

Supporting Students with Disabilities in Trades/Technical Programs

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INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Post-secondary education is considered key in terms of competitiveness within the labour market. Students with disabilities have added barriers to completing their post-secondary education, and are seemingly at a disadvantage when compared to their non-disabled peers who do not face the same impediments. Importantly, barriers which are amendable through evaluation and action can be seen to increase the likelihood of student success within their respective programs, and subsequently, their likelihood of successfully transitioning into the labour market at a rate which is comparable to their non-disabled peers.

The Justice Institute of British Columbia, Camosun College and Selkirk College joined together to develop a research approach that they believed would be the best course of action with the one-time grant provided. A two-step mixed-methods approach was proposed by the institutions to better understand the issues/challenges faced by students with disabilities (a faculty/staff interview, and an online student survey), and the possible options available to address those challenges.

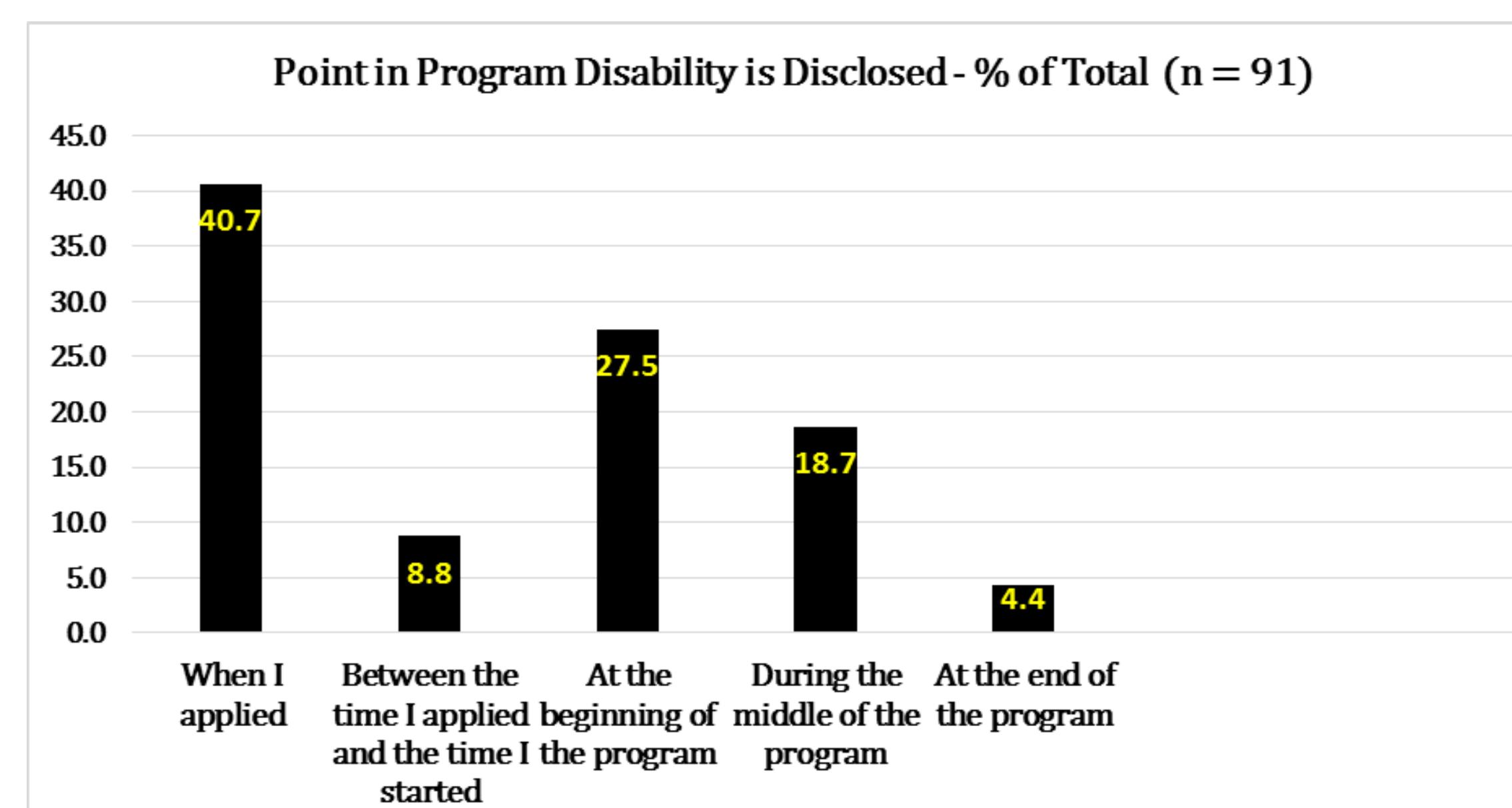
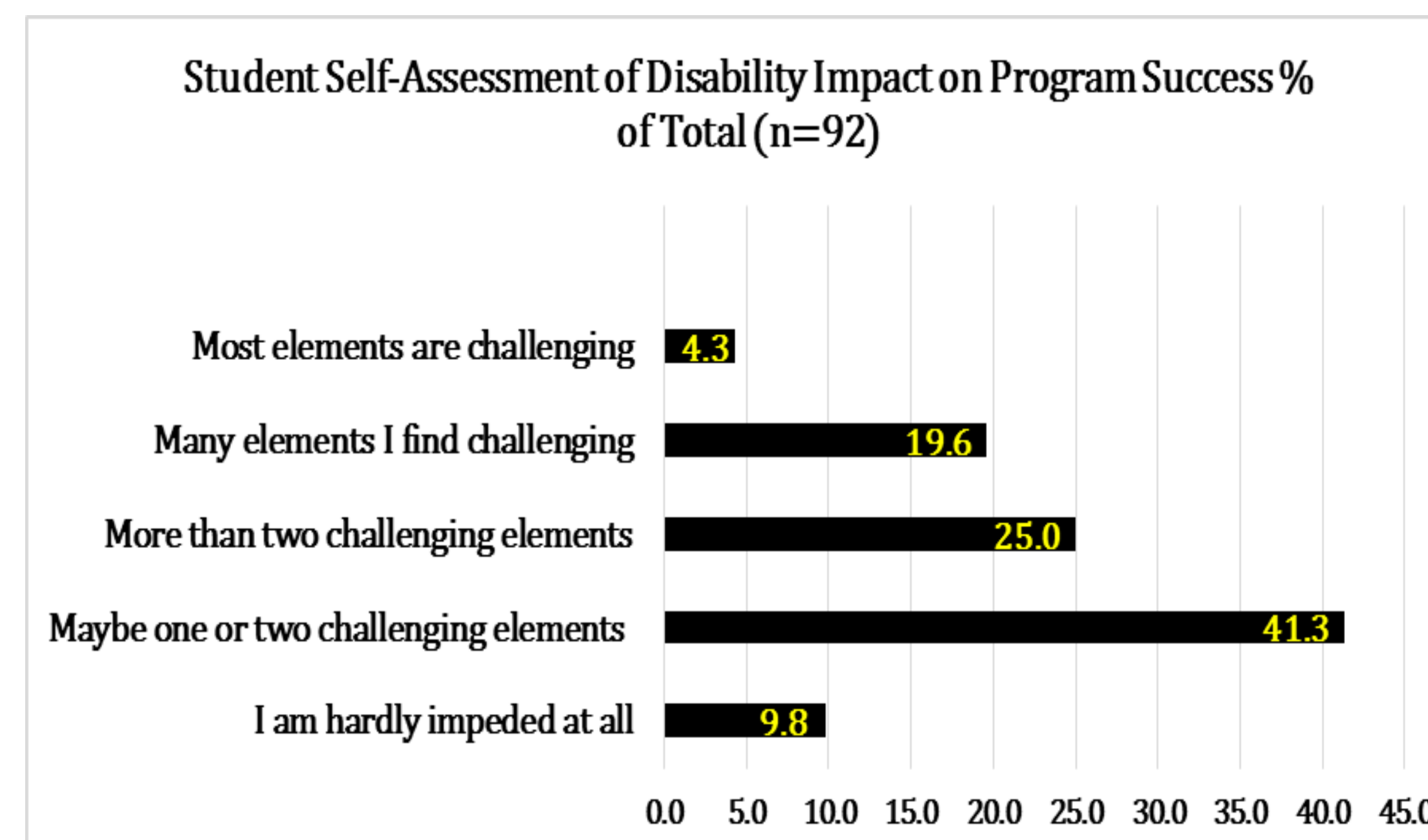
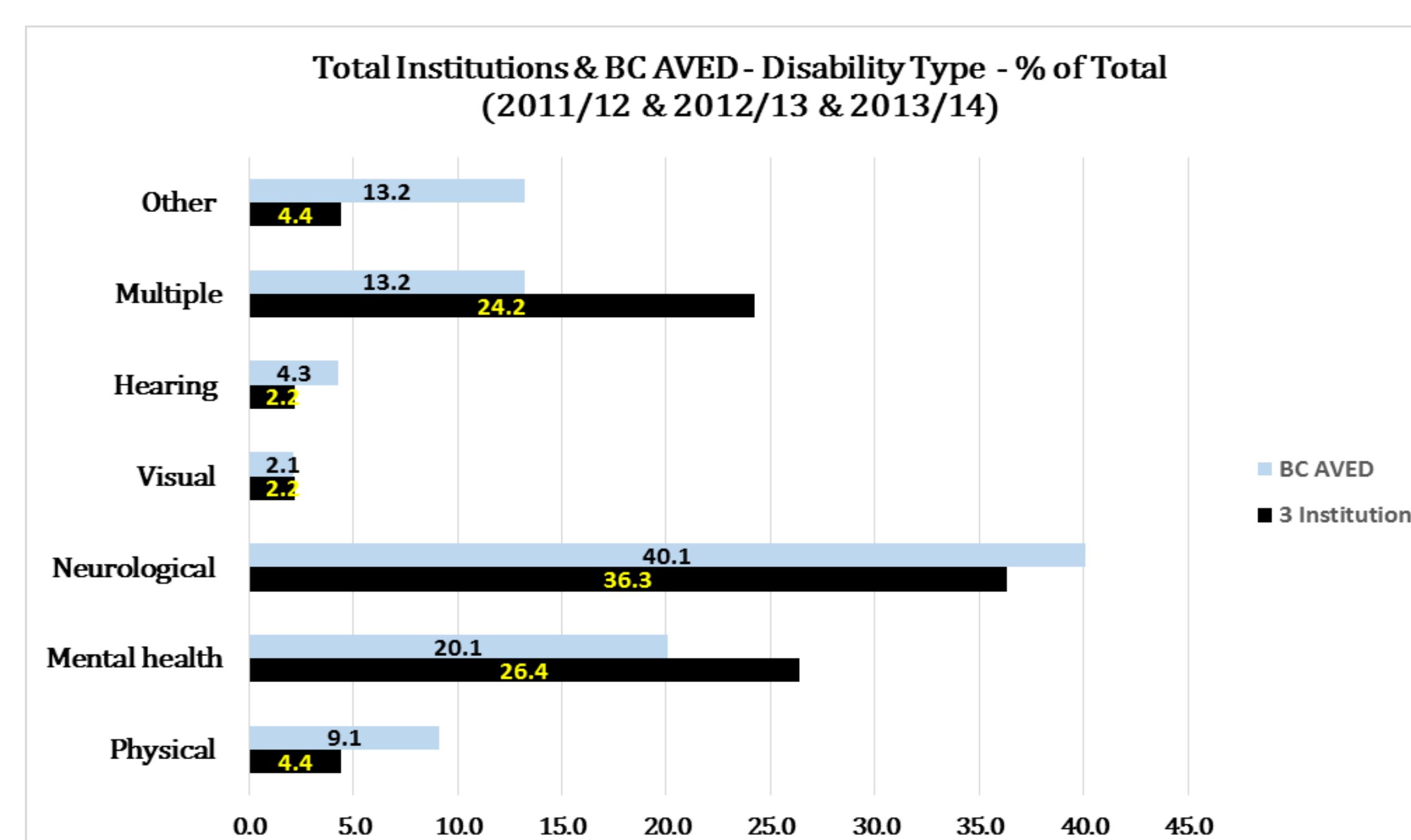
METHODS

A harmonized ethics review which included all three institutions had been completed prior to the project commencement. Guided by the literature, a series of 32 questions were developed that would be asked of the faculty/staff interviewees during an hour and a half (1.5) long in-person, or over-the-phone interview of staff and faculty. The development of the student survey was influenced by both the reviewed literature, and the participating institution's (Camosun College (10), Selkirk College (5) and the Justice Institute of British Columbia (5)) twenty faculty and staff interviewee themed responses. Potential participants included all students registered with the disability resource centre for the academic years 2012, 2013 & 2014 in trades and technical programs – defined by ministry reporting code requirements – classification of instructional program.

RESULTS

Twenty faculty/staff were interviewed in proportions equal to FTE of each participating institution. The results of the student survey produced 92 participants across all three institutions of the 1137 students identified, or provided an 8% response rate. The number of emails that bounced back as undeliverable were 19, and 17 participants started the survey, but ultimately did not complete it. Only one participant requested an alternative over-the-phone method of participating in the survey. The mean age of all student participants was 34 years old.

Sixty percent (60%) of participants were between 17 and 35 years old, and the remaining forty percent (40%) were between the ages of 36 and 65 years old. Gender was equally distributed, with fifty-one percent (51%) male, and forty-nine percent (49%) female. Lastly, a large majority of students, ninety-six (95.7%) had their disability diagnosed by a doctor or specialist.



DISCUSSION

Of the total number of participants (n = 91), the large majority claimed they were aware of the services available to them (91.2%). With respect to a student's sense of satisfaction that they had adequately received what they needed (accommodations and/or supportive services), the majority of students reported that they did (78%). On a scale of satisfaction, students predominantly felt *completely satisfied* with the accommodations that they had received.

When asked about the plan to disclose their disability to an employer, students (n = 91) equally answered yes (36.3%), no (28.6%), and maybe (35.2%). Similar answers resulted from the question of whether or not the student had concerns due to their disability, about entering the workforce. Many students answered yes (54.9%), some maybe (25.3%), and less had no concerns (19.8%). When asked to reflect on what those concerns were 42.4% of students reported that they felt they may not be hired, 40.2% felt concerned about having to ask for accommodations in the workplace, and 37.0% felt concerned about being discriminated against.

The contrast of perspectives between that of the interviewees and the students was relatively minor.

APPLICATION

Five recommendations come as a result of this multi-institutional review of barriers, and gaps in service for students with disabilities. Although, most of the interviewees noted that most students were disclosing their disability after the start of the program, while the student data did not support this observation. Nearly eighty percent (77%) of students disclosed their disability either when they applied, or between the time that they applied and the beginning of the program.

Recommendations

Explore student transition-to-work workshop models for purchase or development & implement.

Review clarity of process for a student to disclose disability & establish accommodations at each institution prior to beginning of program – Explore & implement necessary changes.

Establish mental health resources available & review clarity of mental health resources available to students at each institution.

Explore specialized disability training modules for staff and faculty – Purchase/develop & implement training as mandatory.

Explore informational campaigns targeting non-disabled students – Purchase/develop & implement.