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A National survey of bibliotherapy practice in professional counseling

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A National Survey of Bibliotherapy Practice in Professional Counseling

**Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson
& Paula McMillen**

UNLV

**American Counseling Association
March, 2009**



Books have universal appeal and much to offer us...

- > We are wired for stories
- > We learn from stories
- > We heal with stories

Bibliotherapy defined...



- ① **Literally... treatment through books**

- > (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1998)

- ② **Guided reading of written materials to help the reader grow in self awareness**

- > (Harris & Hodges, 1995)

- ③ **Process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature under the guidance of a trained helper**

- > (Shrodes, 1950)

Levels of Bibliotherapy

■ *Developmental*

The use of literature and facilitative processes by skilled helpers to assist individuals in dealing with life transitions and normal developmental issues

■ *Clinical*

The use of literature and facilitative processes by skilled mental health or medical practitioners in meeting specific therapeutic goals for the purpose of assisting individuals in dealing with severe disorders and traumatic life experiences

Benefits of Bibliotherapy

- **Increases empathetic understanding**
 - other cultures, viewpoints and lived experiences
- **Fosters appreciation of & identification**
 - one's own ethnic/cultural identity
- **Increases self-awareness & clarifies emerging values**
- **Stimulates discussion of feelings & ideas**
- **Improves coping skills**
 - as alternative responses are explored
- **Reduces negative emotions**
 - stress, anxiety & loneliness
- **Enhances**
 - self-esteem, interpersonal skills & emotional maturity

Why this Survey?

- **Limited scope/scale of existing surveys**
- **No standardized preparation, education or training in bibliotherapy**
- **No standardized supervision or certification in bibliotherapy**
- **Need for counselor educators to know current scope of practice by professional counselors**

Previous Surveys

- ◉ Atwater & Smith (1982)
- ◉ Smith & Burkhalter (1987)
- ◉ Starker (1986, 1988)
- ◉ Matthews & Lonsdale (1991, 1992)
- ◉ Quackenbush (1991)
- ◉ Warner (1991)
- ◉ Adams & Pitre (2000)

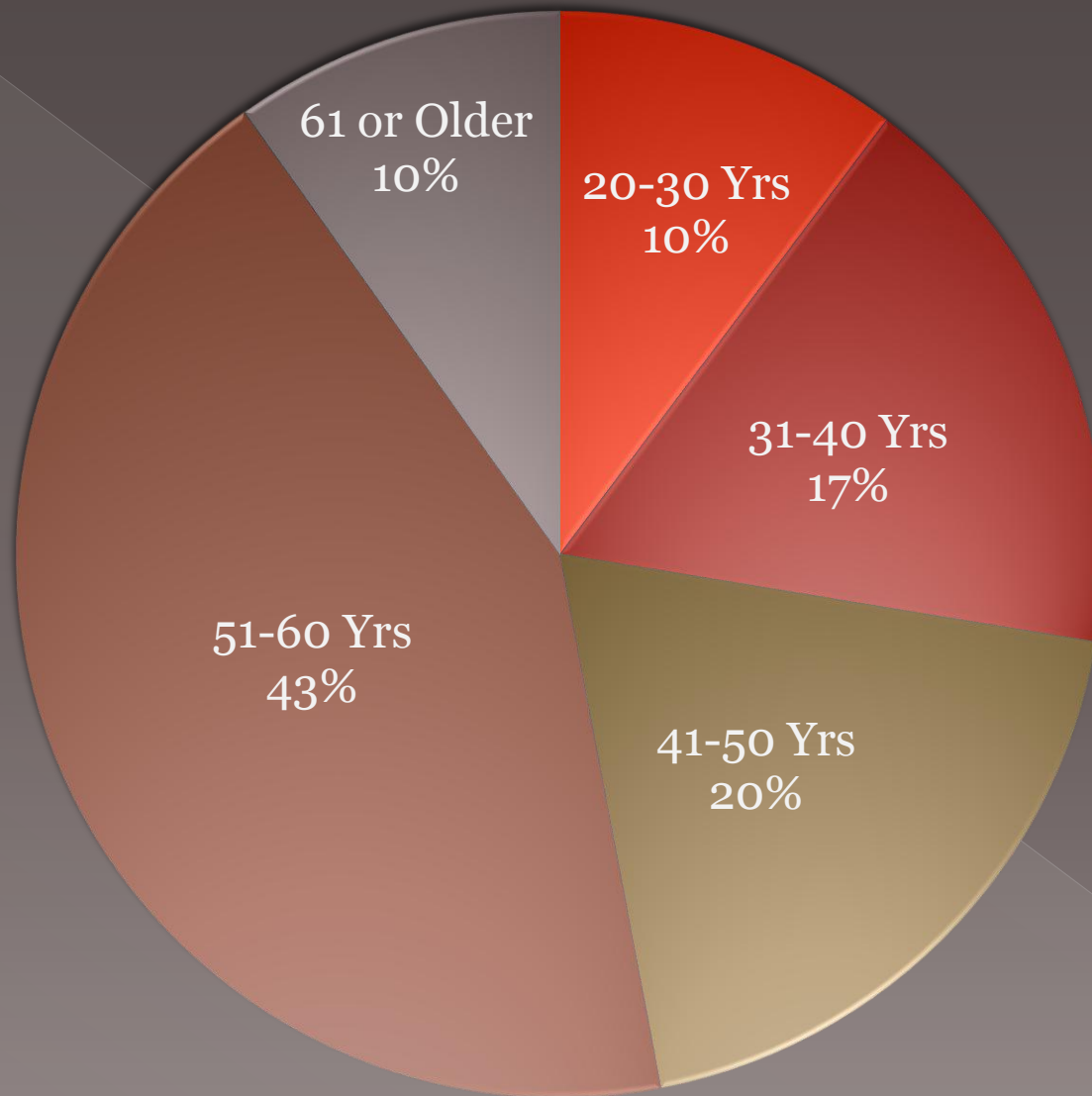
Research Methodology

- Drafted project proposal and questions
- Consulted with OSU Survey Research Center
- Refined questions
- Pilot tested survey
- Secured funding to buy ACA mailing list
- Sent three rounds of e-mail requests
- Eliminated 'undeliverables' and spam filters
- Summarized survey responses

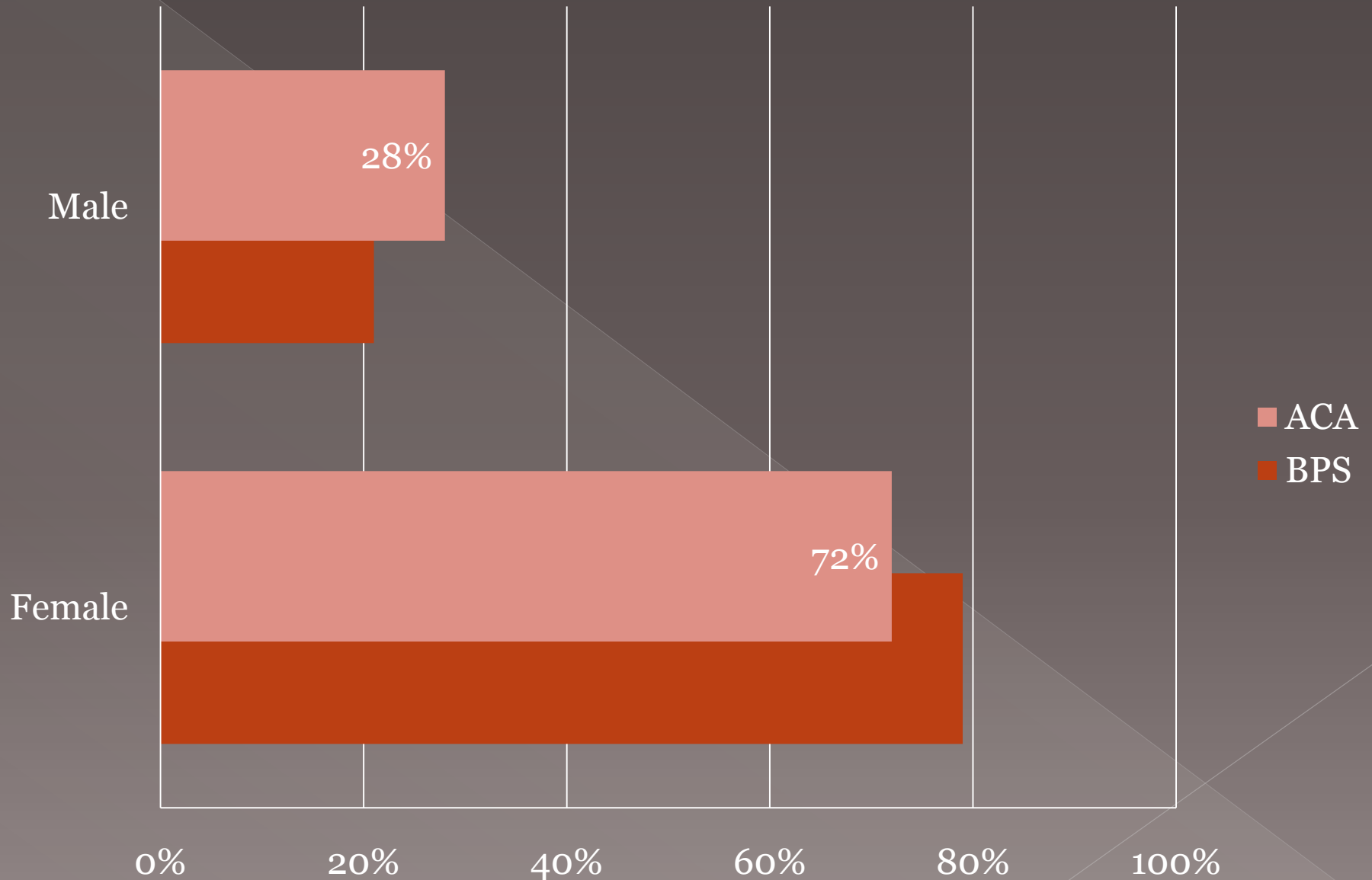
Research Questions

- **Demographics of respondents**
 - Personal and professional
- **Specific bibliotherapy practices**
 - Populations
 - Presenting problems
 - Implementation strategies
 - Assessment approaches
 - Book recommendations

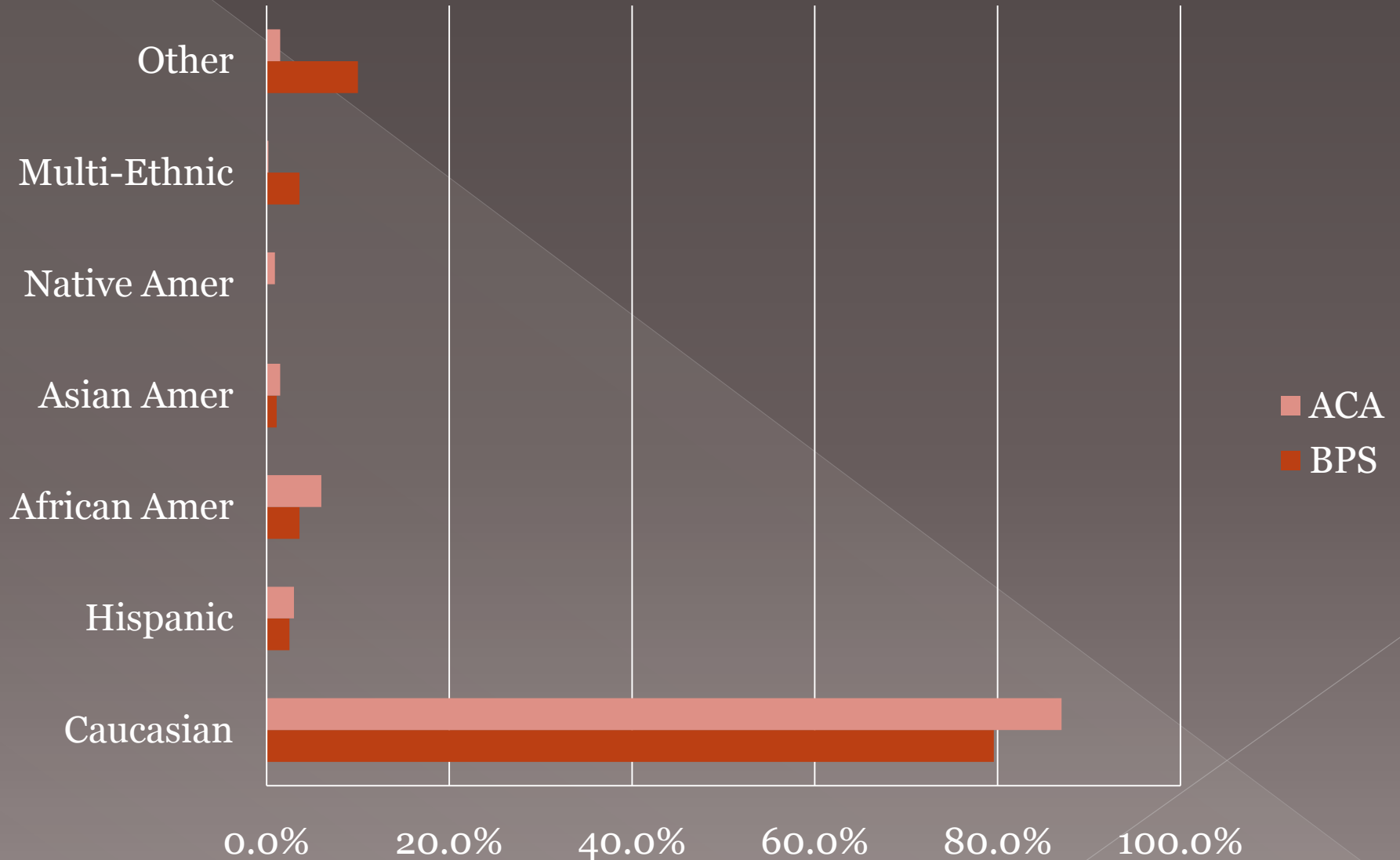
Age Group of Respondents



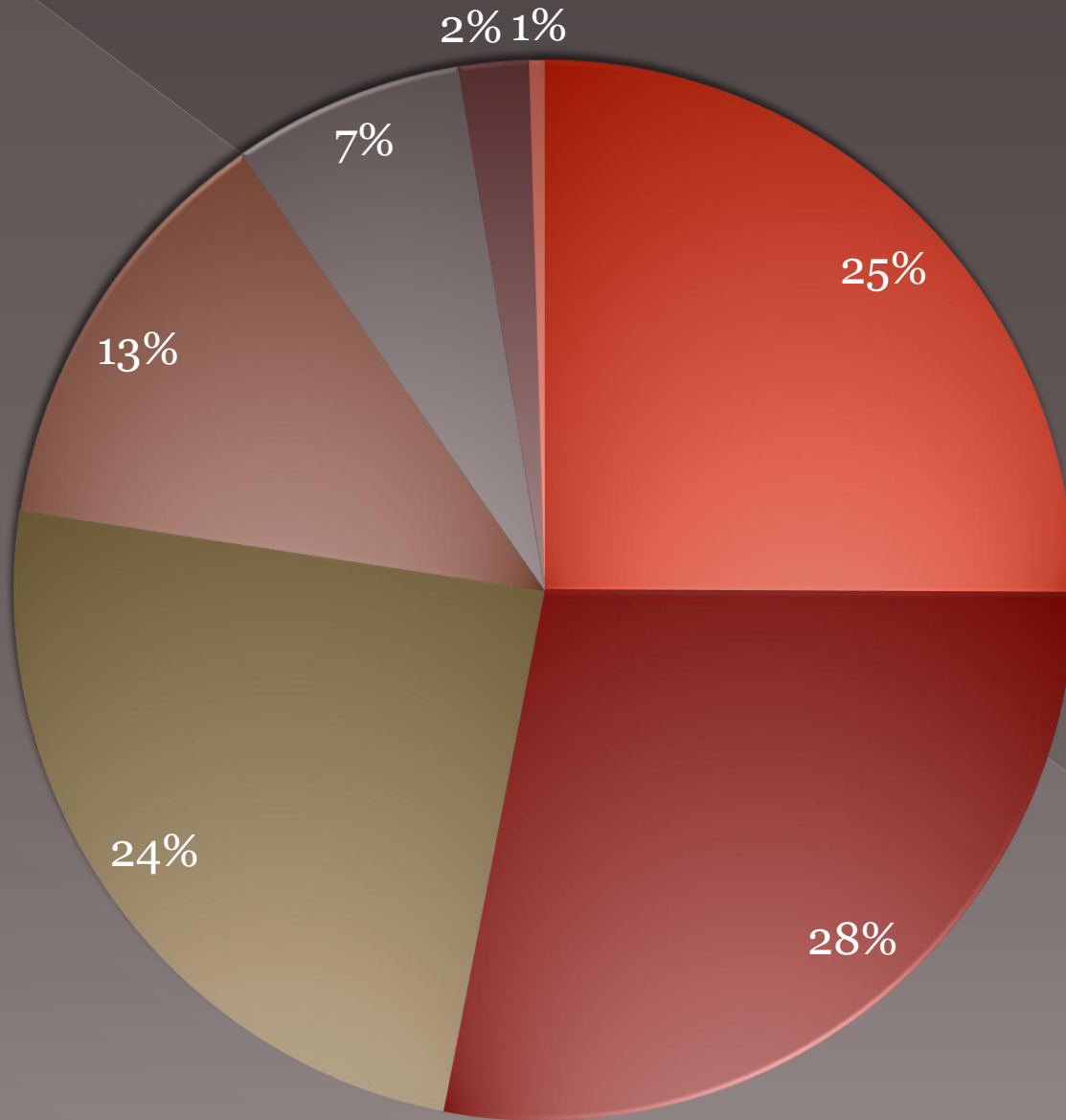
BSP-ACA Demographics: Gender



BPS-ACA Demographics: Ethnic Affiliation

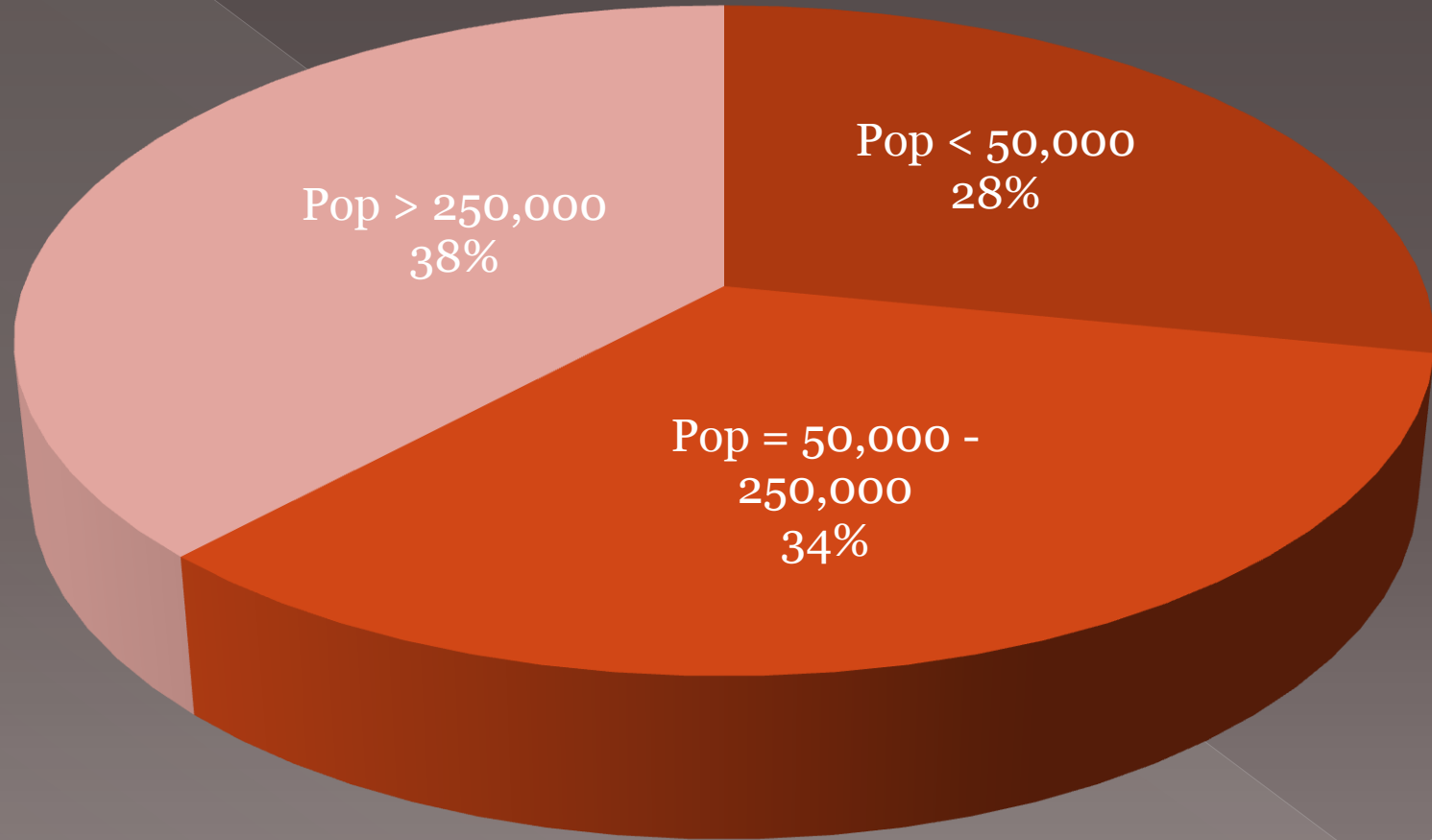


Geographic Location of Practice

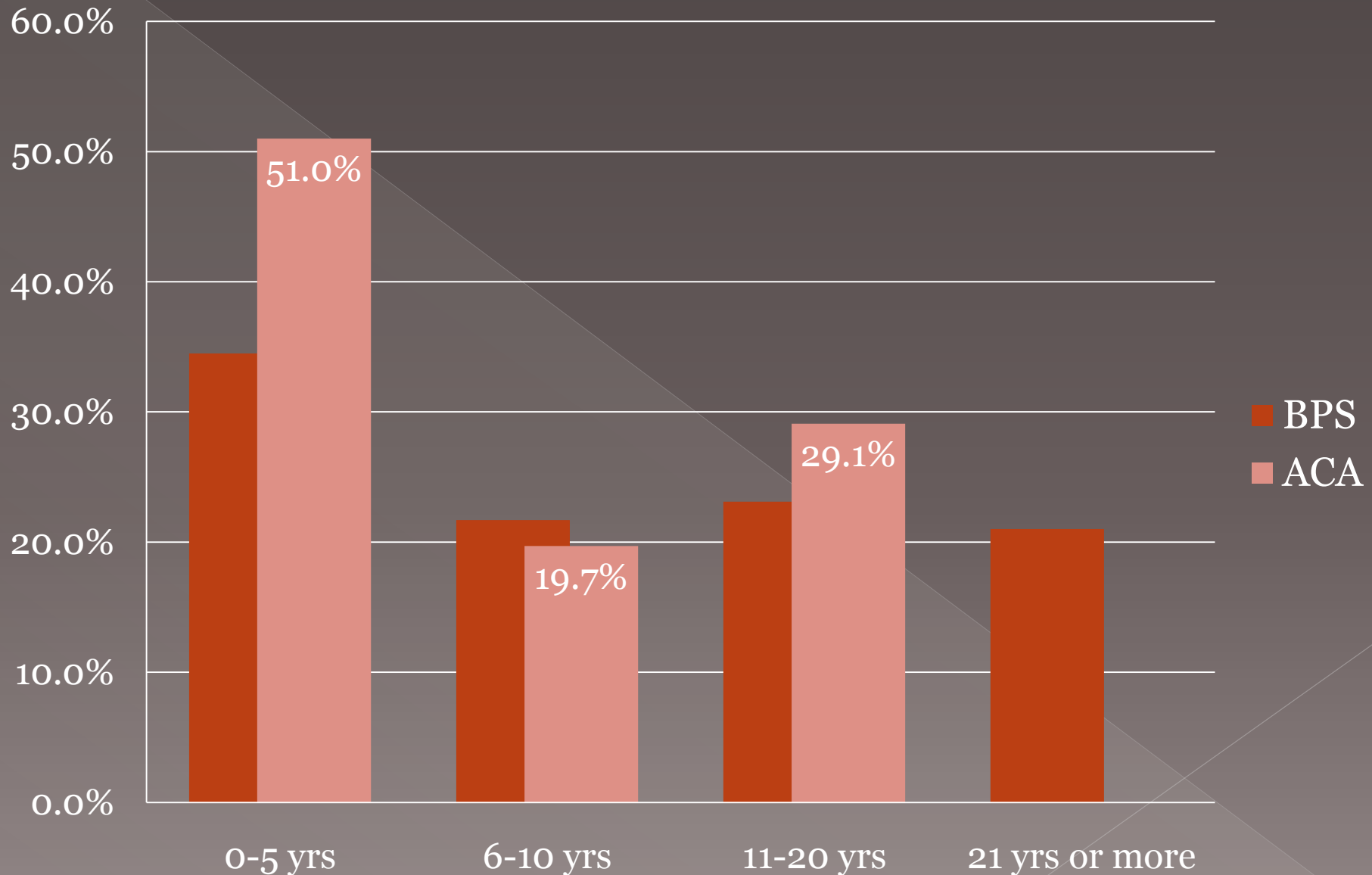


- Northeast U.S.
- Southeast U.S.
- Central U.S.
- Southwest U.S.
- Northwest U.S.
- Alaska or Hawaii
- International

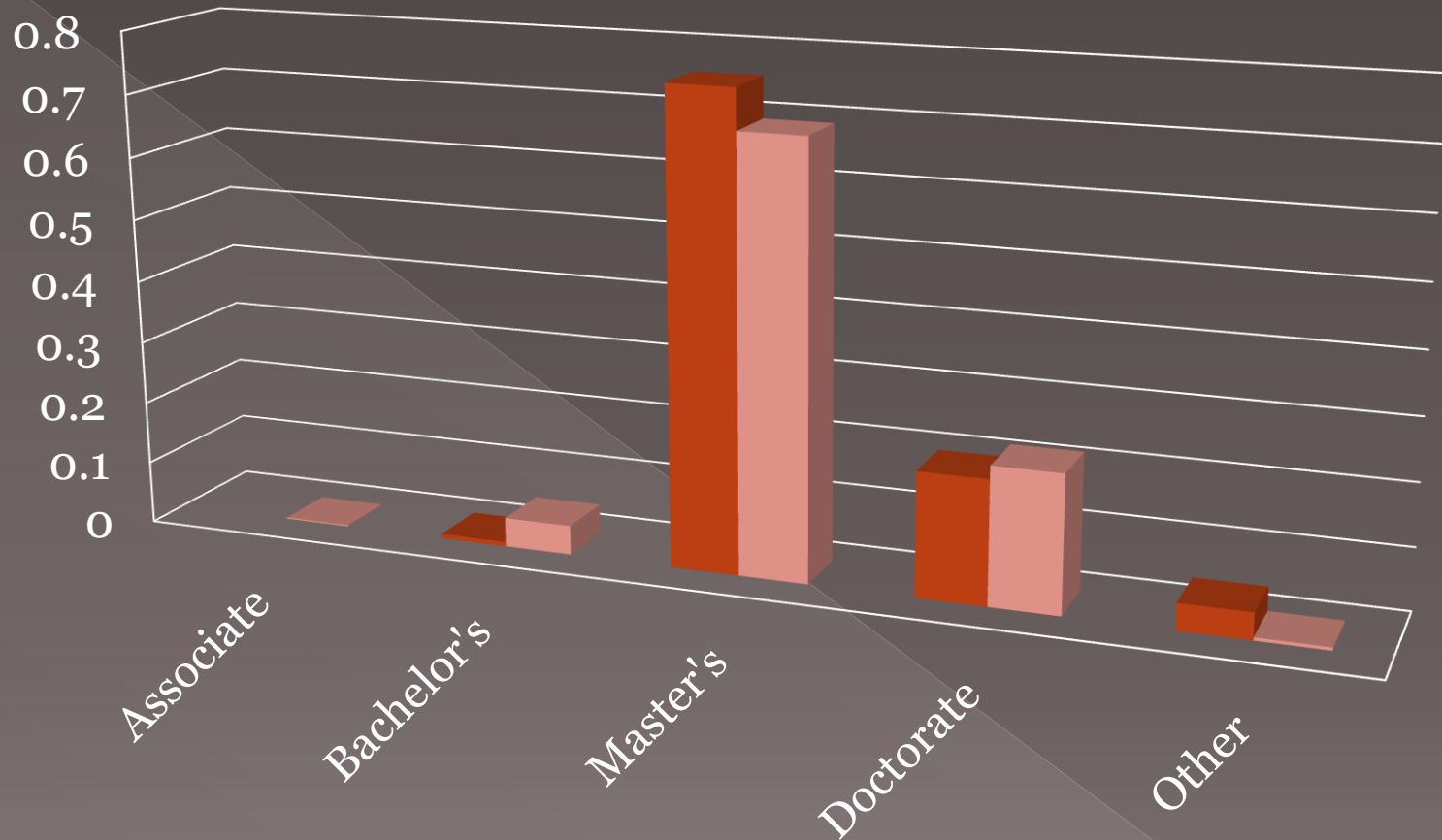
Population Base of Practice



BPS-ACA Demographics: Years in Practice

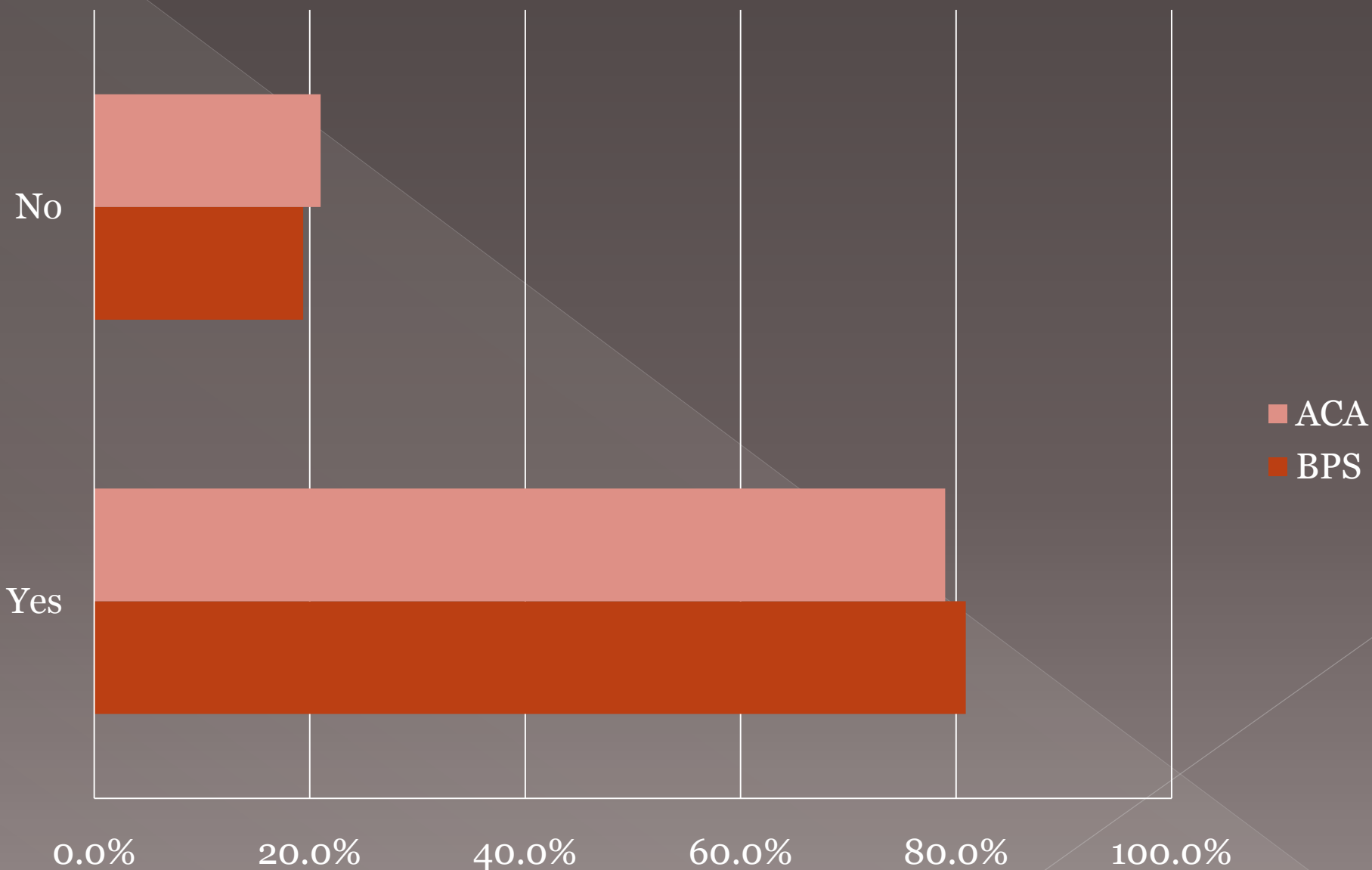


BPS-ACA Demographics: Highest Degree Obtained

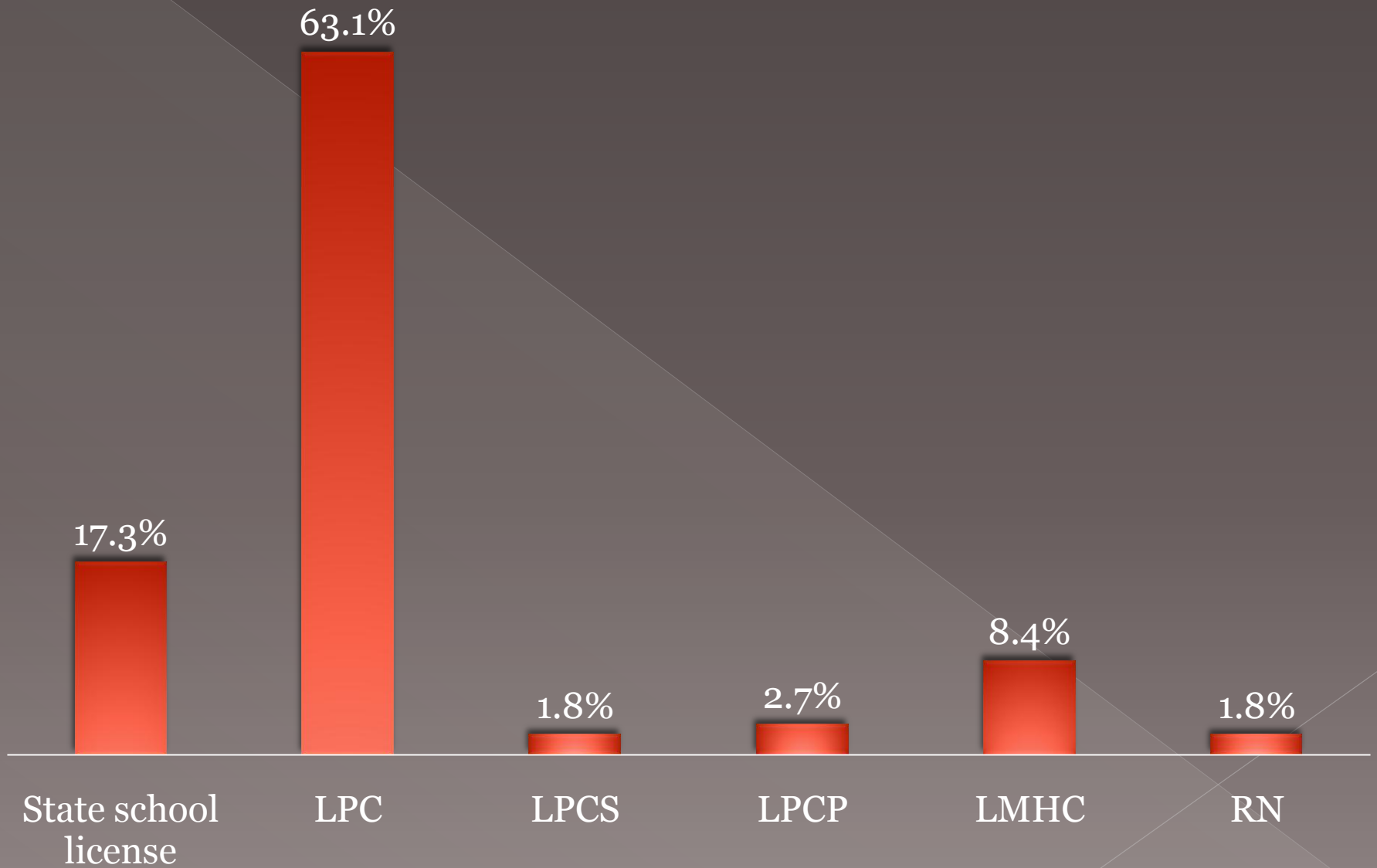


	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate	Other
■ BPS		0.70%	75.50%	19.90%	4.30%
■ ACA	0.20%	4.70%	69%	22%	0.50%

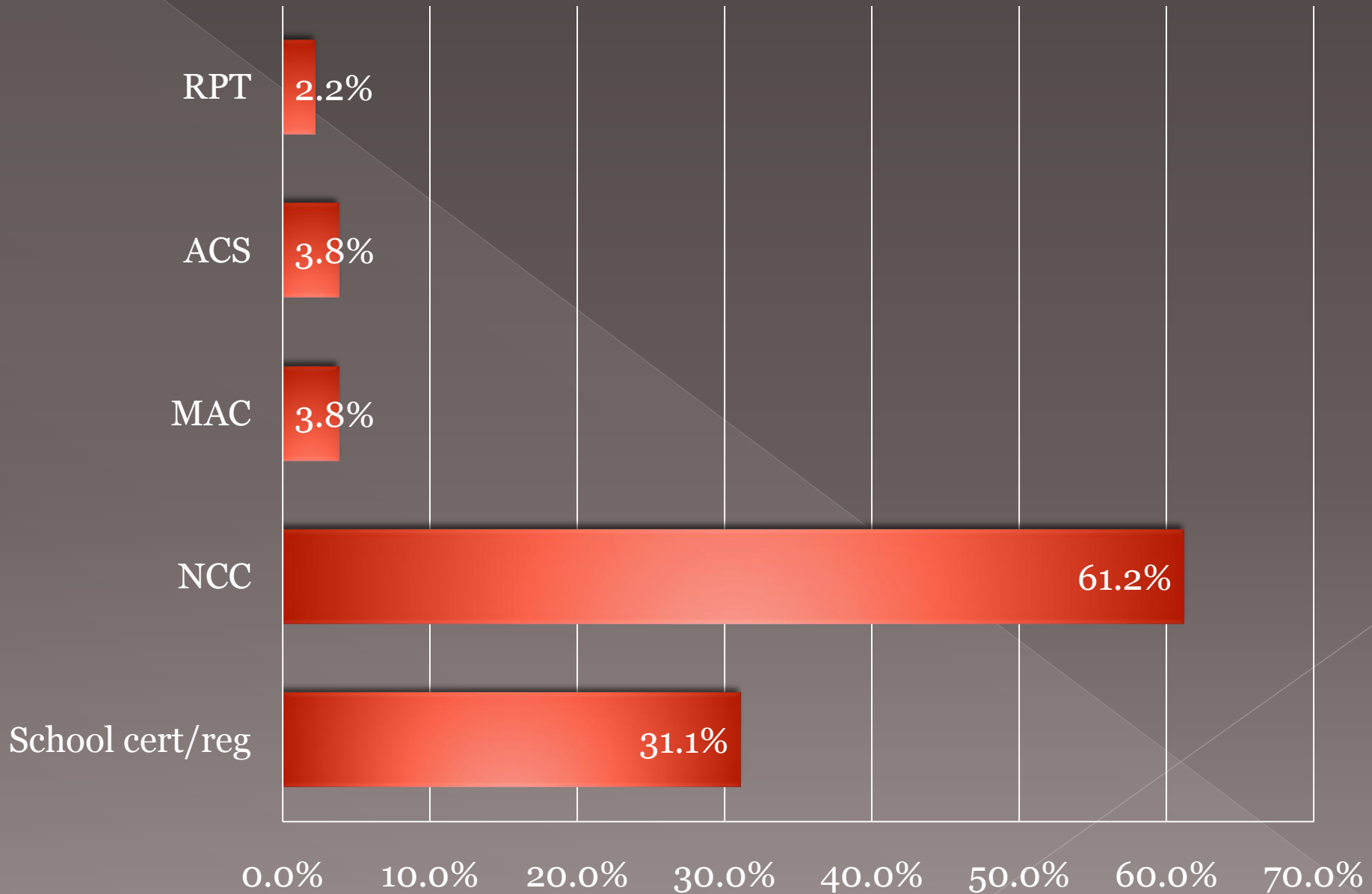
BSP-ACA Demographics: Holds Professional License



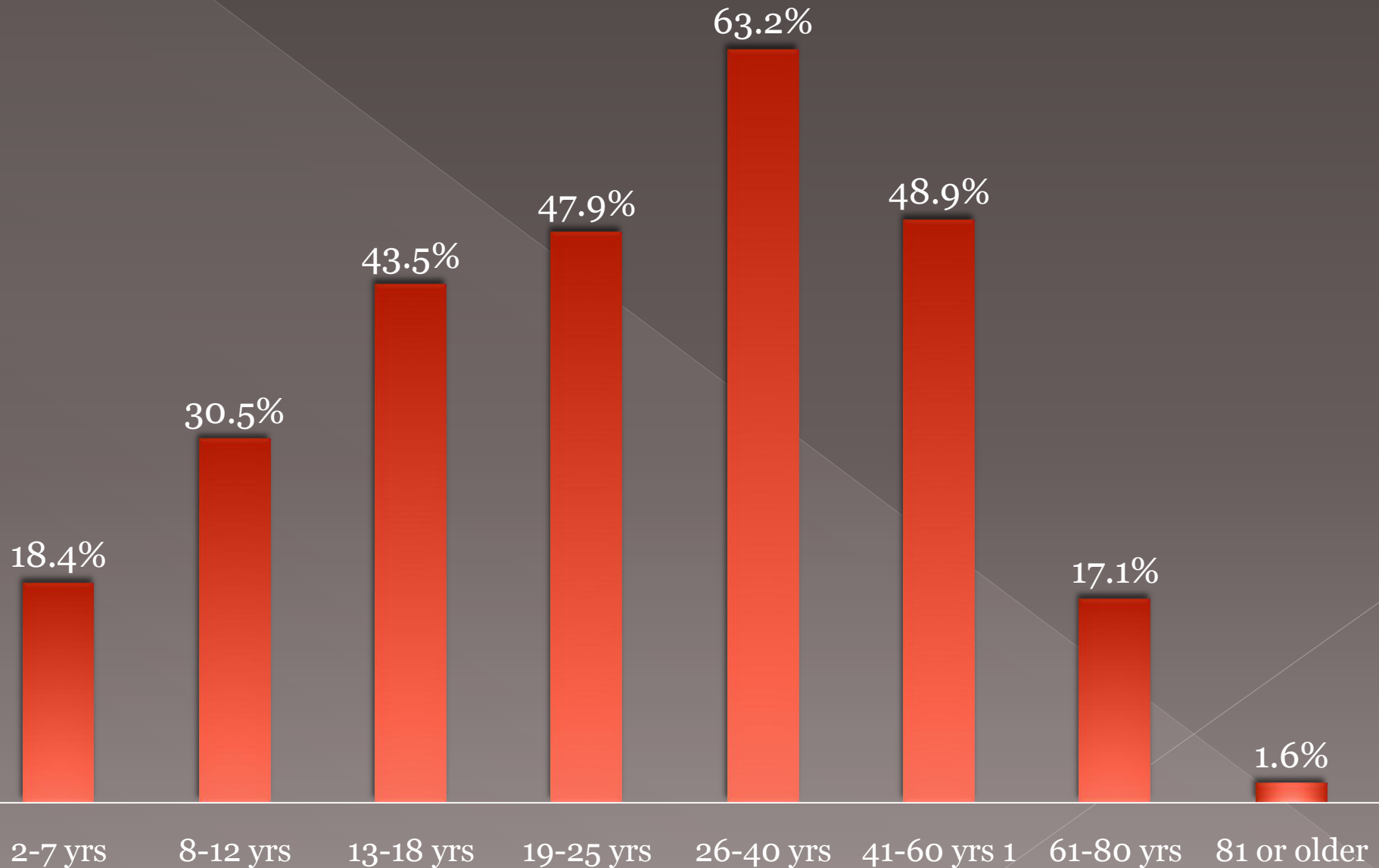
Professional Licenses Held



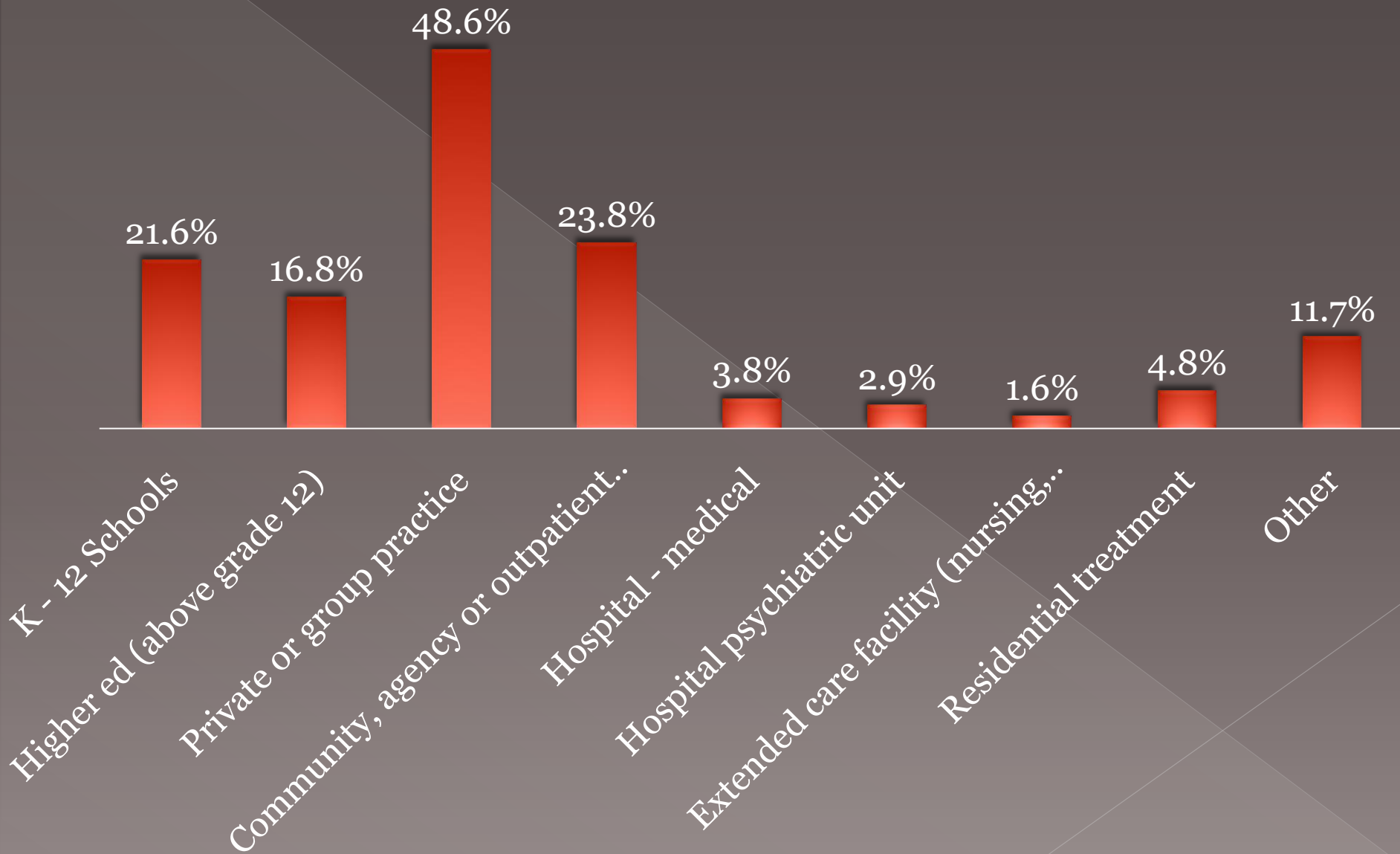
Professional Certifications/ Registrations



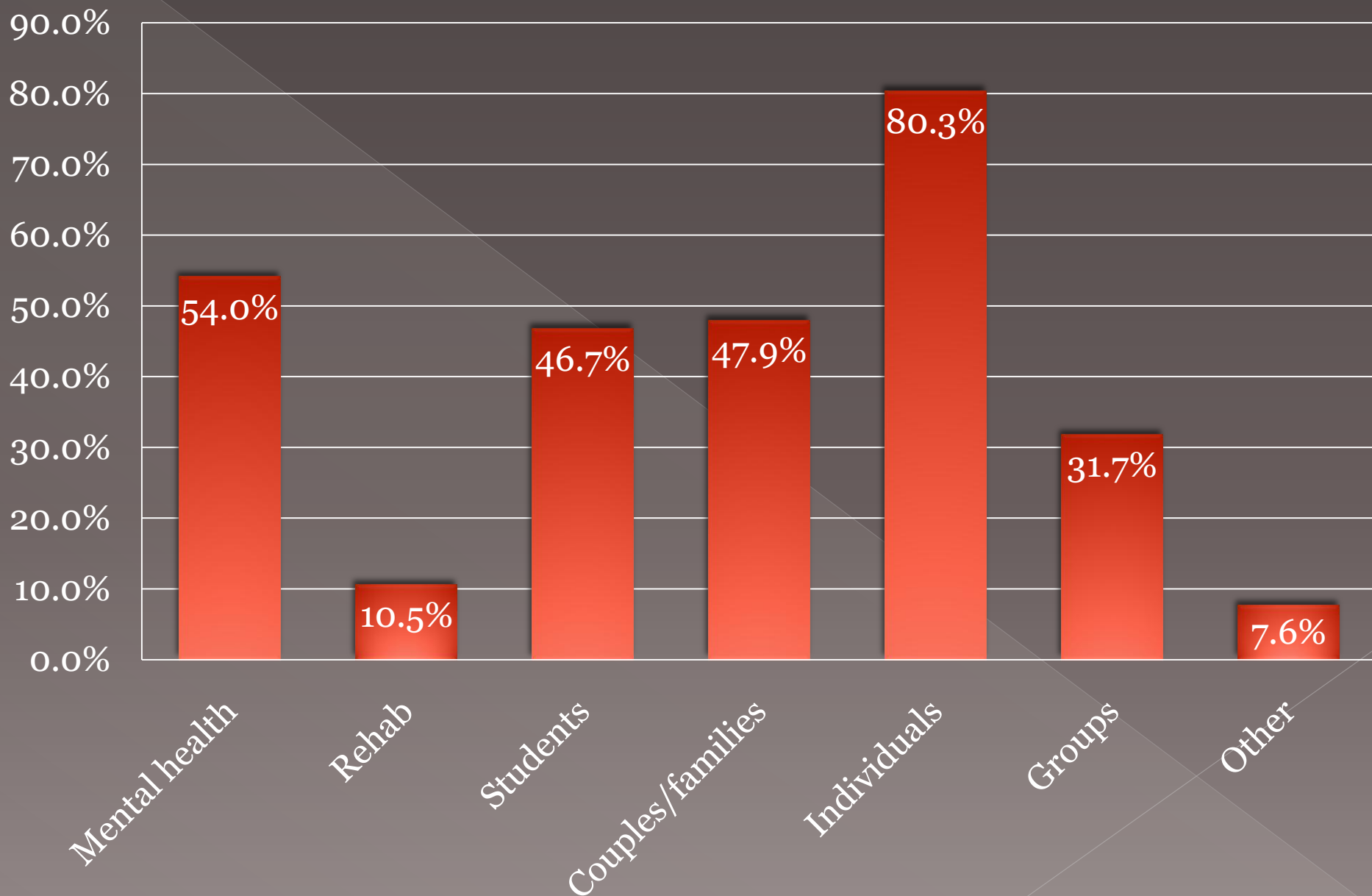
With which age groups do you most commonly work? Check all that apply.



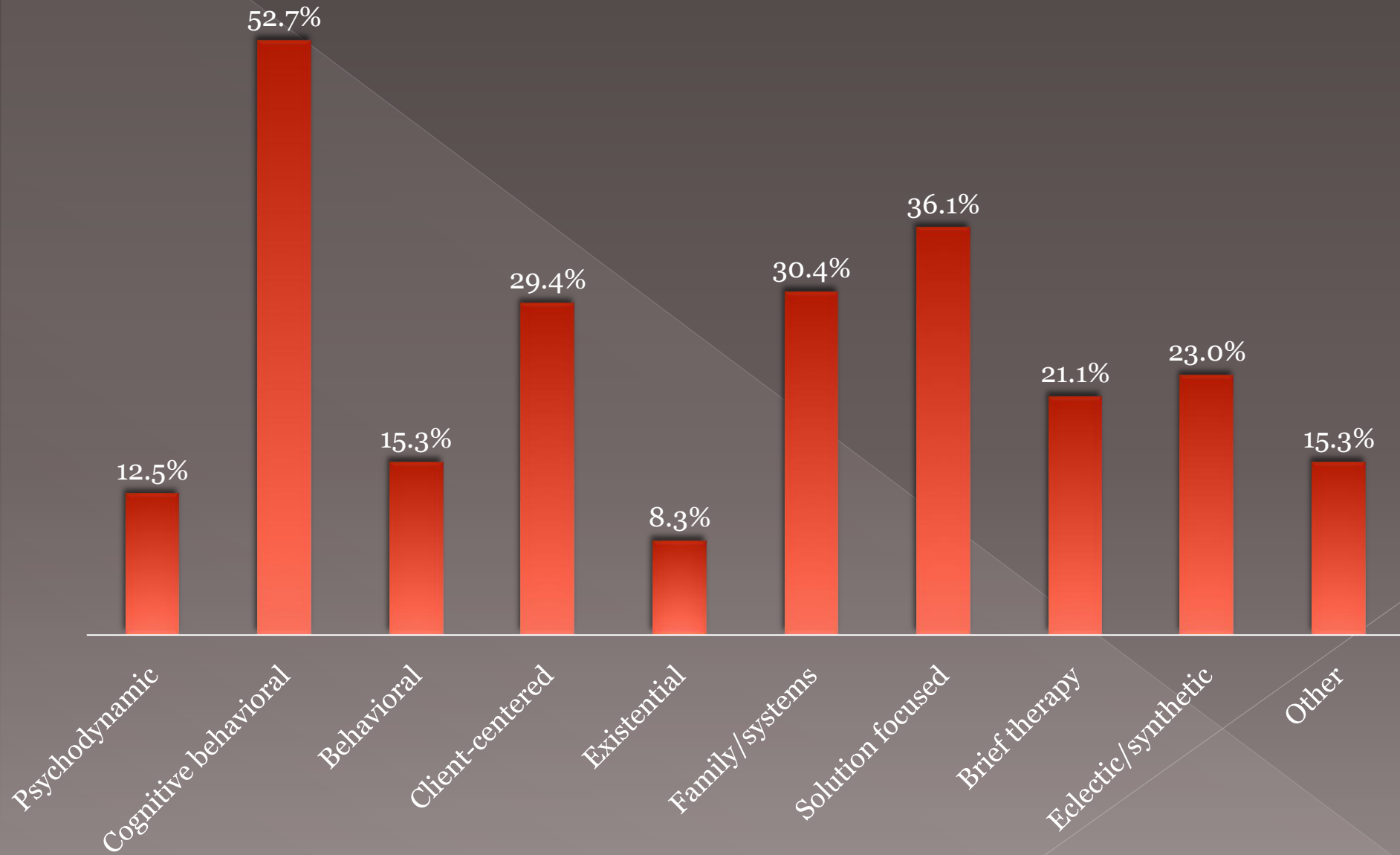
In which setting(s) do you most commonly work with clients? Limit to 3 choices.



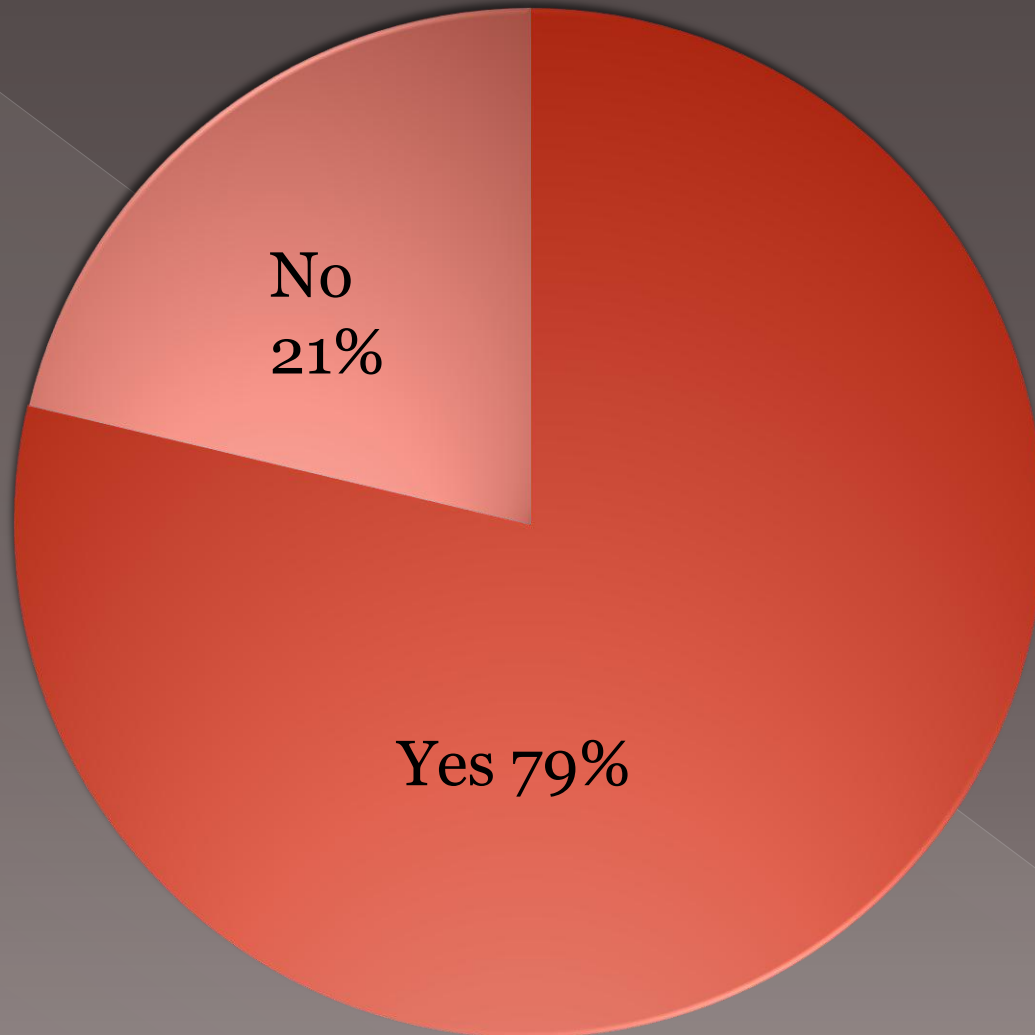
With which client populations do you regularly work? Check all that apply.



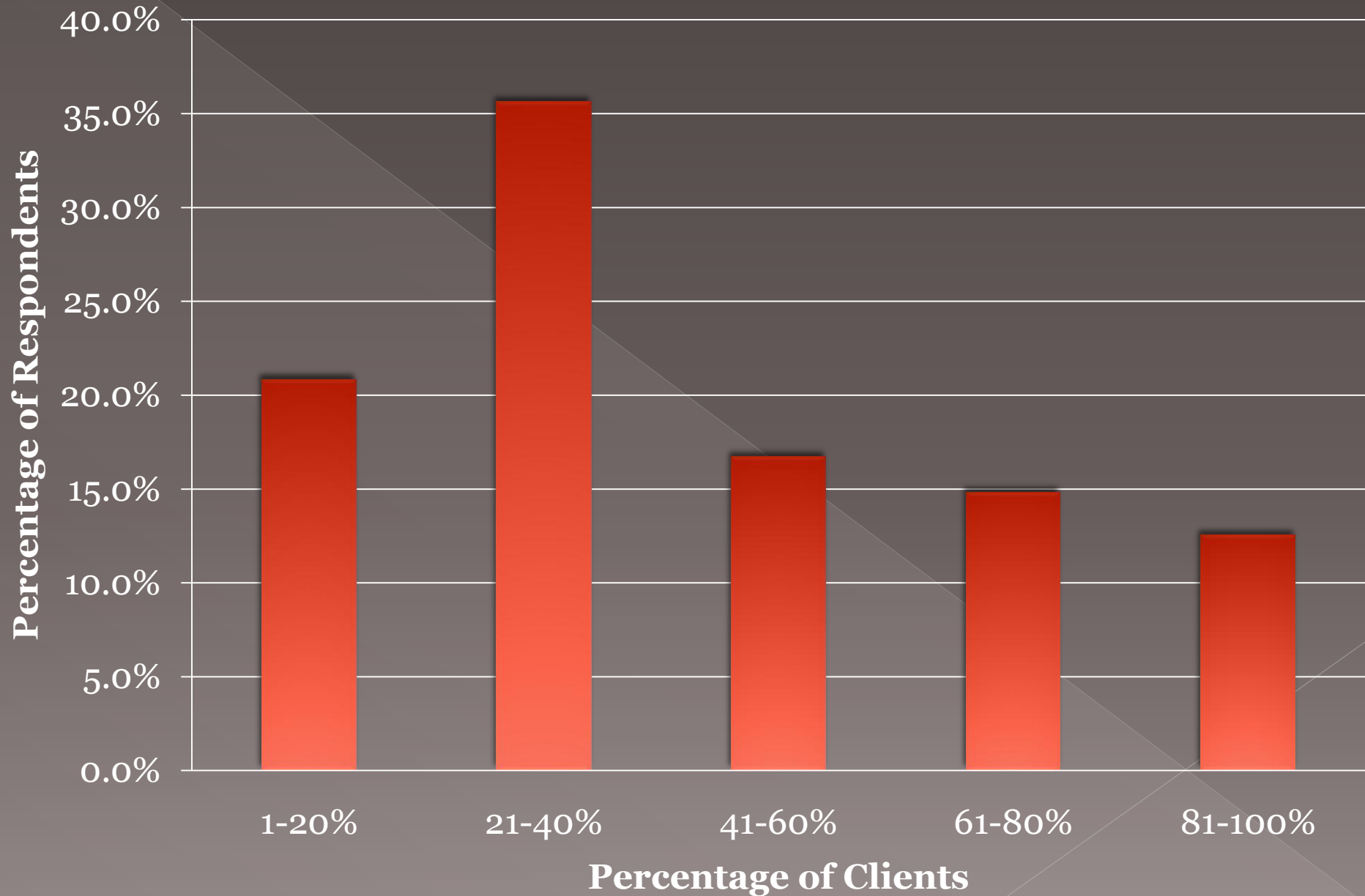
Identify your primary therapeutic orientation(s).



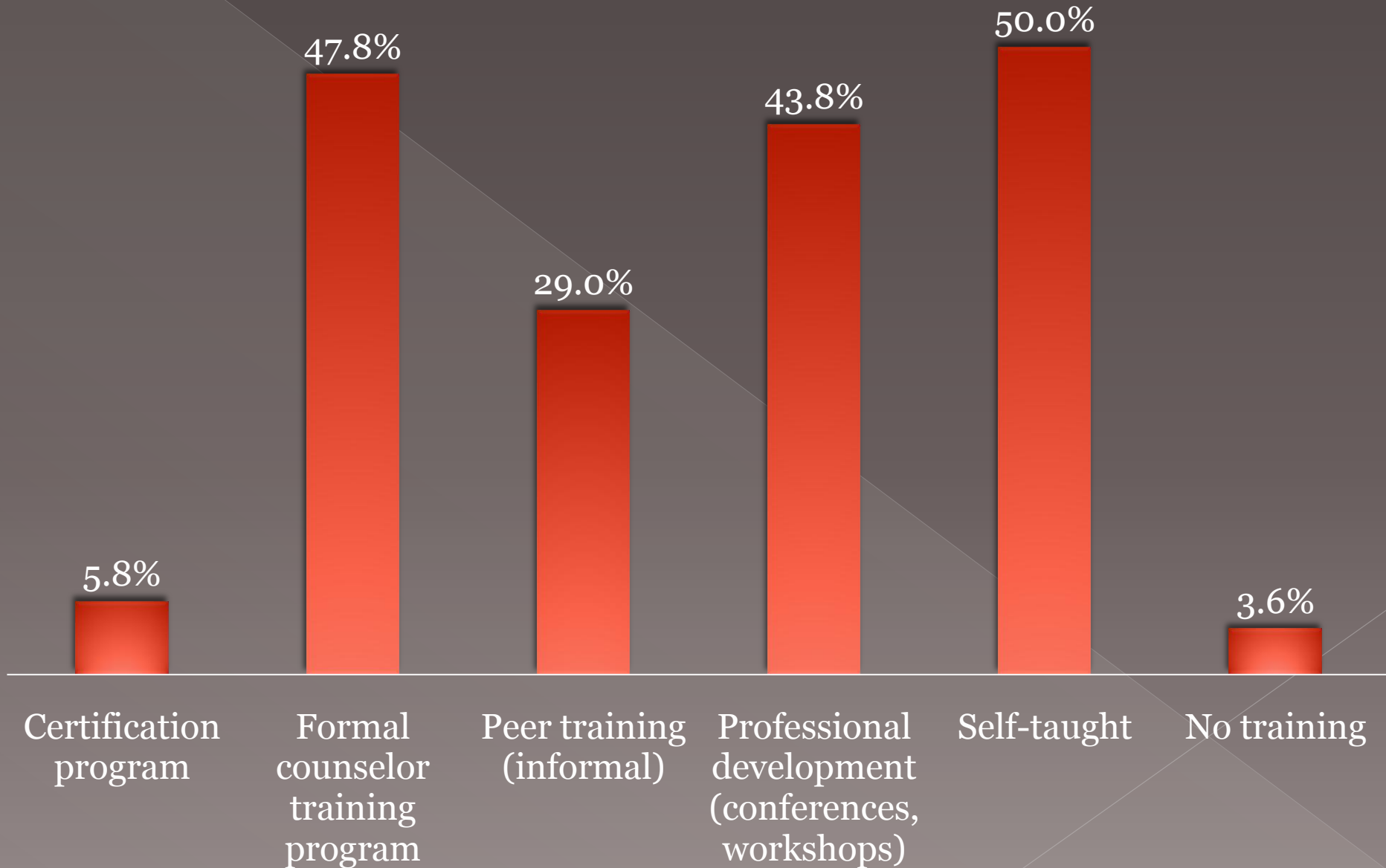
Do you use bibliotherapy in your work with clients?



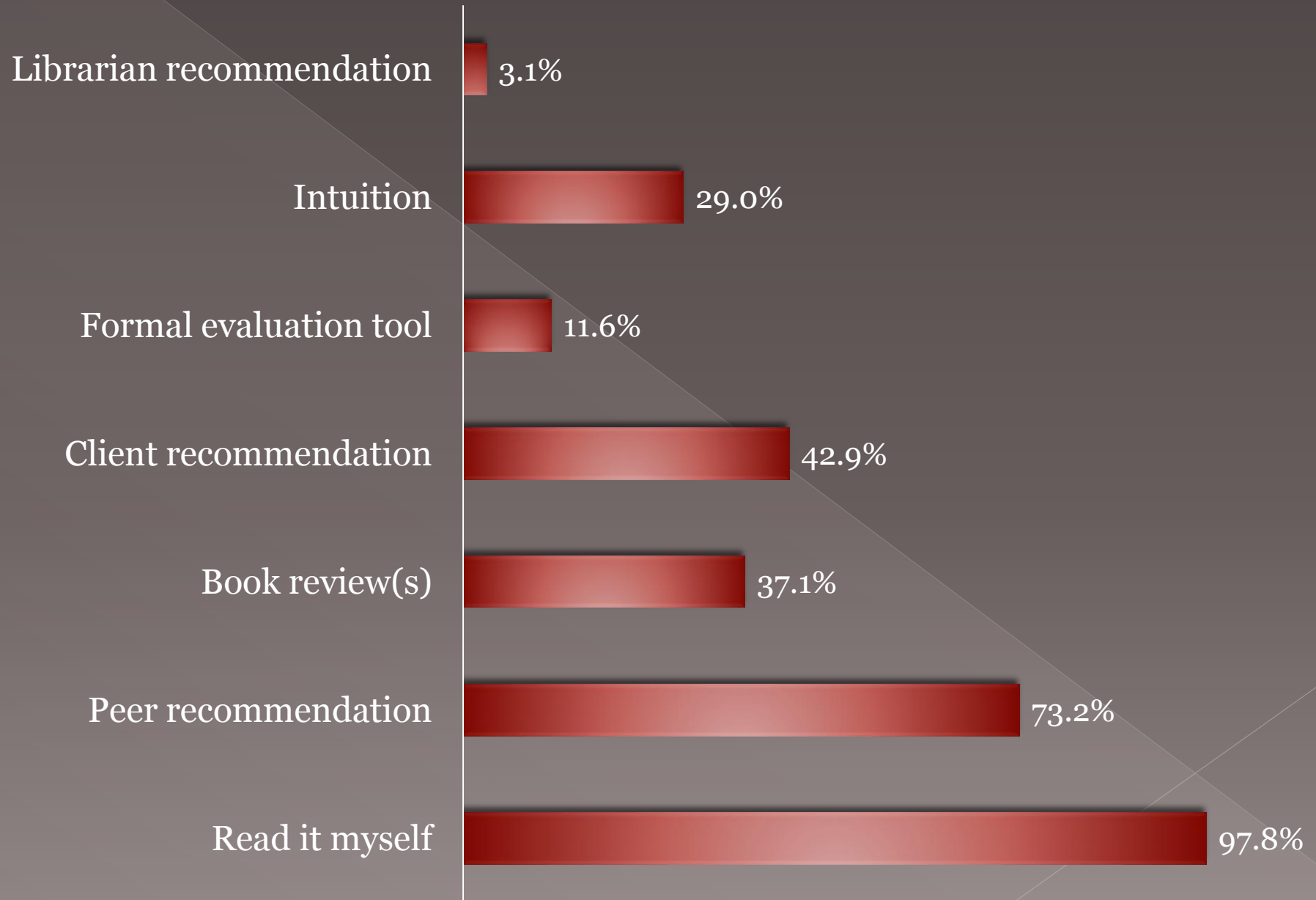
With what percentage of your clients do you use Bibliotherapy?



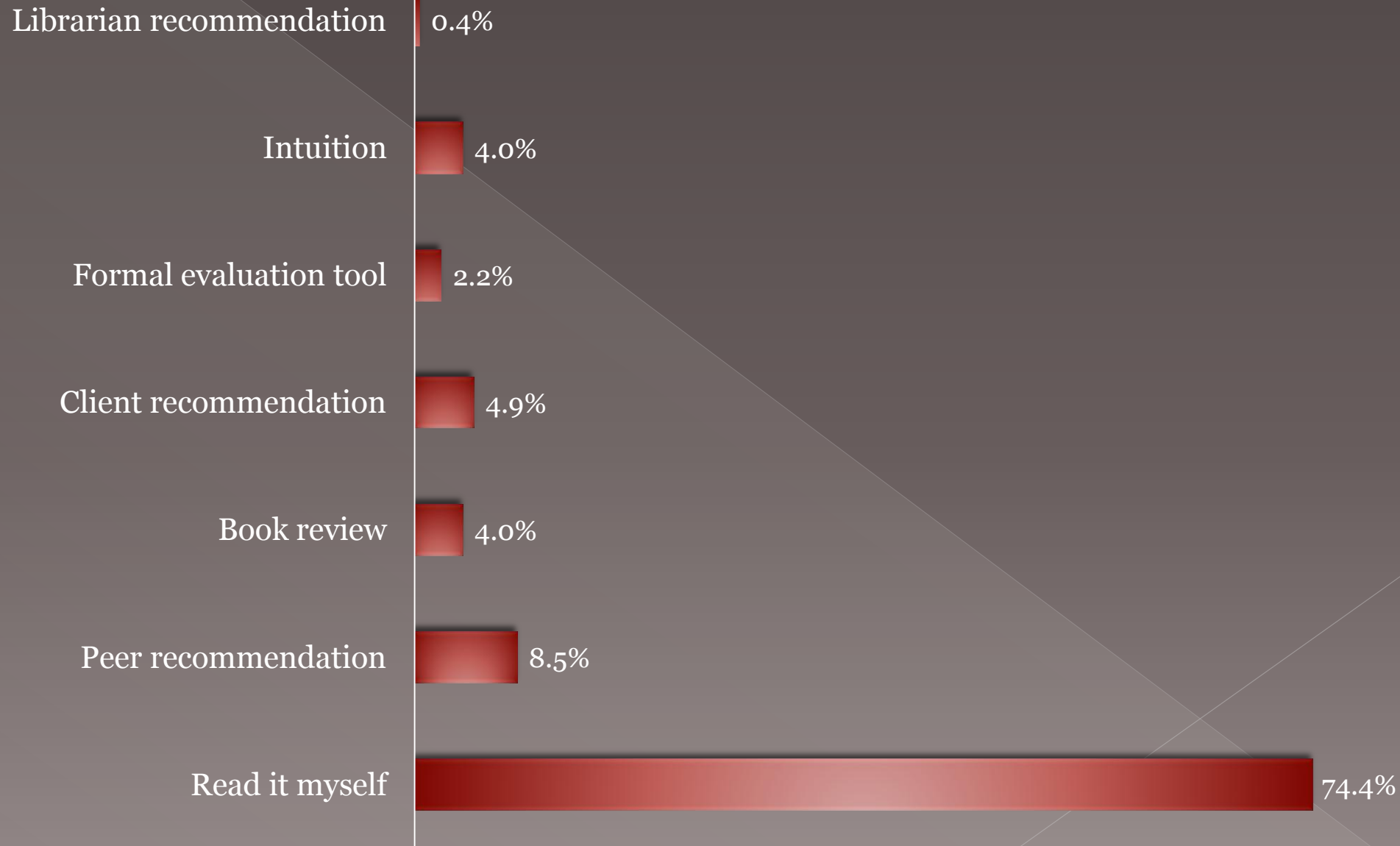
Preparation to Use Bibliotherapy



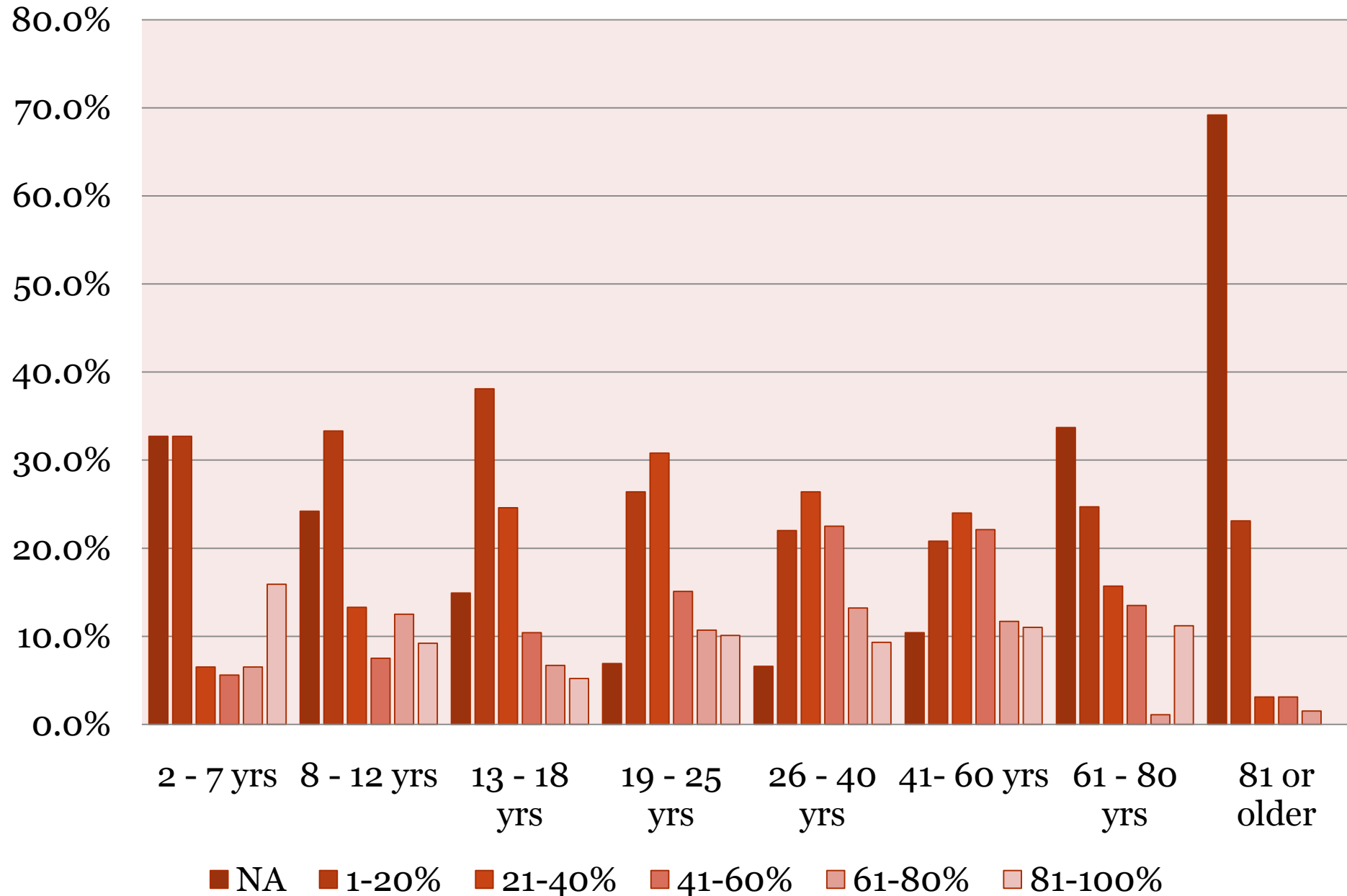
How do you choose books for clients?



Most Valuable Way to Choose Materials for Bibliotherapy Use with Clients



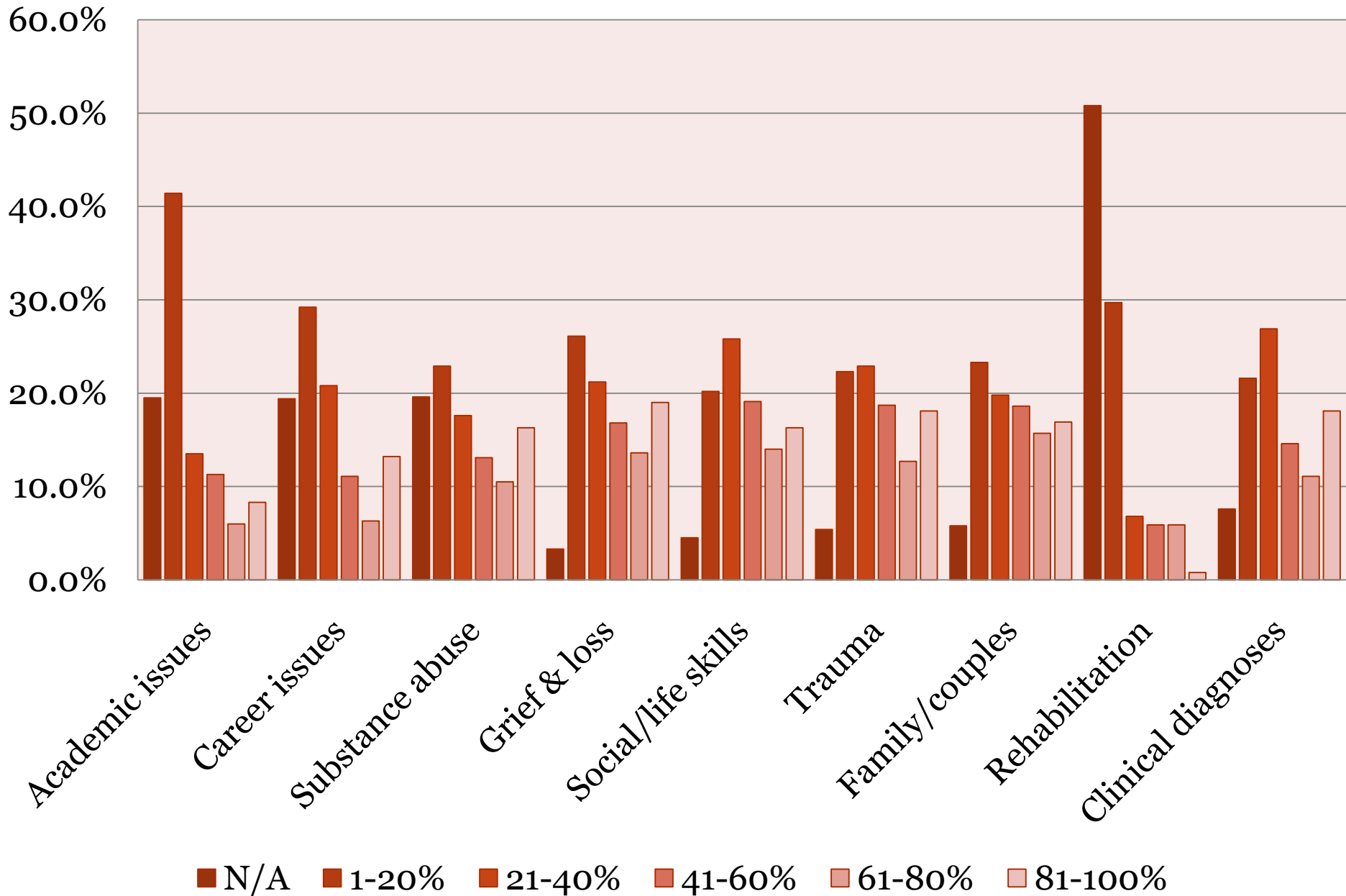
Percentage of Clients with Whom Use Bibliotherapy: Age Groups



Significant Findings for Age Groups:

- 67% of counselors report they use bibliotherapy (BT) with 19-25 year old clients more than 20% of the time
- 71% of counselors report they use BT with 26-40 year old clients more than 20% of the time
- 69% of counselors report they use BT with 41-60 year old clients more than 20% of the time
- Only 20% of our sample reported working with the 2-7 year old & 81 or older age groups so BT usage was accordingly low

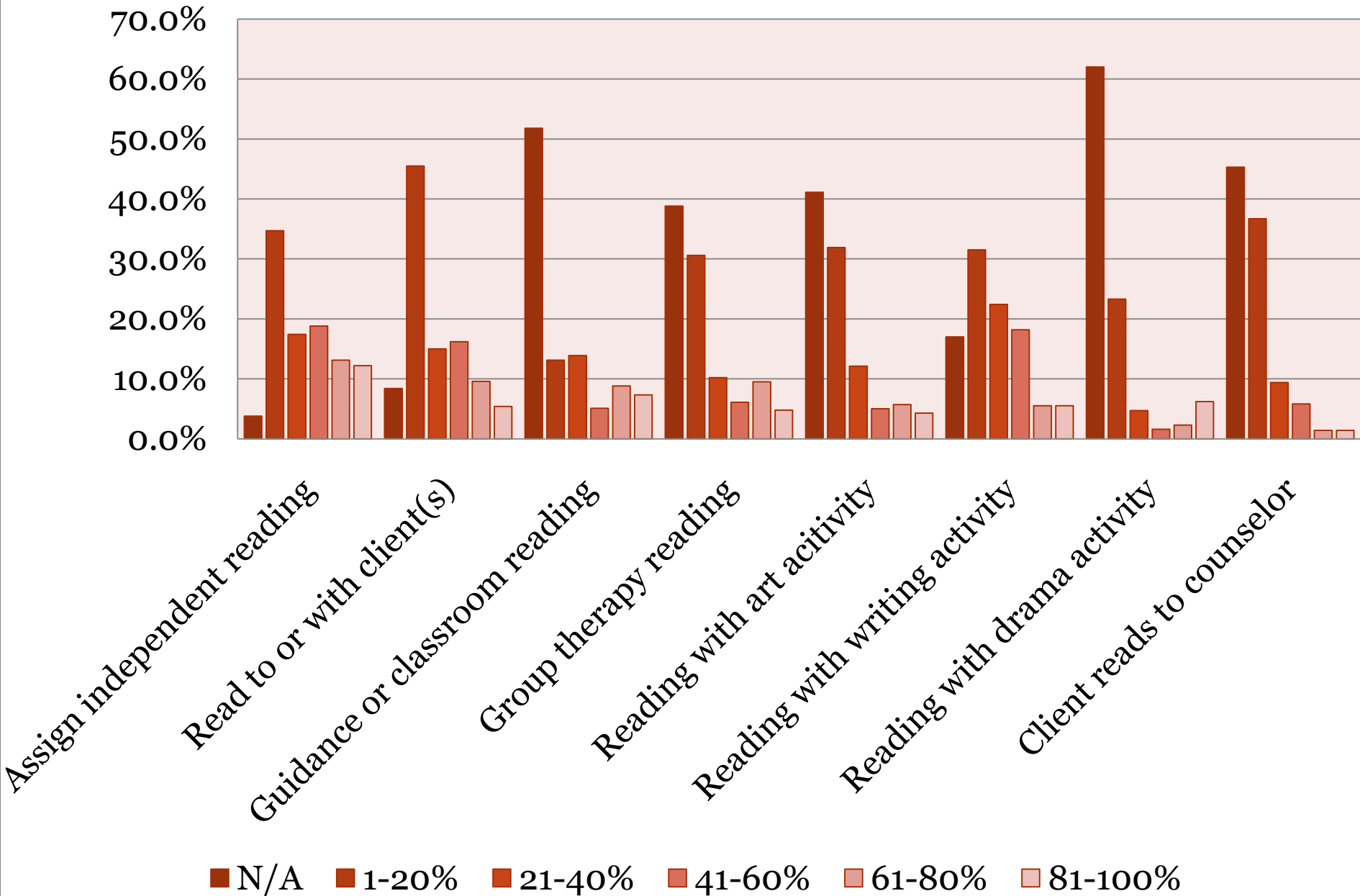
Percentage of Clients with Whom Use Bibliotherapy: Issues



Significant Findings for Issues:

- Counselors report using BT with more than 20% of their clients for the following categories of presenting issues:
 - Grief and loss
 - Social/life skills
 - Trauma (abuse, catastrophic events)
 - Family & couples' issues
 - Clinical diagnoses (depression, anxiety, etc.)

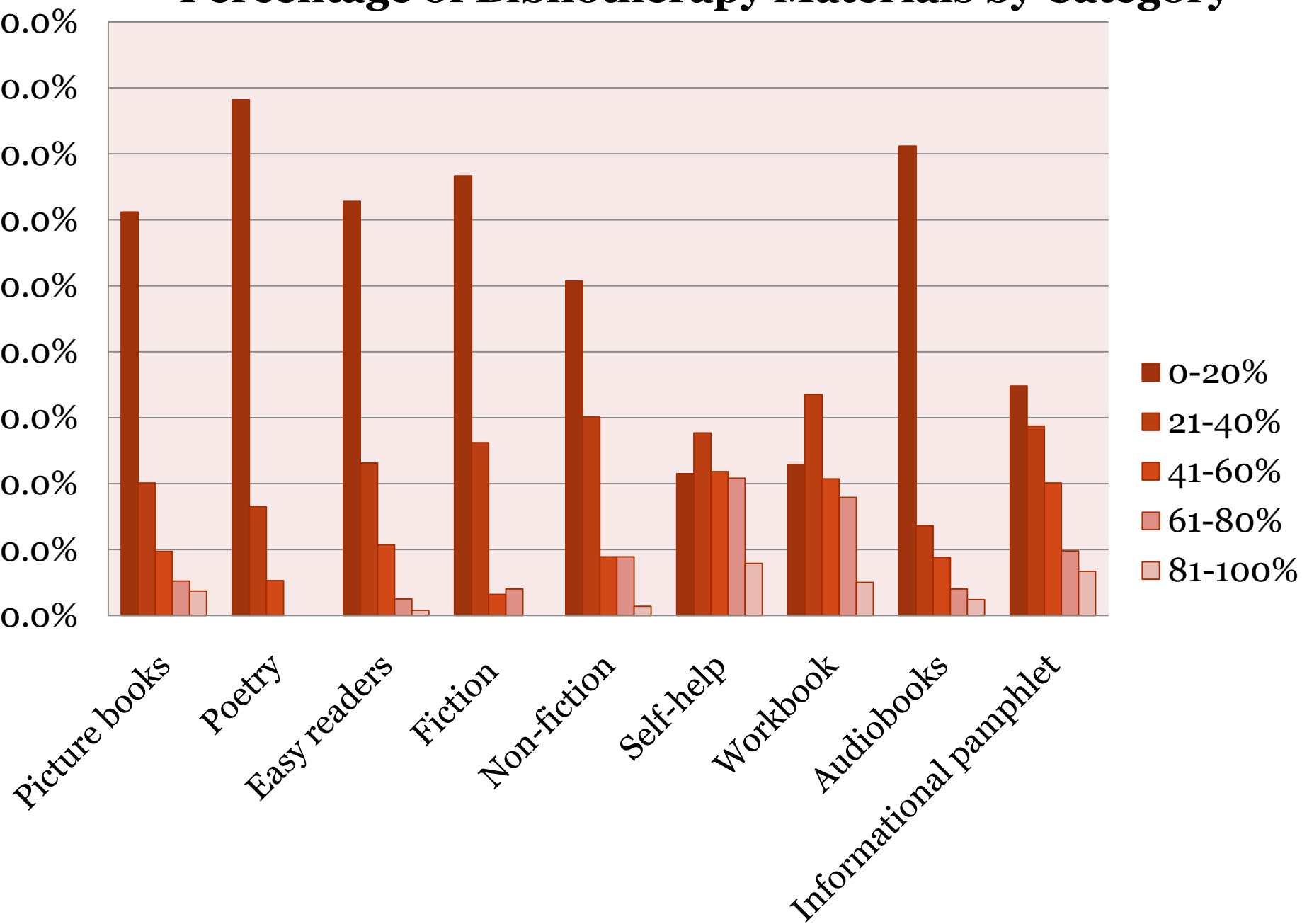
What percentage of your bibliotherapy interventions involve the following activities?



Significant Findings for Activities:

- Most frequently used activities were
 - Reading combined with writing activity
 - Assigning independent reading
 - Reading to or with the client
- Least used activities included
 - Use in classrooms or guidance units
 - Group therapy readings
 - Reading accompanied by art or drama activity

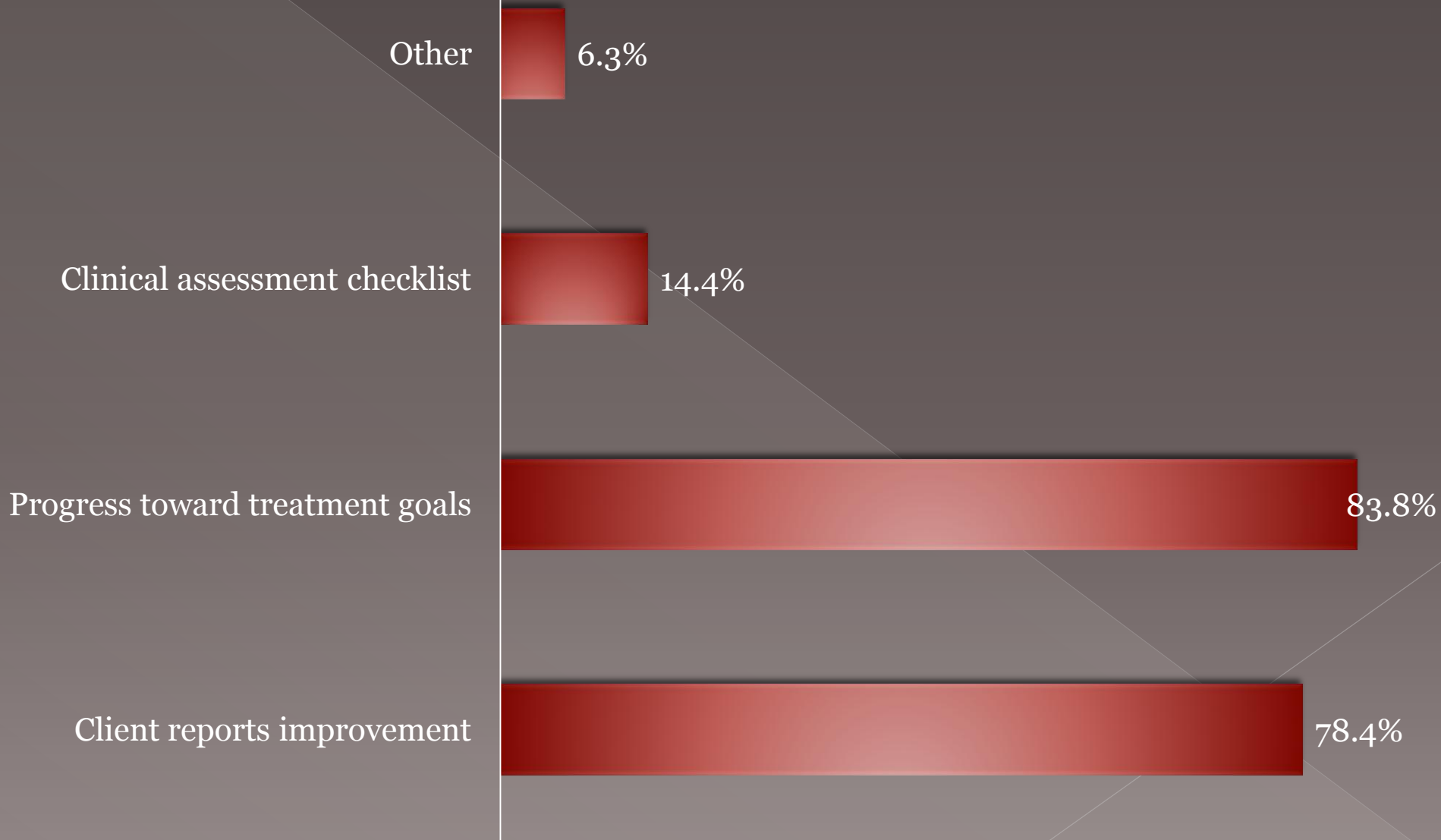
Percentage of Bibliotherapy Materials by Category



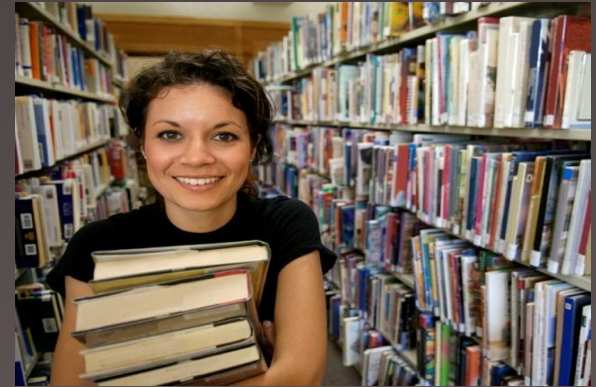
Significant findings for Materials:

- Most commonly used materials for BT were:
 - > Self-help materials or readings
 - > Workbooks
 - > Informational pamphlets
- Least used materials were :
 - > Poetry
 - > Audio books
 - > Fiction
 - > Picture books

How Assess Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy?



Research Limitations



- Getting a viable sample from e-mailing list
- Self-selected respondents
- Those who selected out of survey
- Possible social desirability response bias
- Some possibilities of duplicate reporting within questions (“Other” category)
- Difficult to assess actual preparation that individuals obtained

Survey Surprises

- Limited use of imaginative literatures (e.g., poetry, picture books, fiction)
- Limited intervention approaches (e.g., few use with classroom guidance)
- Some populations/ issues not targeted (e.g., academic issues, children & elders)
- Few rely on librarians as source of recommendations!



Conclusions

- Based on the populations served (adults aged 19-60 years) and the therapeutic orientations (cognitive behavioral, 53%, & solution-focused, 36%) of our sample, it is not surprising that the predominantly used materials are non-fiction (self-help, workbooks, informational pamphlets).
- We believe that fiction & imaginative literature are not adequately recognized or used.

More to do....

- Target practitioners who use creative interventions for comparative survey data
 - Association for Creativity in Mental Health
 - American School Counselor Association
 - Association for Play Therapy
 - Association of Poetry Therapy
- Enhance the evaluation components in Bibliotherapy Evaluation Tool for
 - Non-fiction
 - Informational
 - Self-help books
 - Manualized treatment texts



Implications for Counselor Educators



- ◉ **Counselors do use bibliotherapy as a part of their professional practices**
- ◉ **Their preparation takes place to a large degree as part of academic course work or at workshops**
- ◉ **Many are self taught**
- ◉ **Counselors in training need grounded preparation because this is a common set of therapeutic interventions**

Recommendations for Counselor Preparation

- **Specific bibliotherapy education unit embedded within curriculum that includes:**
 - **Historical practices of bibliotherapy**
 - **Research on effectiveness of bibliotherapy**
 - **Client assessment and treatment planning**
 - **Intervention options and strategies**
 - **How to analyze and select appropriate literature**
 - **How to assess client progress**
 - **Ethical considerations and practice cautions**
 - **How to find therapeutically relevant resources—including calling on the expertise & resources of local libraries (children and adult librarians)**
 - **Emphasize the value of imaginative literature & picture books for bibliotherapeutic applications**

Thank you!

For questions or future communication contact either:

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Bibliotherapy Education Project website:
<http://www.library.unlv.edu/faculty/research/bibliotherapy/>