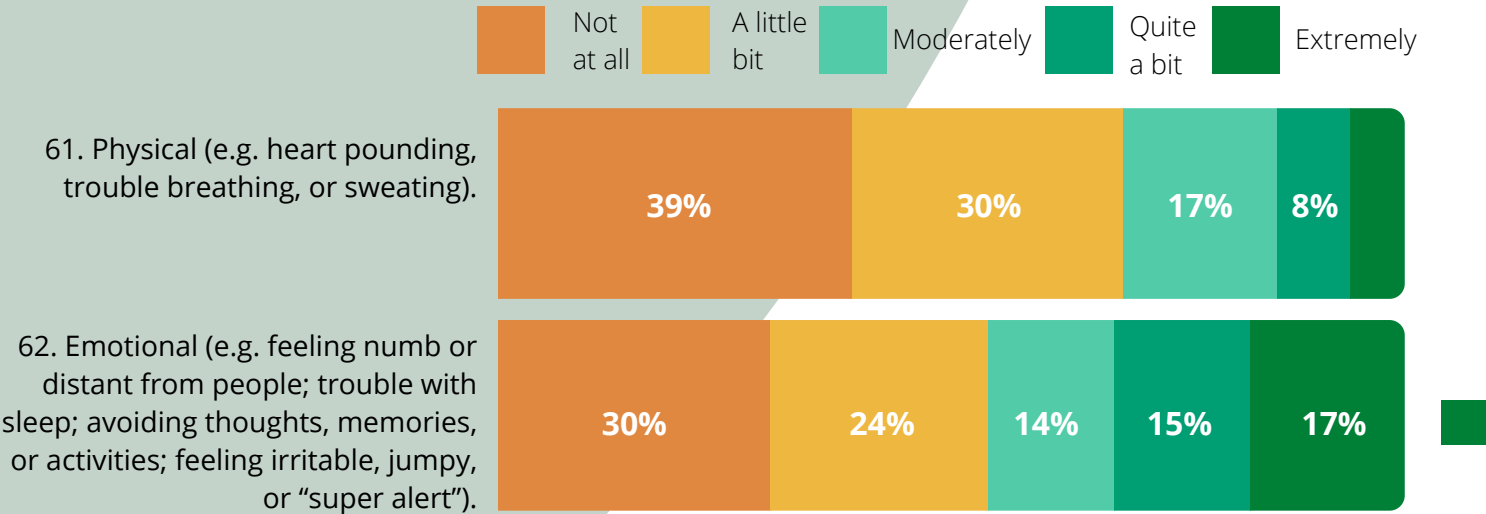
*Consider your entire life, have you experienced?
(happened to you or witnessed it)*





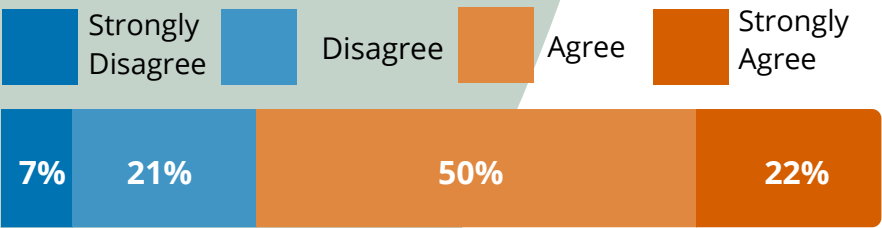
TRAUMA, Continued

In the past month, how much have you been bothered by physical or emotional reactions when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?

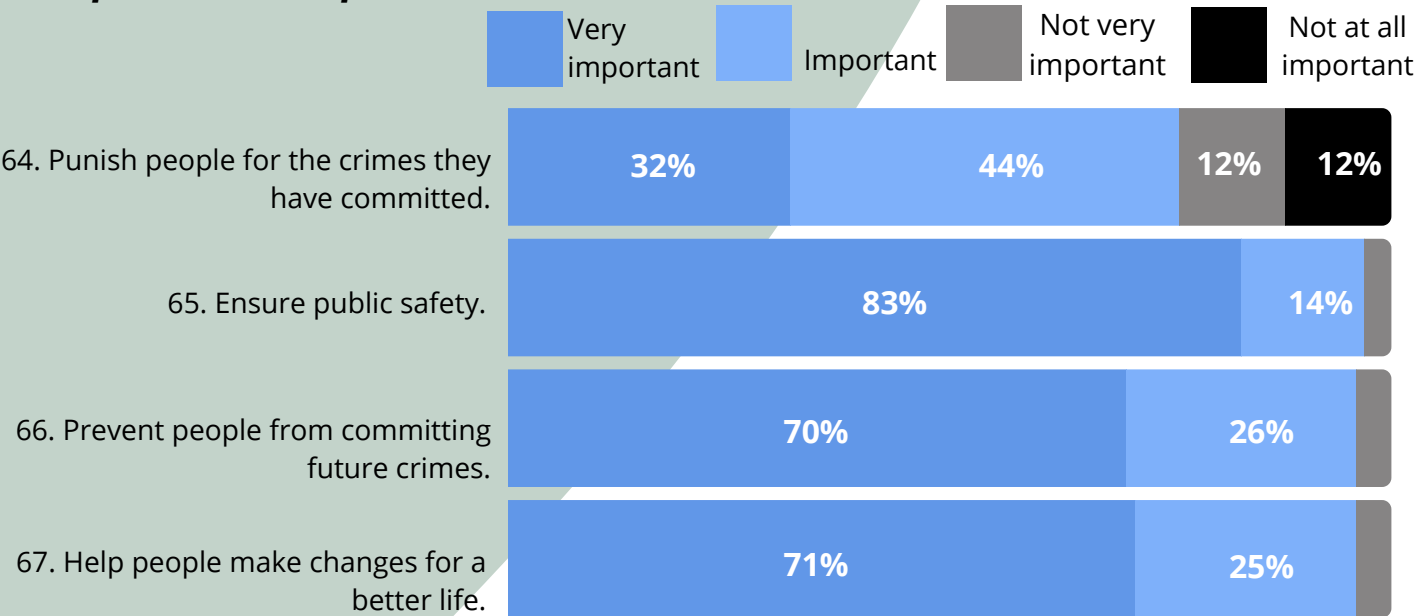




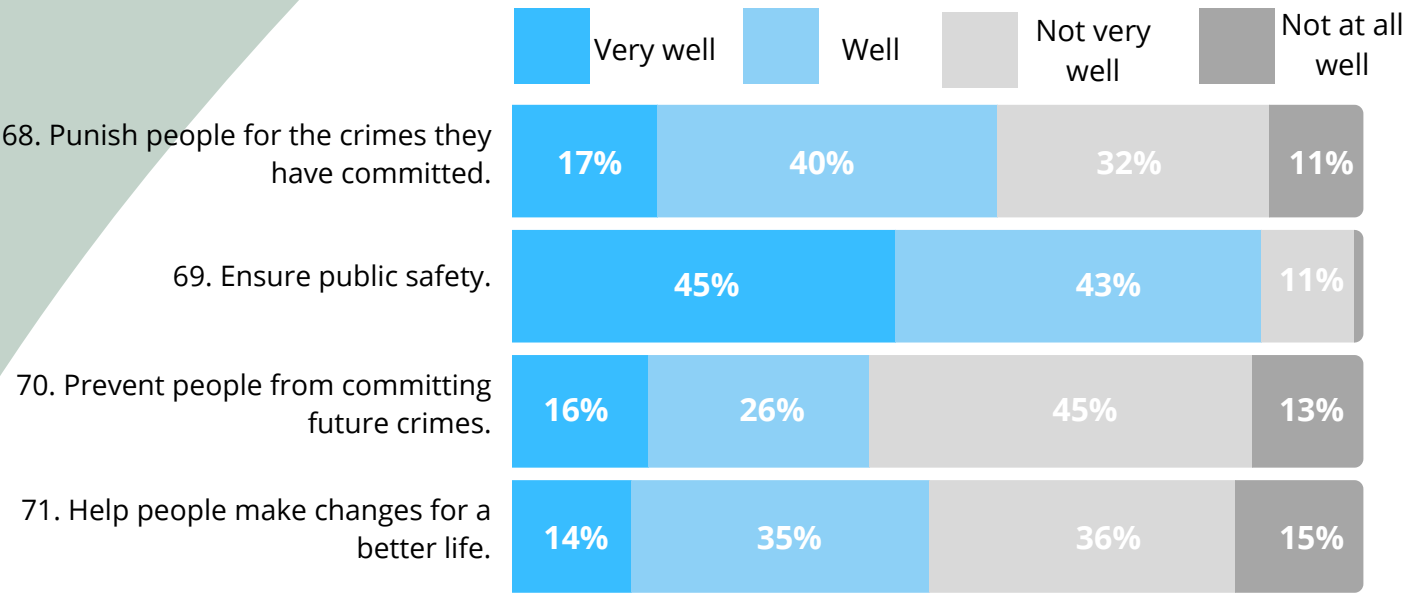
PURPOSE OF PRISON



It is important that prisons...




How well does this prison do these things?

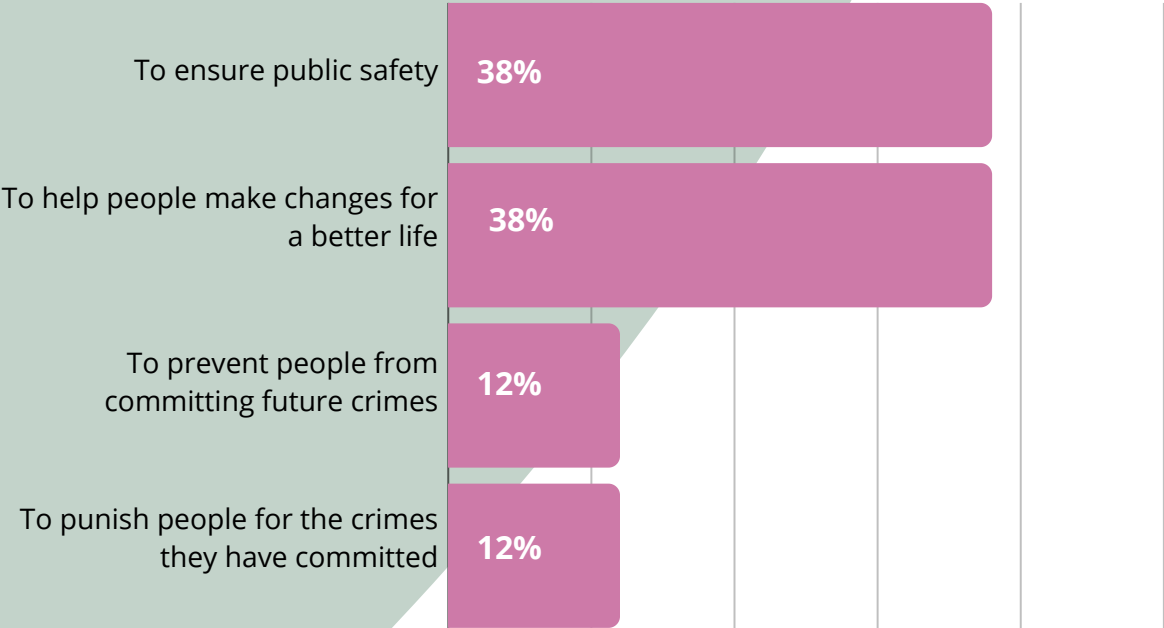




PURPOSE OF PRISON, Continued

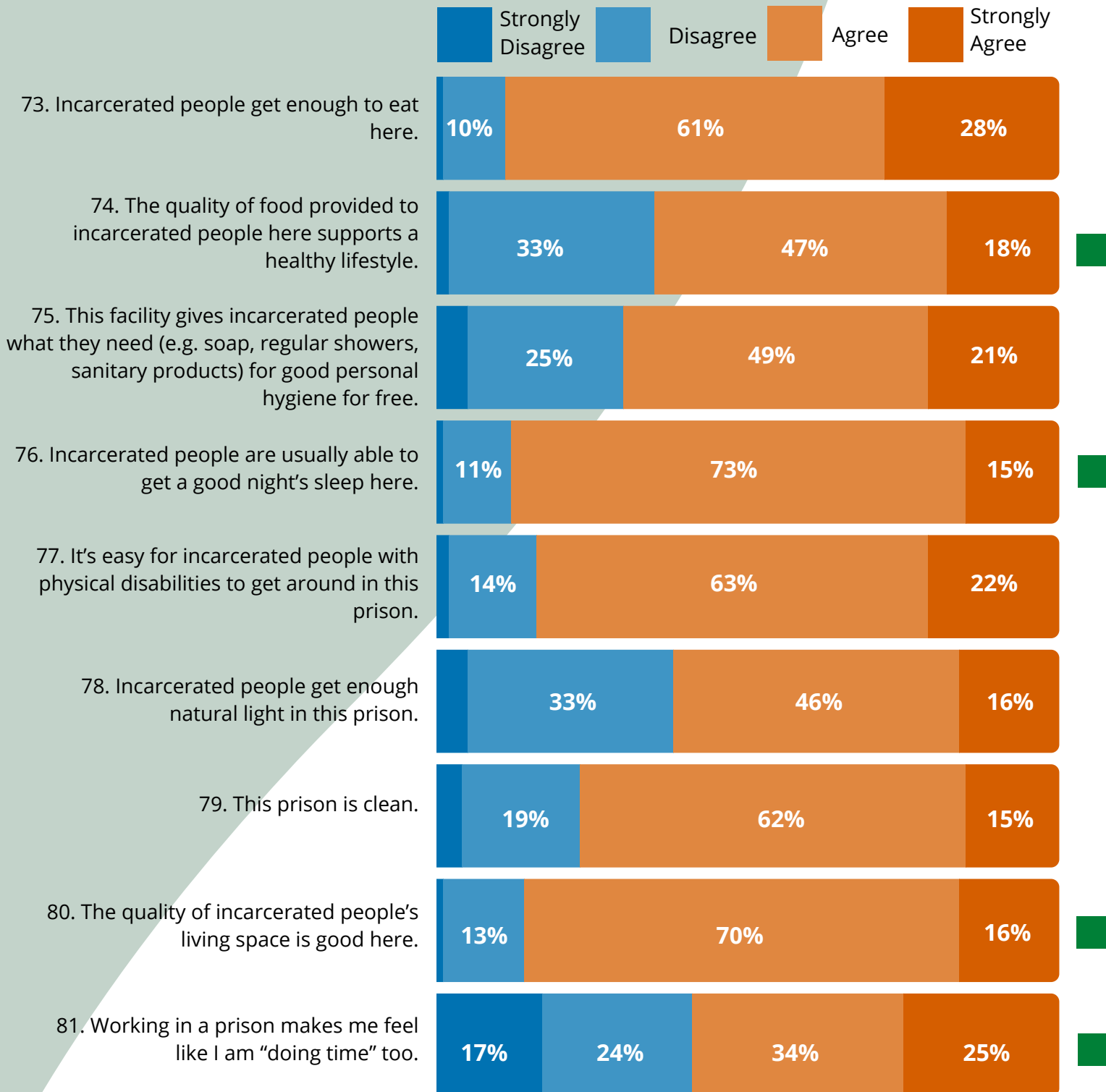
72. Which of these things should be the most important purpose of prison? (choose one)

 % Yes



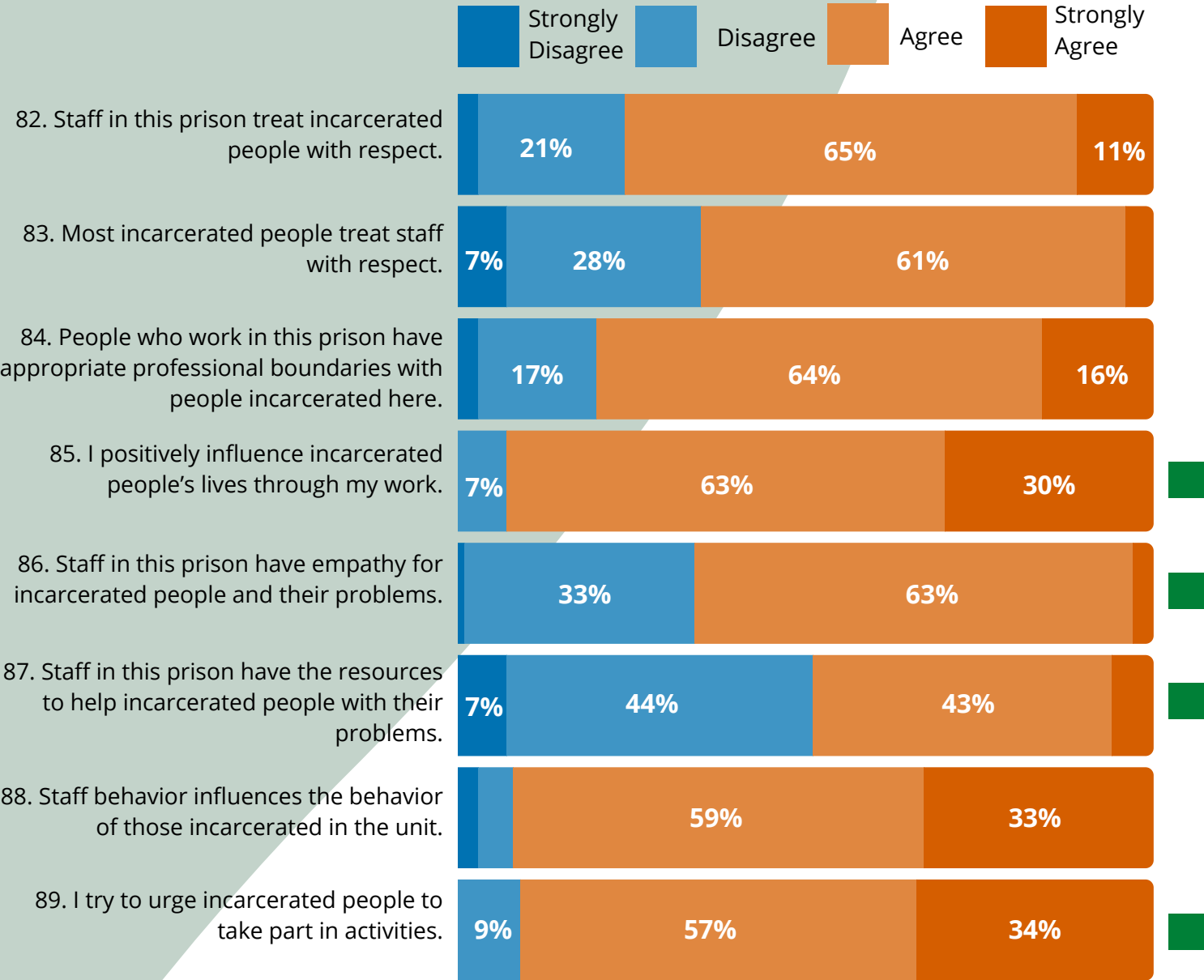


PRISON CONDITIONS





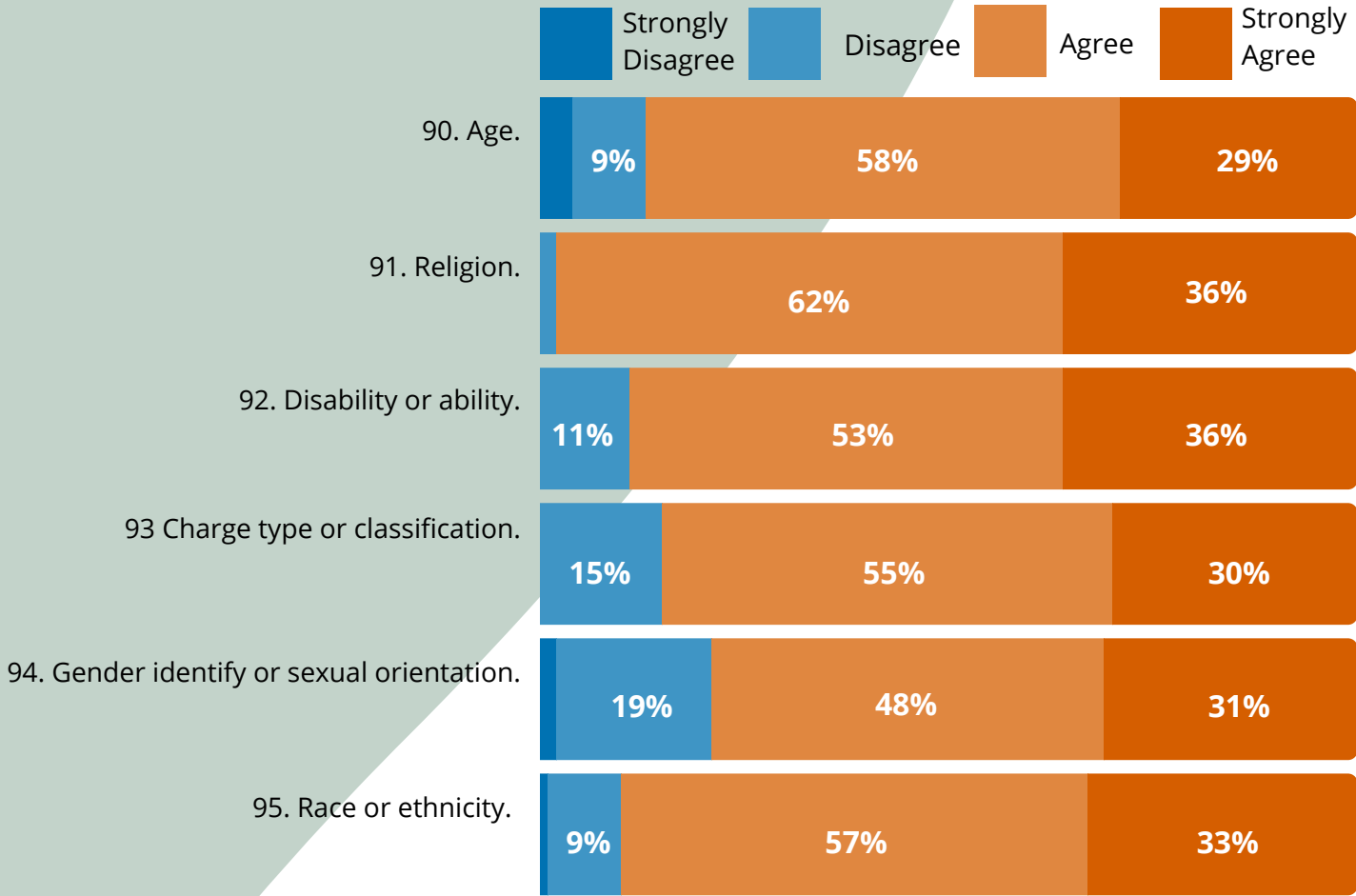
STAFF-INCARCERATED
INTERACTIONS





STAFF-INCARCERATED INTERACTIONS, Continued

Staff in this prison treat incarcerated people the same regardless of the incarcerated persons'...





CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES AND SANCTIONS

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

96. This prison has adequate alternatives to segregation.



97. Staff in this prison are more likely to use segregation over other disciplinary options.



98. Incarcerated peoples' discipline procedures are applied fairly and consistently.



99. Incarcerated peoples' discipline procedures are effective at holding them accountable.



100. There are options for staff to reward incarcerated people for good behavior.



101. This prison provides enough opportunities so incarcerated people can stay busy all day.



102. People incarcerated in this prison can participate in activities that promote their health and wellbeing.



103. When incarcerated people do not have enough to do they are more likely to engage in negative behavior.



104. This prison does a good job preparing people for release.



105. The programs in this prison give incarcerated people the skills they need to be successful in the community.

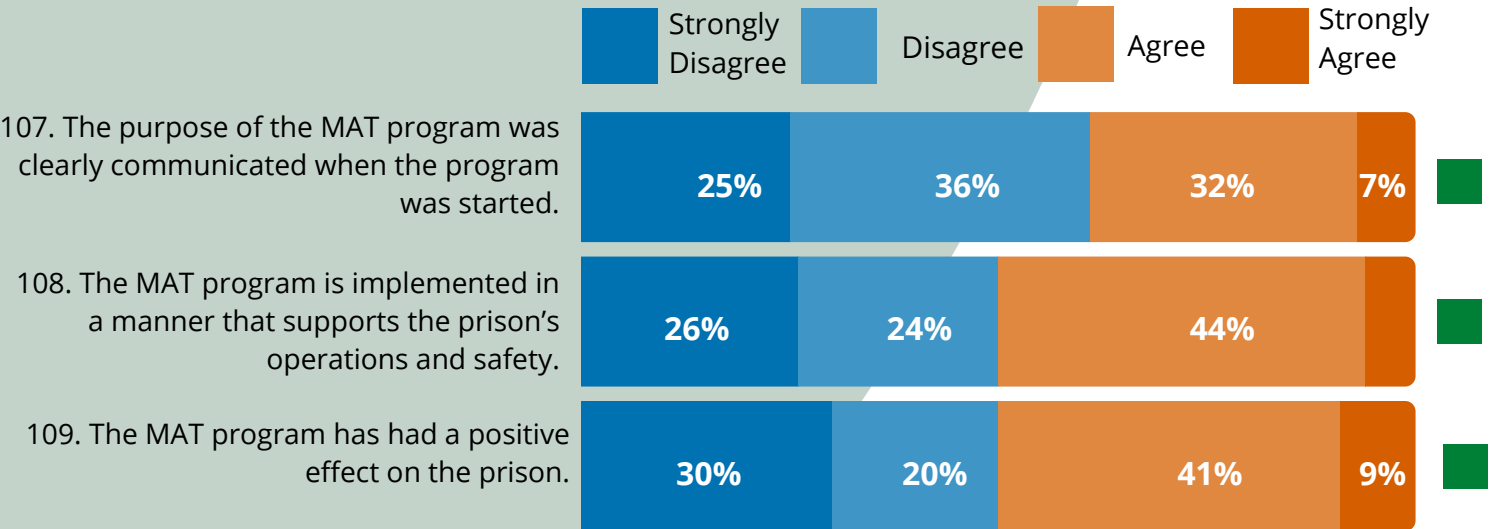


106. Caseloads are manageable to adequately support incarcerated people as they get ready for release.





MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT (MAT) PROGRAM





2024: SURVEY RESPONDENTS - INCARCERATED PERSONS



83%

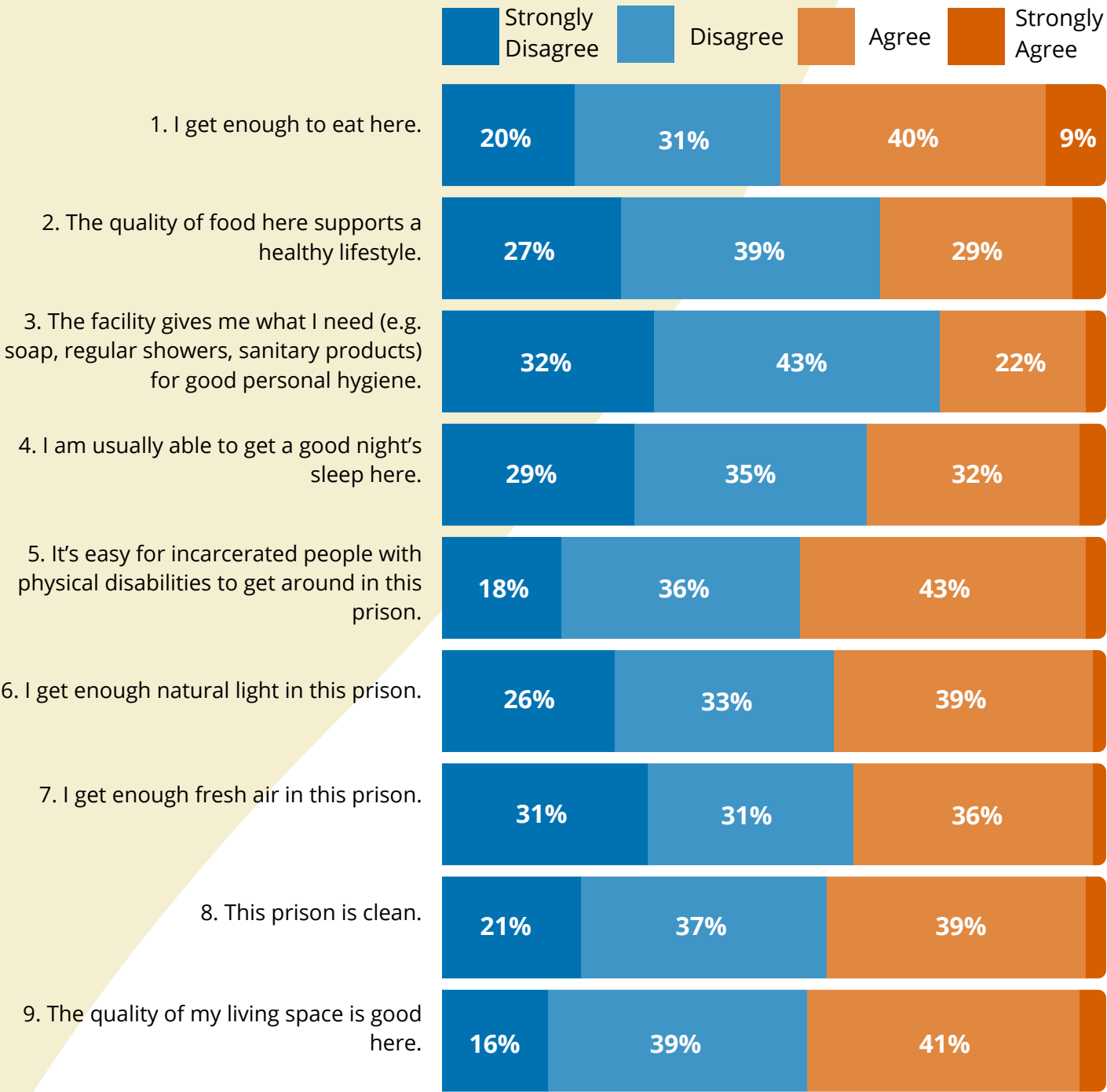
of incarcerated
persons
completed the
survey.

- Age: 42 years (median)
- Race: 72% white
- Ethnicity: 70% white
- Gender identity: 83% male
 - Transgender: 4%
- Status:
 - 32% Detained, awaiting trial
 - 52% Serving sentence
 - 16% Incarcerated for a violation of conditions
- # Years incarcerated at SSCF
 - 82% 0-5 years, 18% 6+ years

The Incarcerated Persons Vermont Prison Climate Survey was administered to people incarcerated in Vermont's Southern State Correctional Facility in June 2022. Surveys were paper-based, confidential, and anonymous. Of 255 eligible incarcerated people, 212 completed the survey (83% response rate). The demographic data presented here are self-reported.

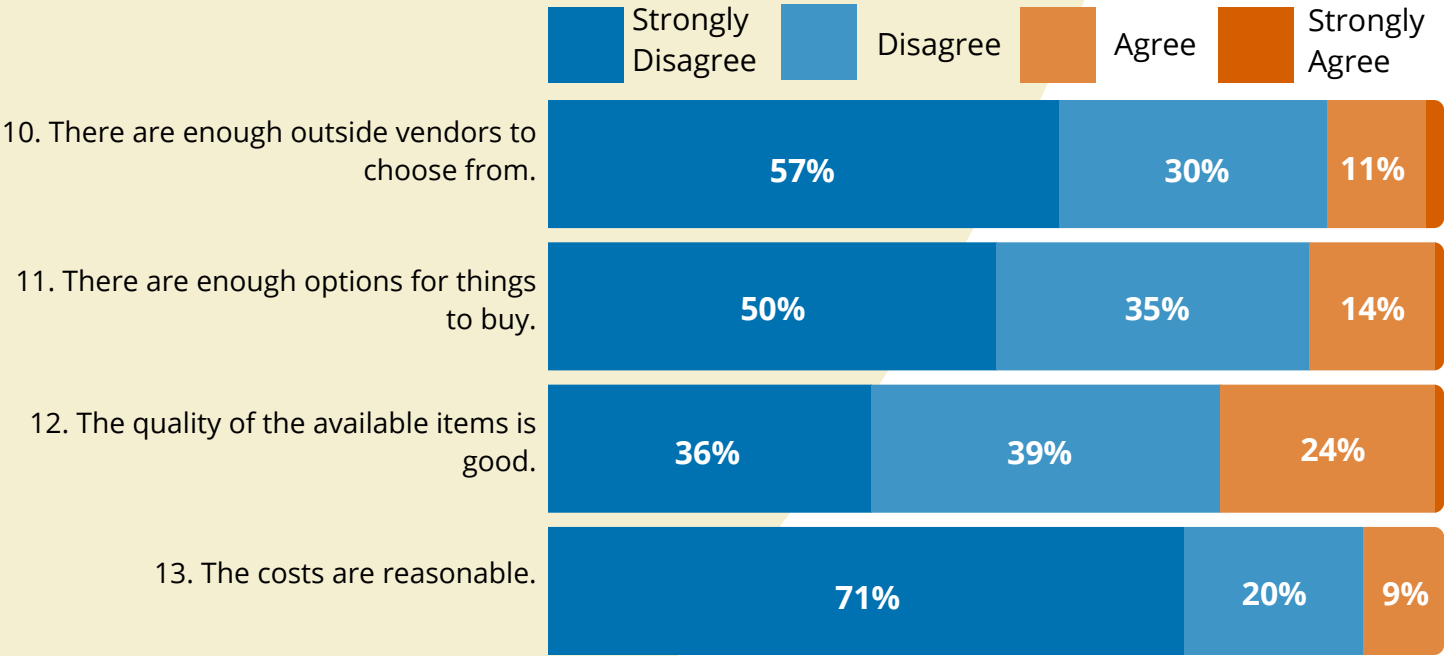


PRISON CONDITIONS & ENVIRONMENT





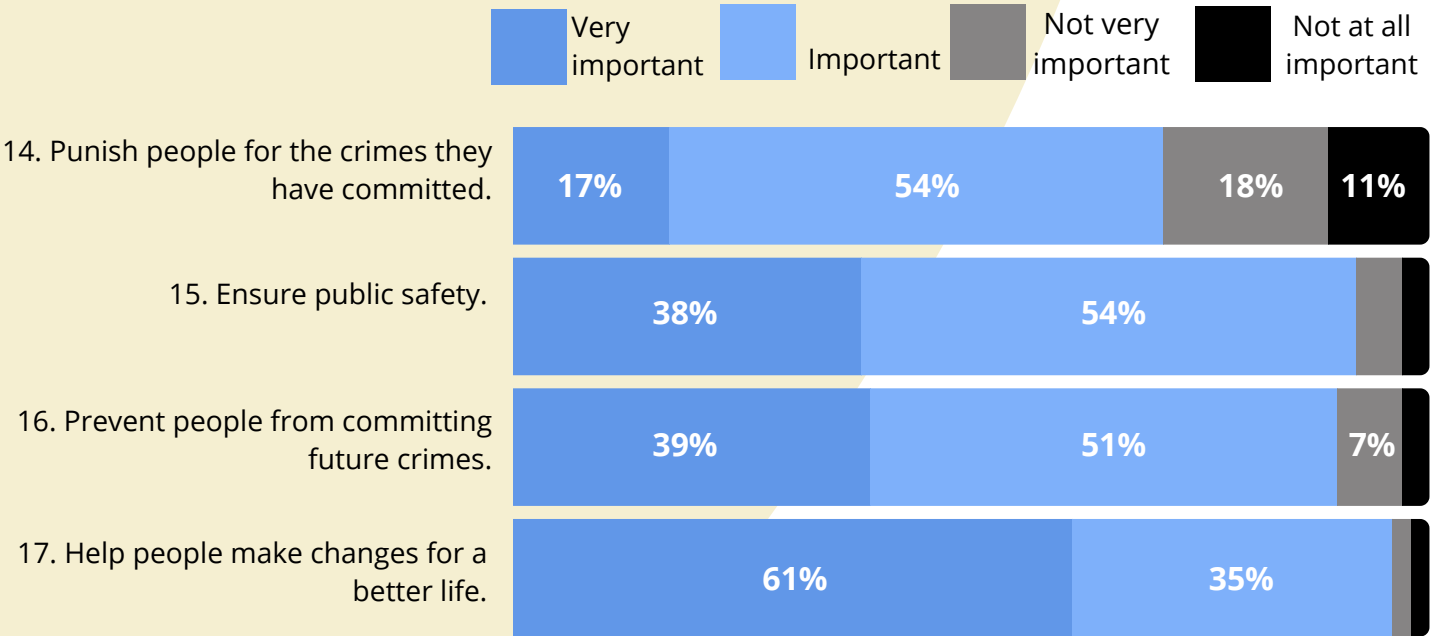
COMMISSARY



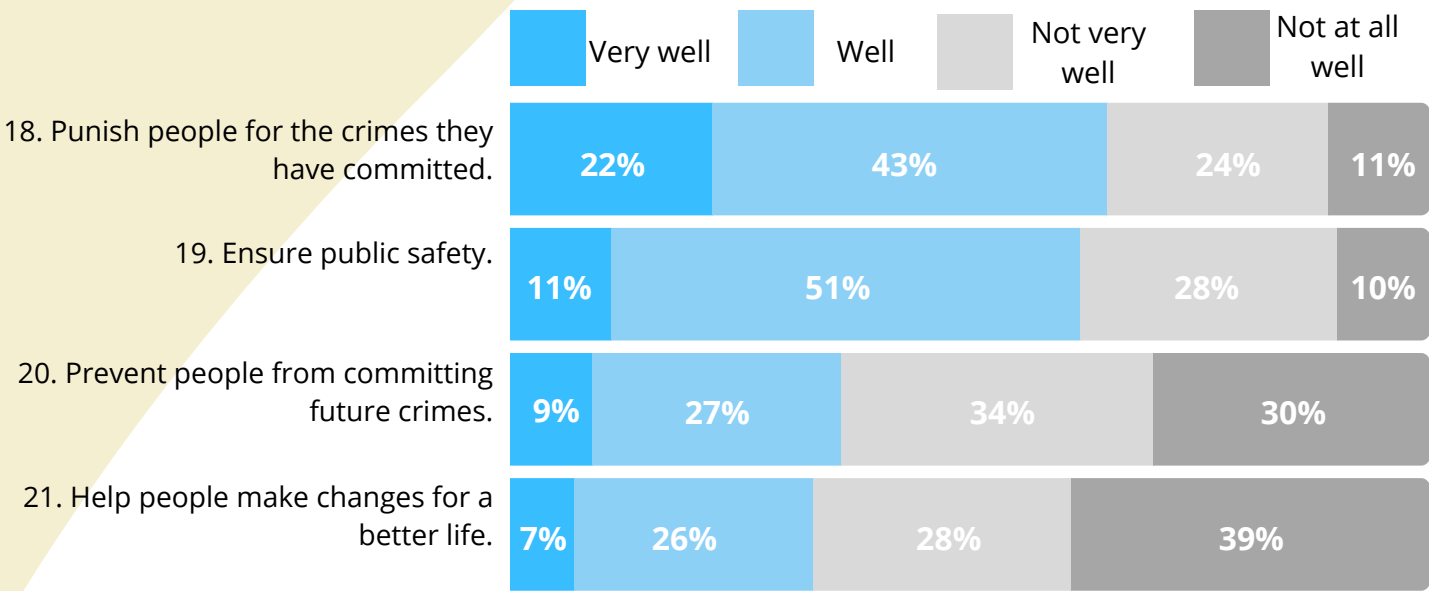


PURPOSE OF PRISON

It is important that prisons...




How well does this prison do these things?

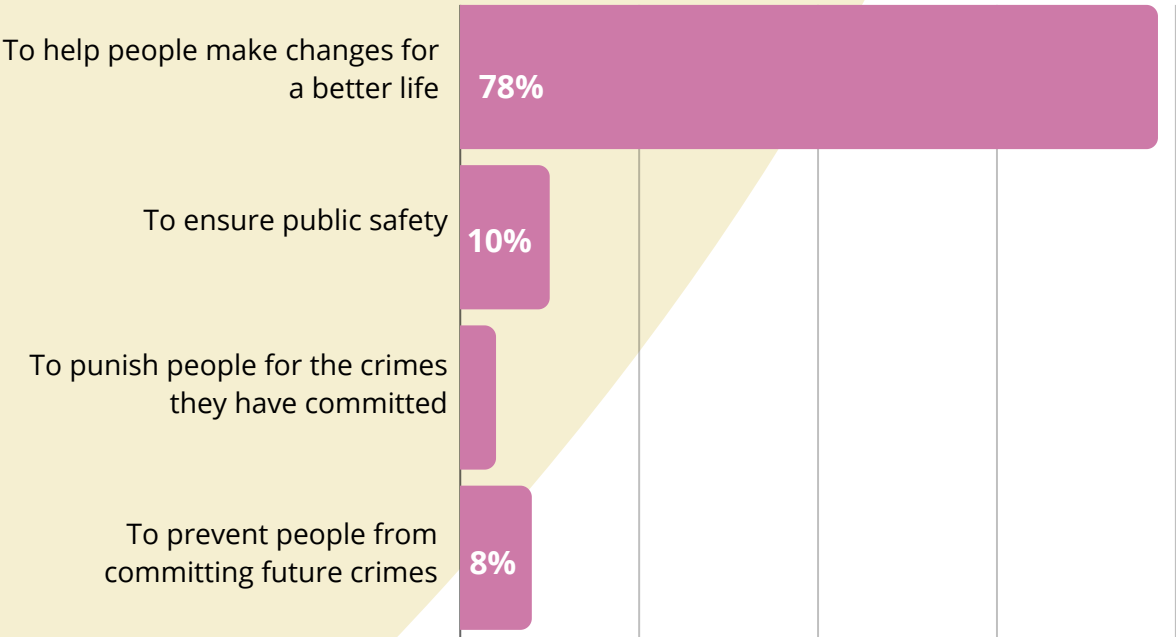




PURPOSE OF PRISON, CONTINUED

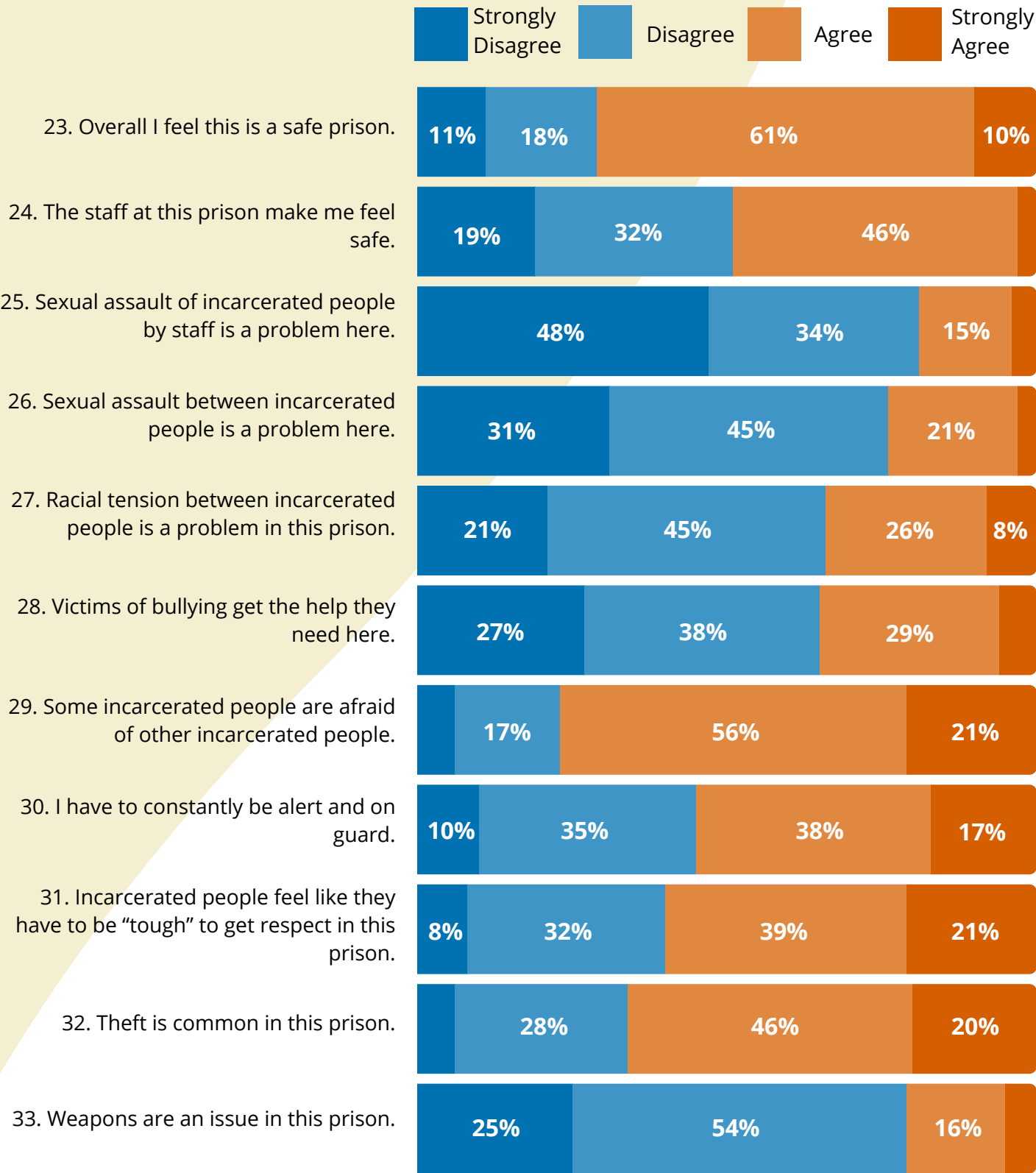
22. Which of these things should be the most important purpose of prison? (choose one)

 % Yes



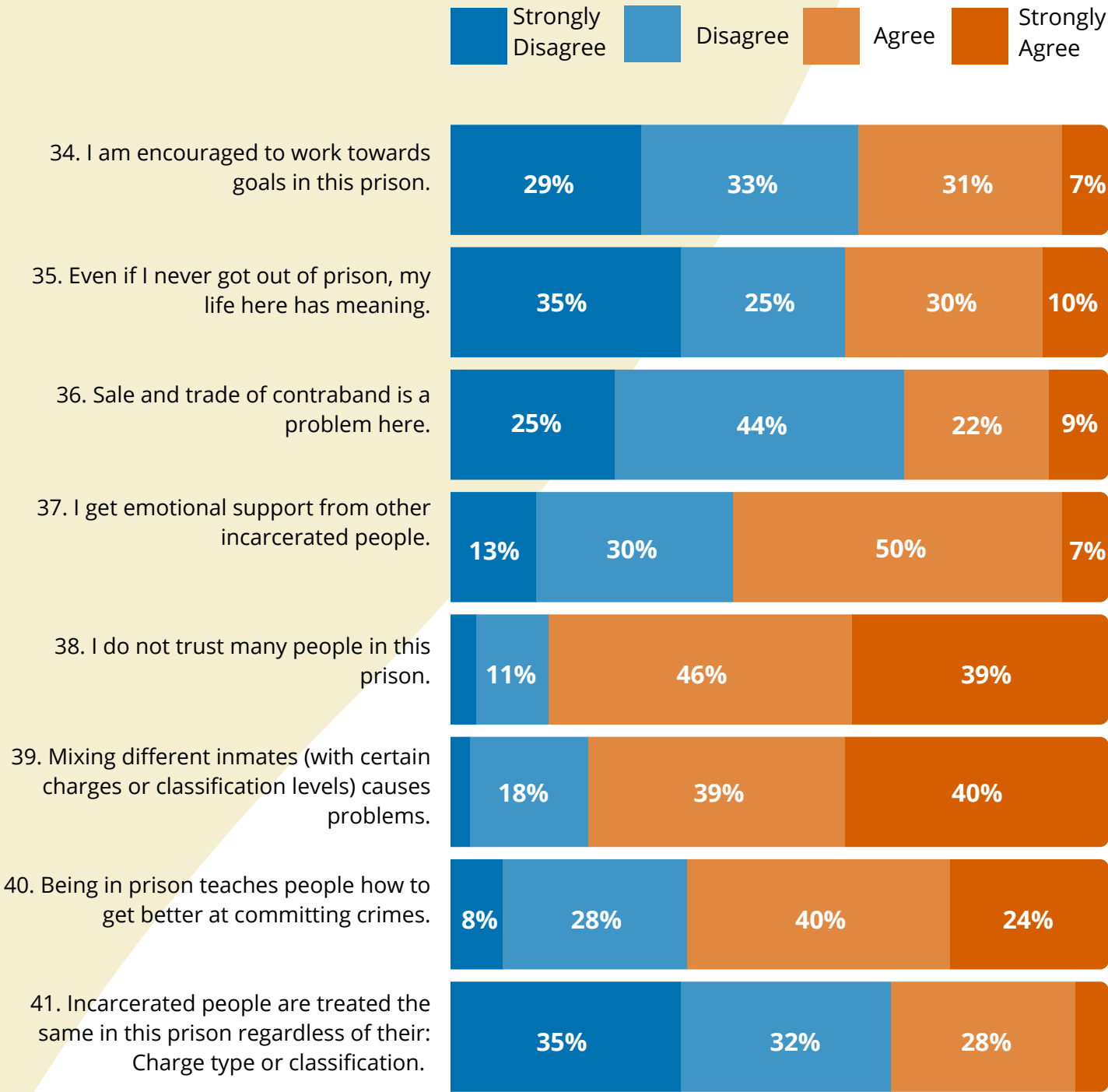


PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL SAFETY



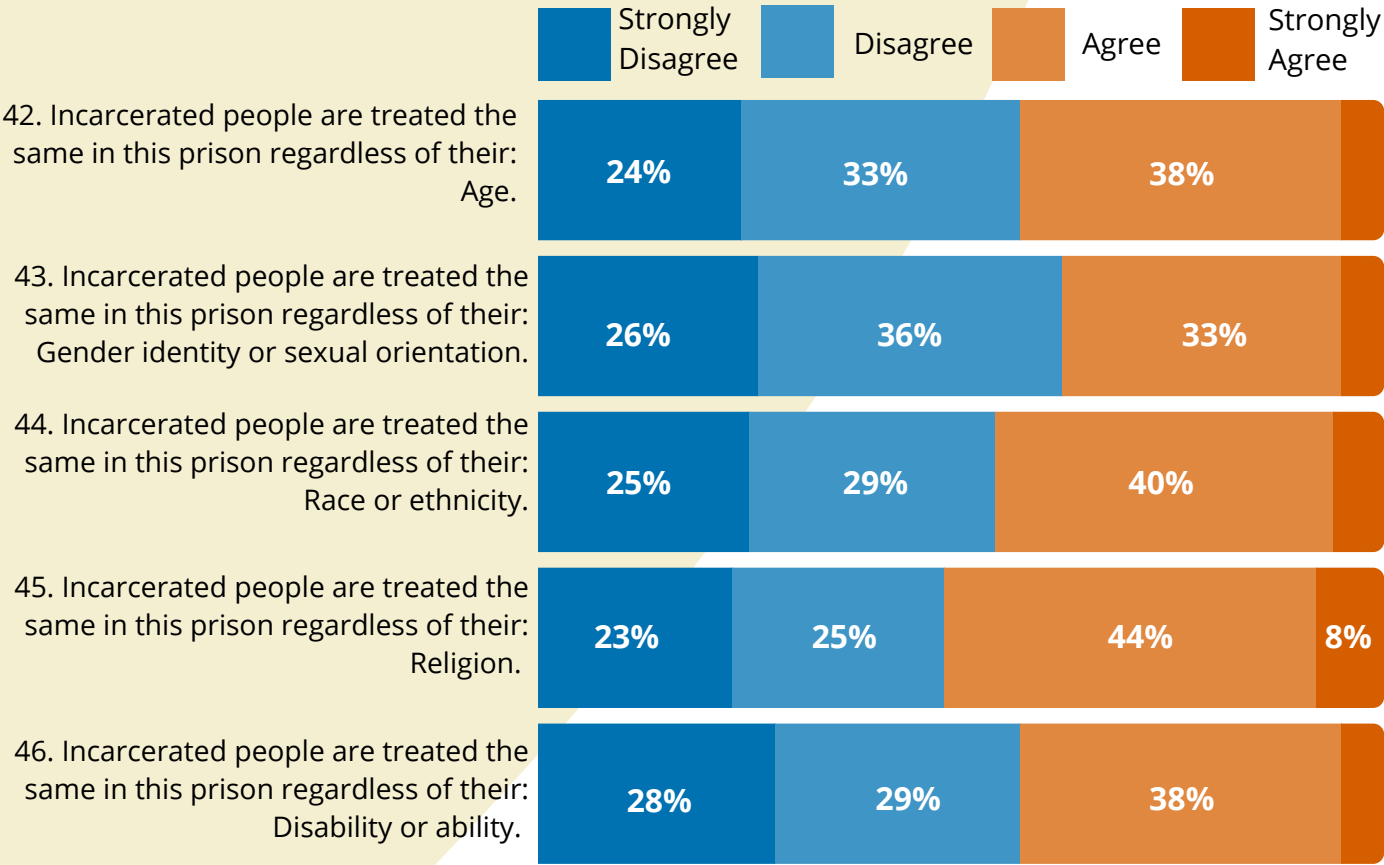


PRISON CULTURE



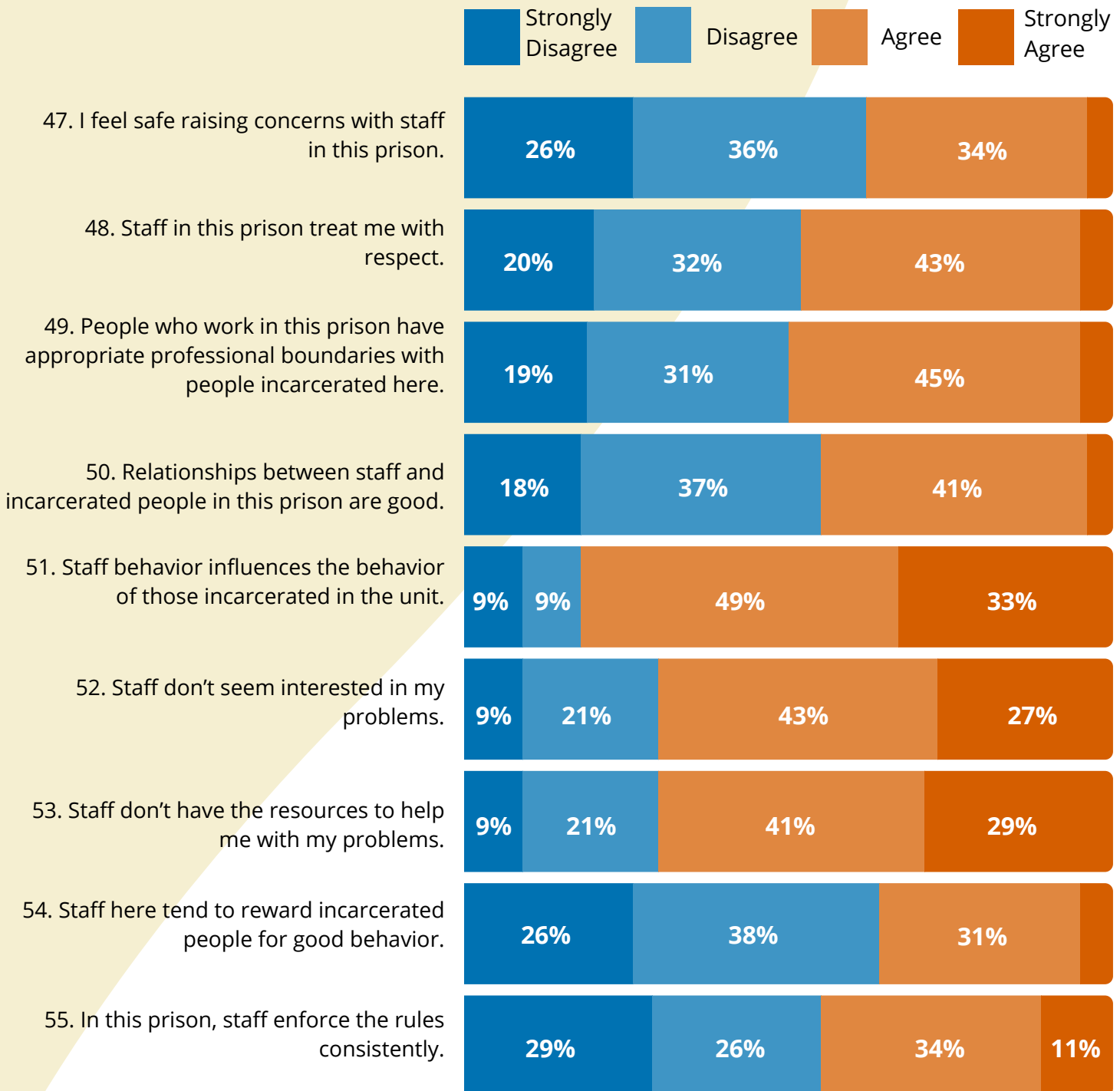


PRISON CULTURE, CONTINUED



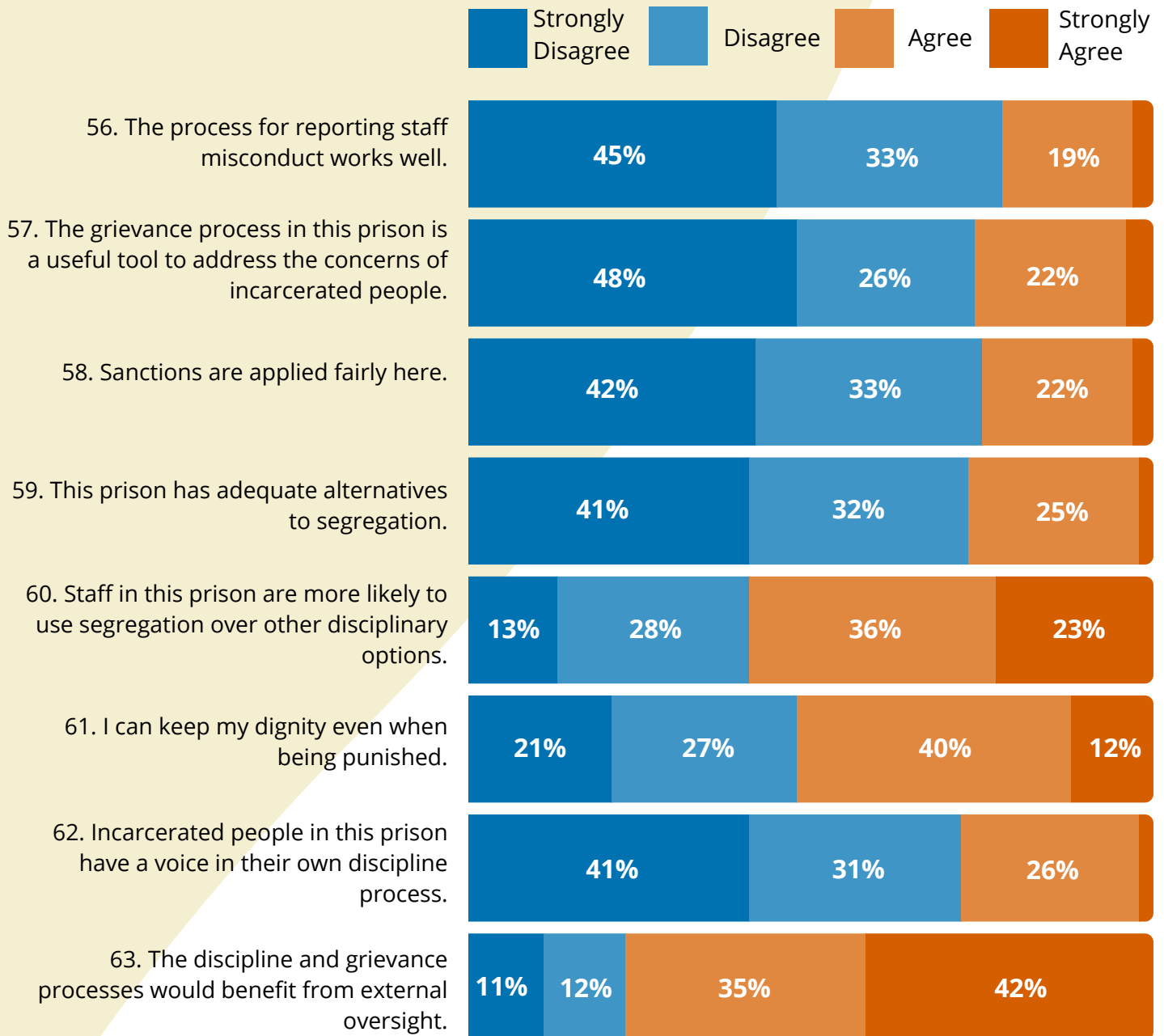


CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND PRACTICES



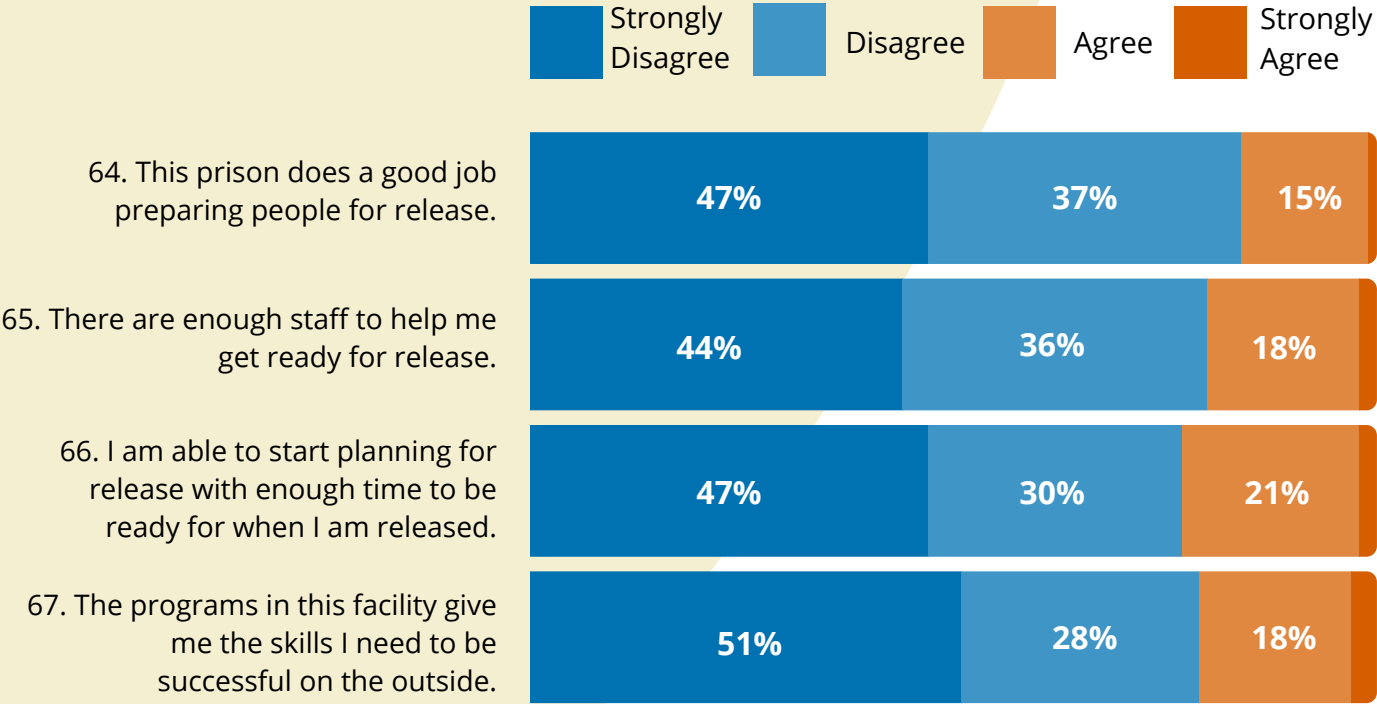


DISCIPLINE AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES



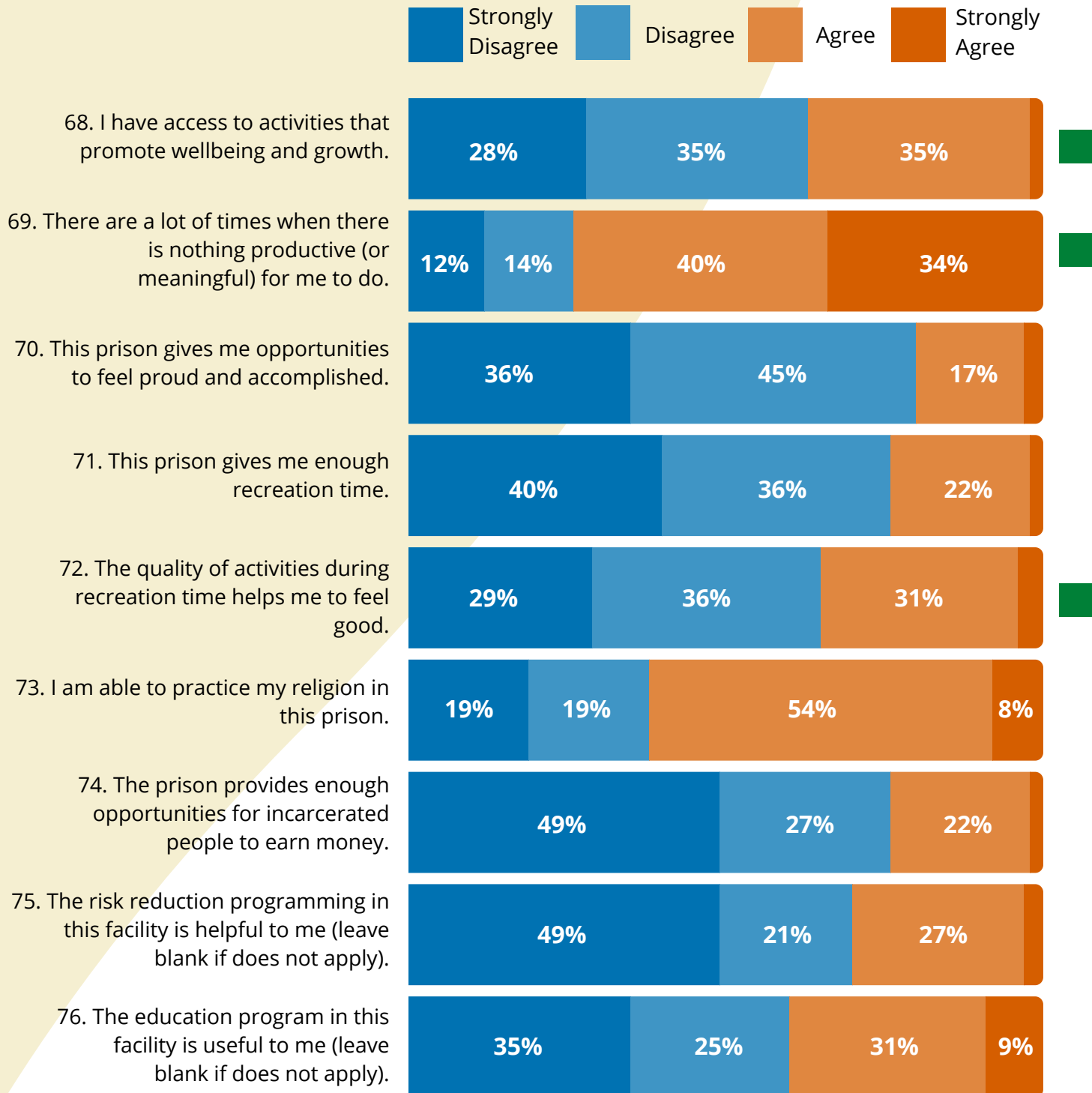


PLANNING FOR RELEASE





PRISON ACTIVITIES





PRISON ACTIVITIES, CONTINUED

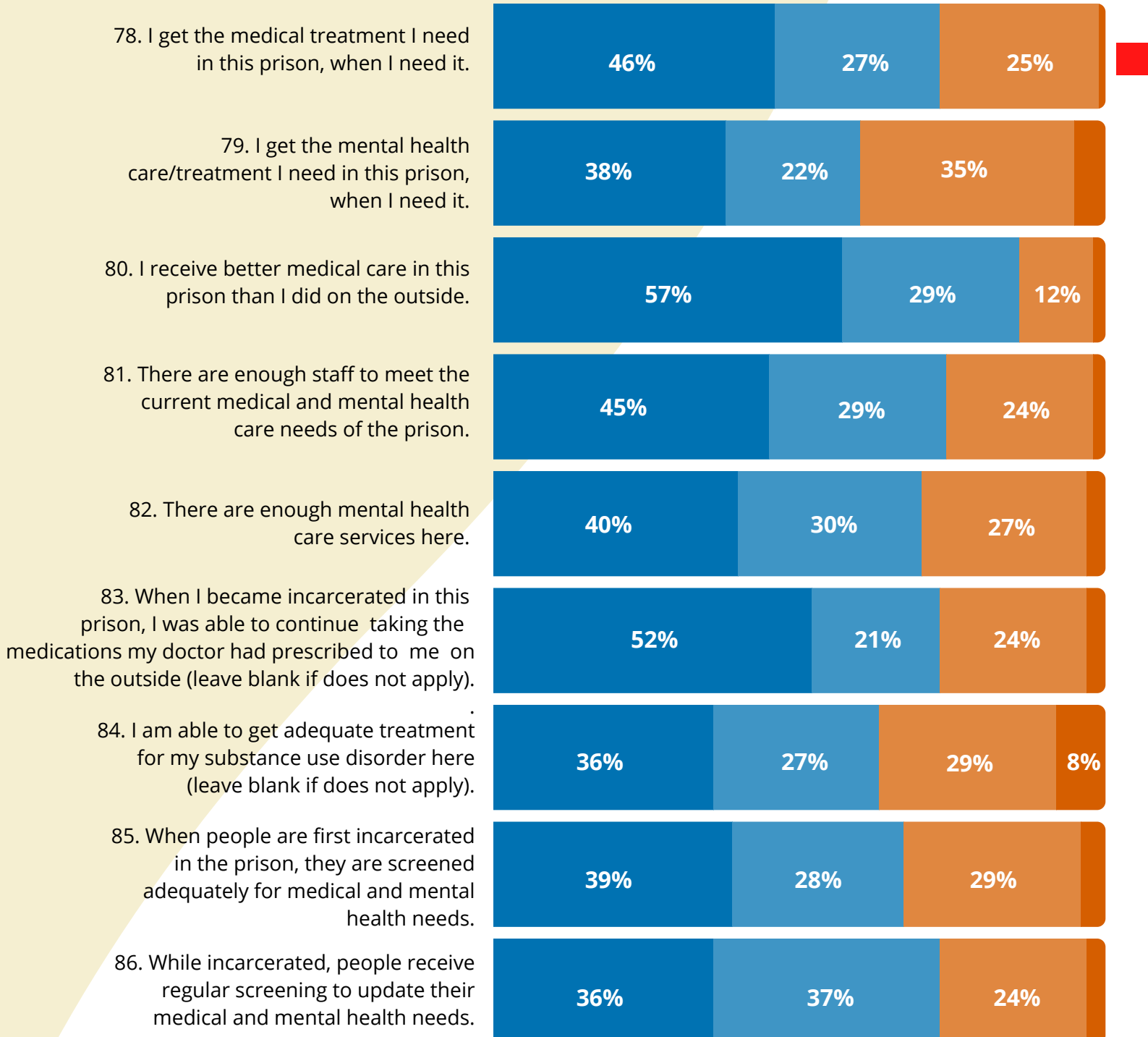
77. *What types of programs would you find most helpful to meet your needs? (choose up to 3)*





MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTHCARE

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree





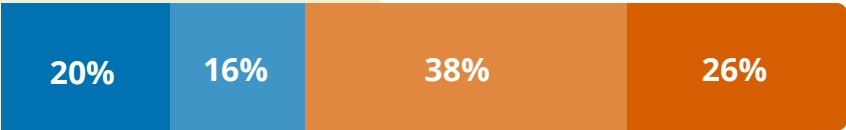
MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT (MAT) PROGRAM



87. The MAT program is implemented in a manner that supports the prison’s operations and safety.



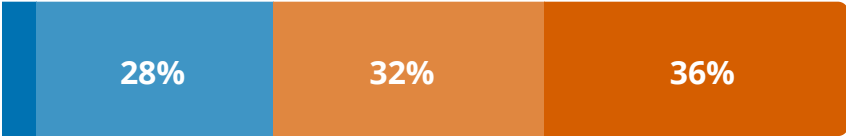
88. The MAT program has had a positive effect on the prison.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING



89. My health has declined since entering prison.



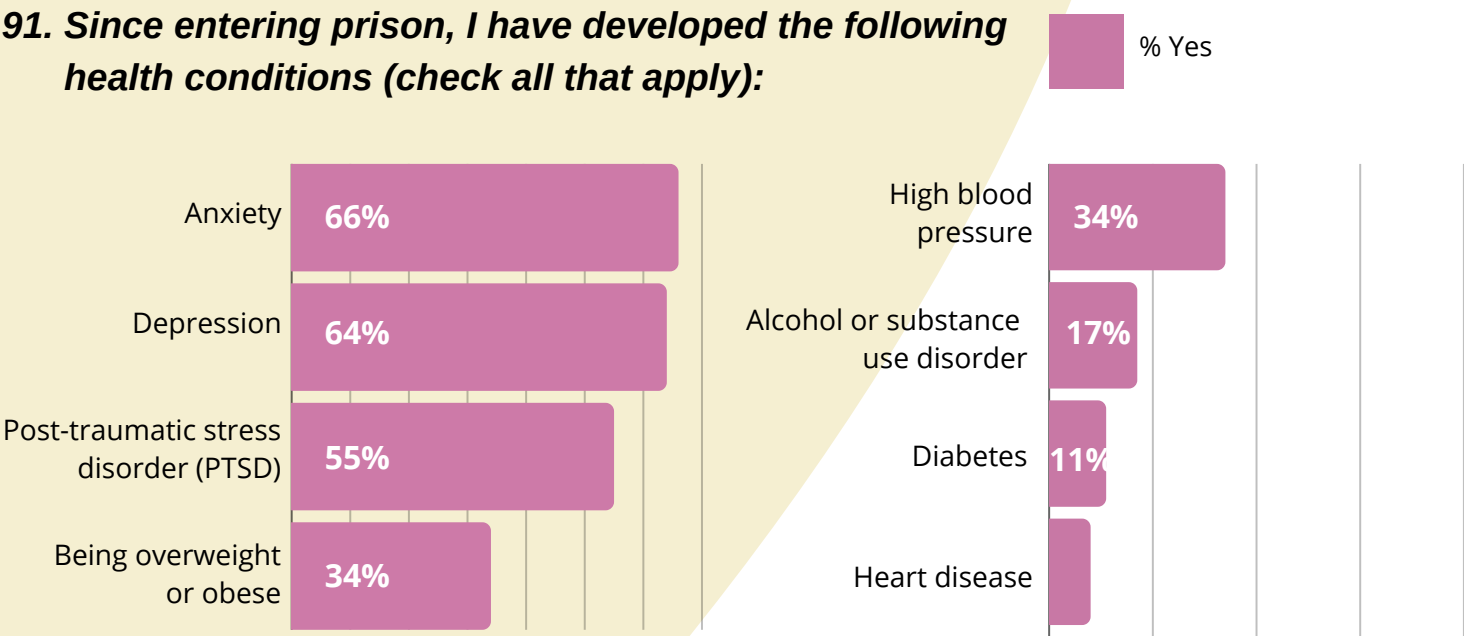
90. Being in prison has been very hard for my mental health.



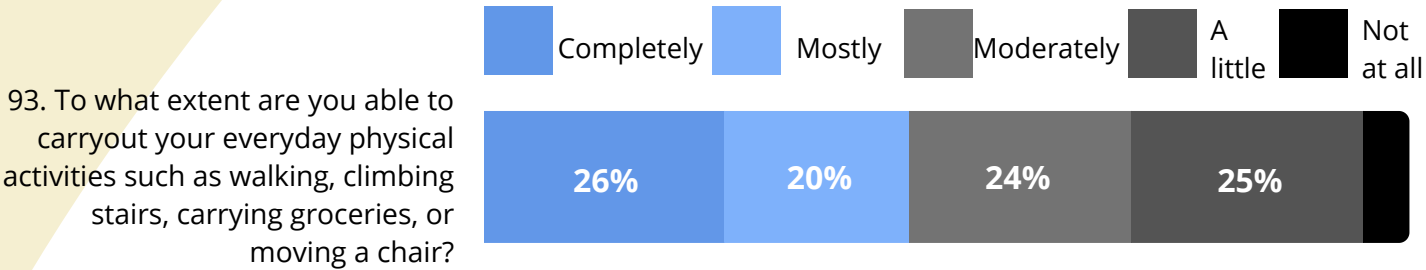
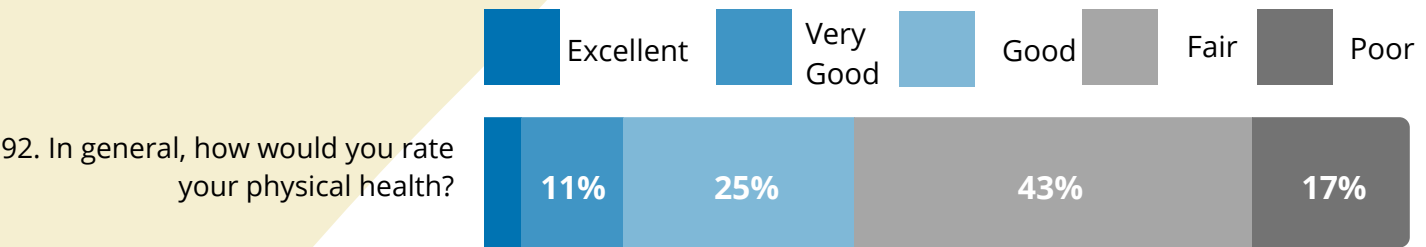


HEALTH AND WELLBEING, CONTINUED

91. Since entering prison, I have developed the following health conditions (check all that apply):



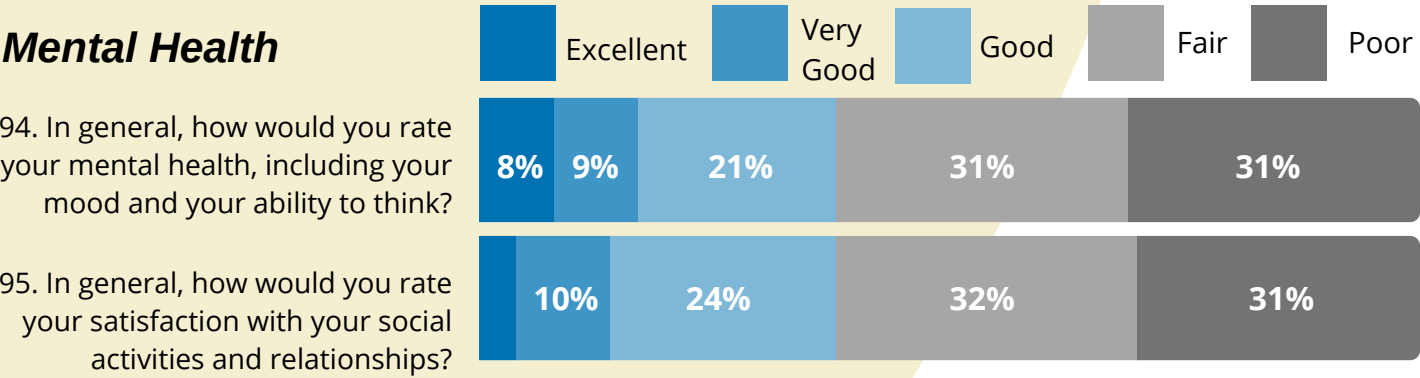
Physical Health



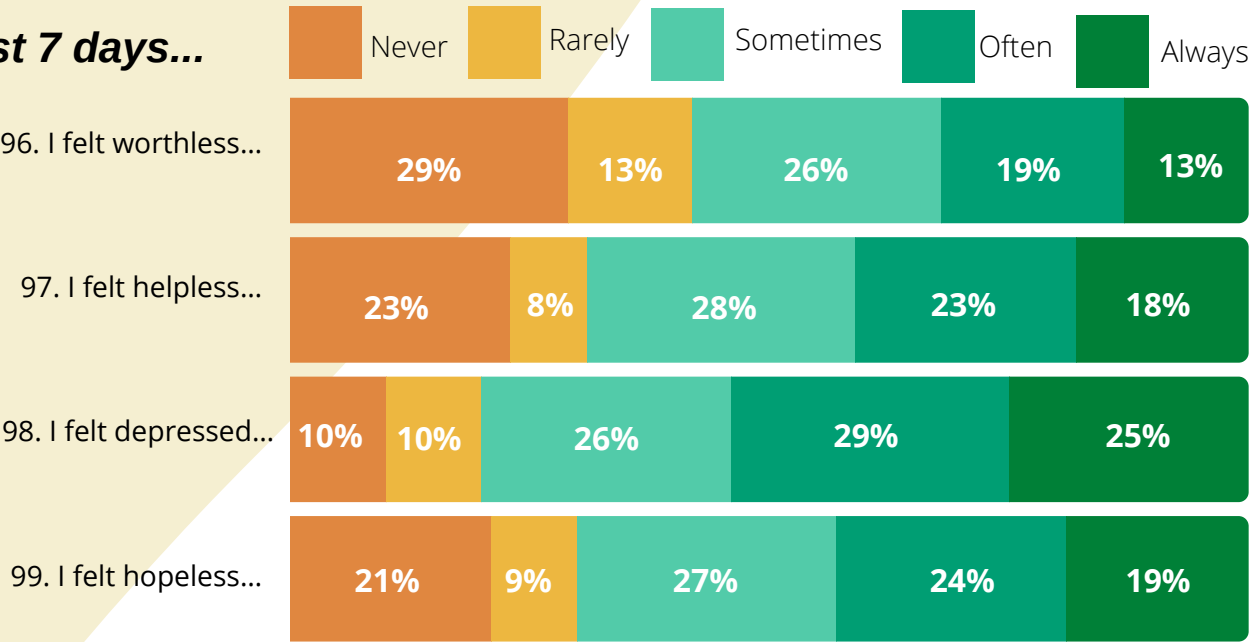


HEALTH AND WELLBEING, CONTINUED

Mental Health



In the past 7 days...



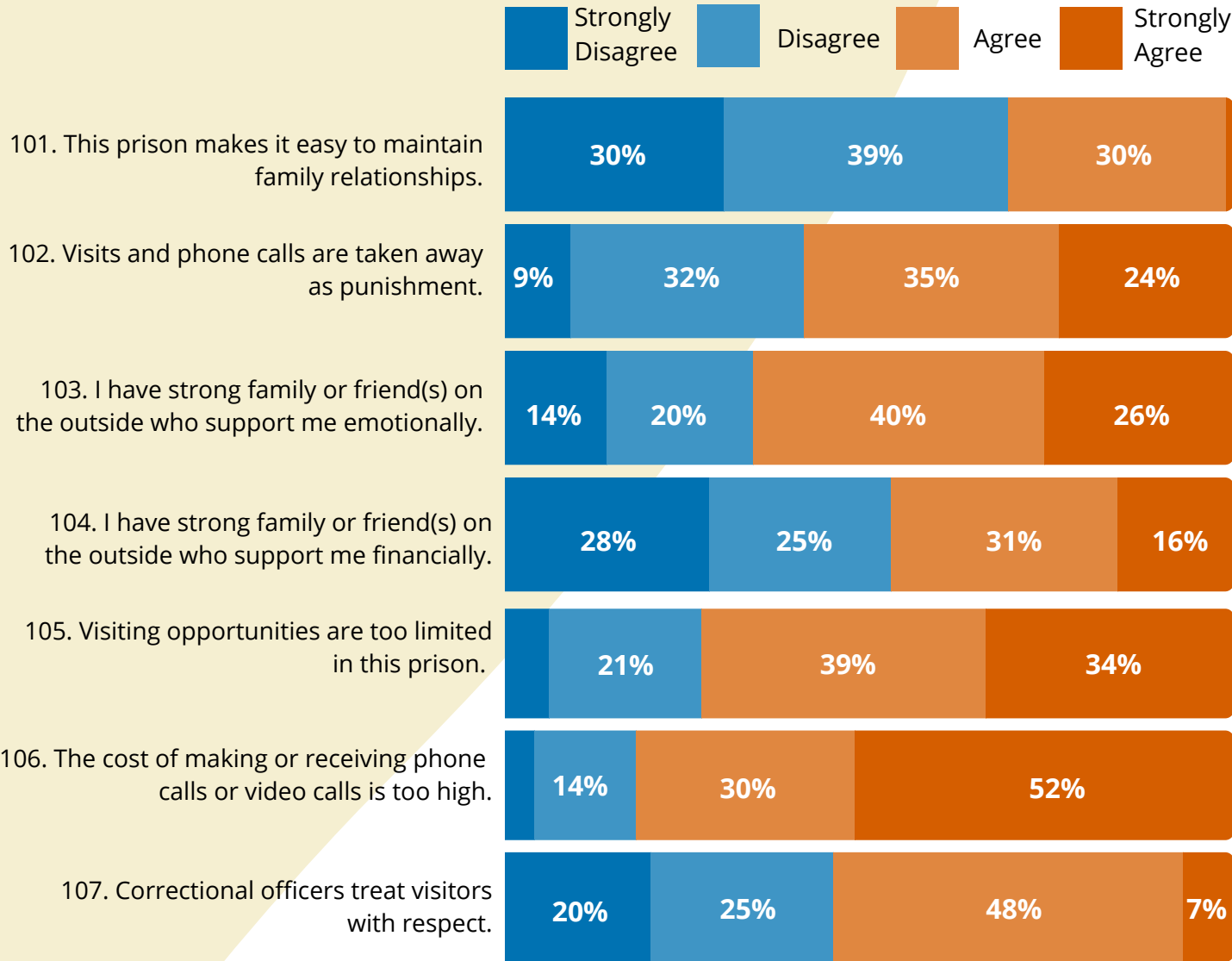
Suicidal Thoughts

100. At any time in the last 12 months did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?





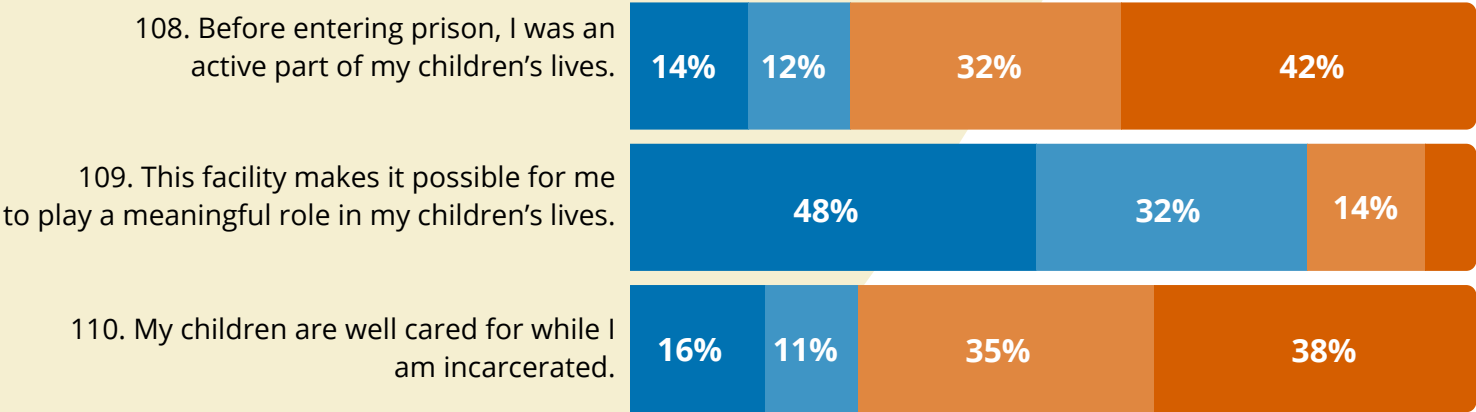
CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS





CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, CONTINUED

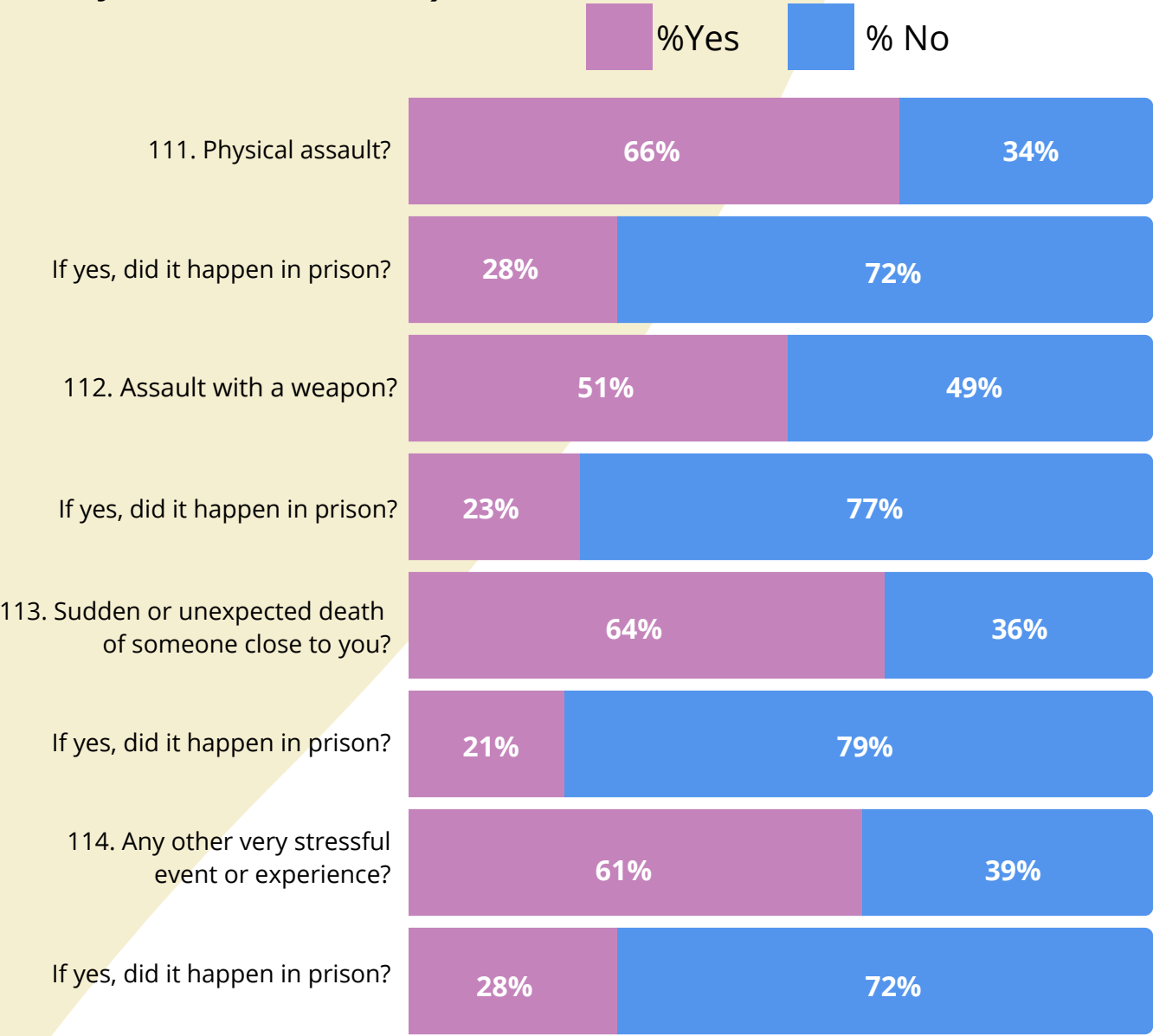
If you have children under the age of 18 years old:





TRAUMA

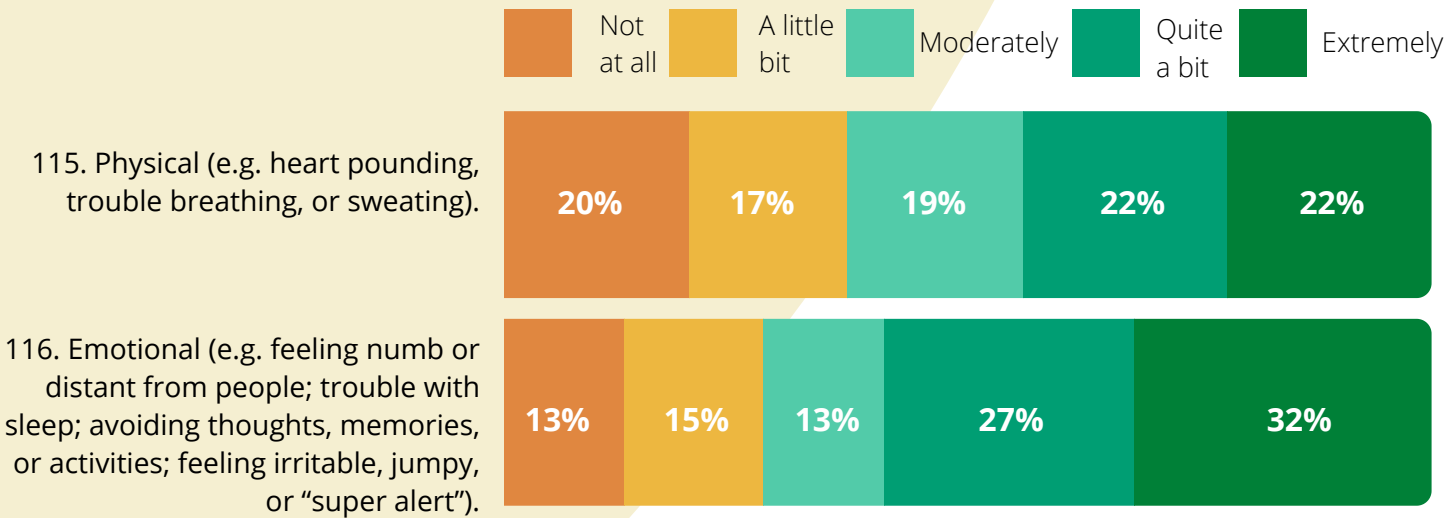
*Consider your entire life, have you experienced ?
(happened to you or witnessed it)*





TRAUMA, CONTINUED

In the past month, how much have you been bothered by physical or emotional reactions when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?





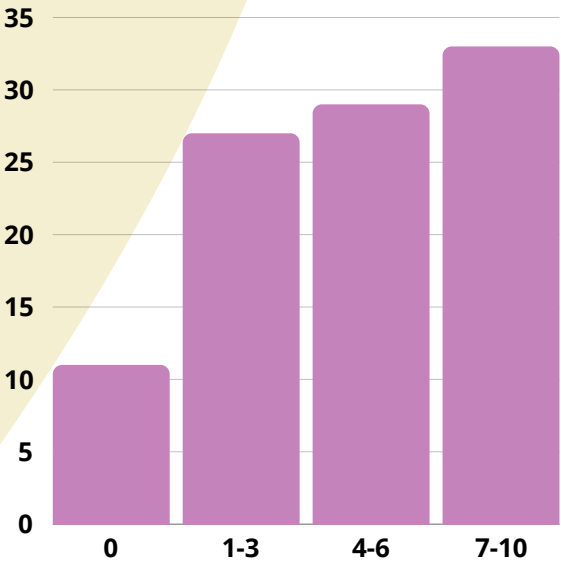
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE)

A series of 10 questions about difficult or stressful things that sometimes happen to people in their childhood. Respondents are asked to consider the time before they were 18 years old as they go through the questions.

One point is assigned for each “yes” response, and then points are summed to calculate a total ACE score.

ACE scores greater than 4 are associated with significantly negative outcomes. Those with scores greater than 6 are in the most severe category of risk – including having an estimated shortened lifespan by 20 years.

ACE categories



% with history of incarcerated parent

