

Oral Health Perception in the LGBTQIA+ Population

Bigham K, Patel K, Miller E and Modesto A

The University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine, Department of Pediatric Dentistry, Pittsburgh, PA



Introduction

The LGBTQIA+ community faces unique oral health challenges. Discomfort in dental settings, often stemming from discrimination, lack of gender-affirming providers, and perceived insensitivity, can lead to avoidance of care and poorer oral health outcomes. This study, conducted at the 412 Youth Zone in Pittsburgh, investigated oral health literacy and perceptions among LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Methodology

Participants completed a survey exploring their oral health knowledge and perceptions, with questions covering topics like dental hygiene habits and perceived barriers to care. This was followed by an educational intervention in the form of a recorded presentation, after which participants completed the same survey again.

Results

29 of the estimated 30 individuals within the 412 Youth Zone participated in this study. Respondents ranged from ages 18 to 26. The majority of respondents were ages 21 – 23. 41.4% of respondents identified as cis male, 41.4% as cis female, 3.4% as trans male, 3.4% as trans female and 6.9% as non-binary. 3.4% of respondents chose to not disclose their gender identity. 55.2% of respondents identified as heterosexual, 13.8% as homosexual, 20.7% as bisexual and 3.4% as questioning. 6.9% of respondents chose to not disclose their sexual identity.

Surprisingly, LGBTQIA+ participants were less likely to acknowledge barriers to healthcare access, despite existing evidence. This may be due to internalized stigma, fear of discrimination, or social desirability bias. However, LGBTQIA+ individuals demonstrated higher oral health literacy, possibly due to increased health consciousness within their community and a greater reliance on shared health information. These findings suggests that, while aware of the importance of oral health, LGBTQIA+ individuals may face unique psychological and social barriers to receiving care.

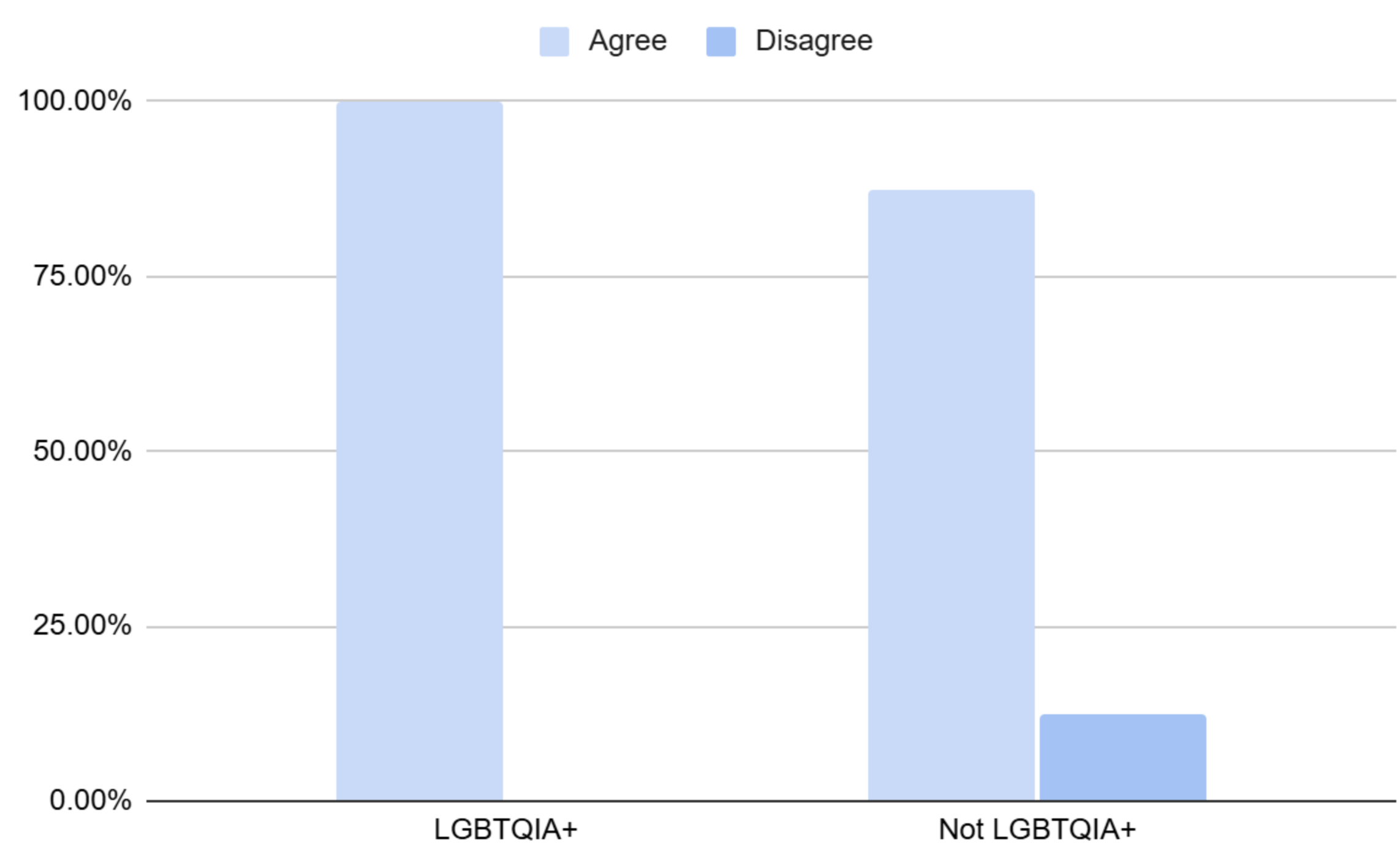


Figure 1: Dental care is a necessity and affect's one's overall health and quality of life.

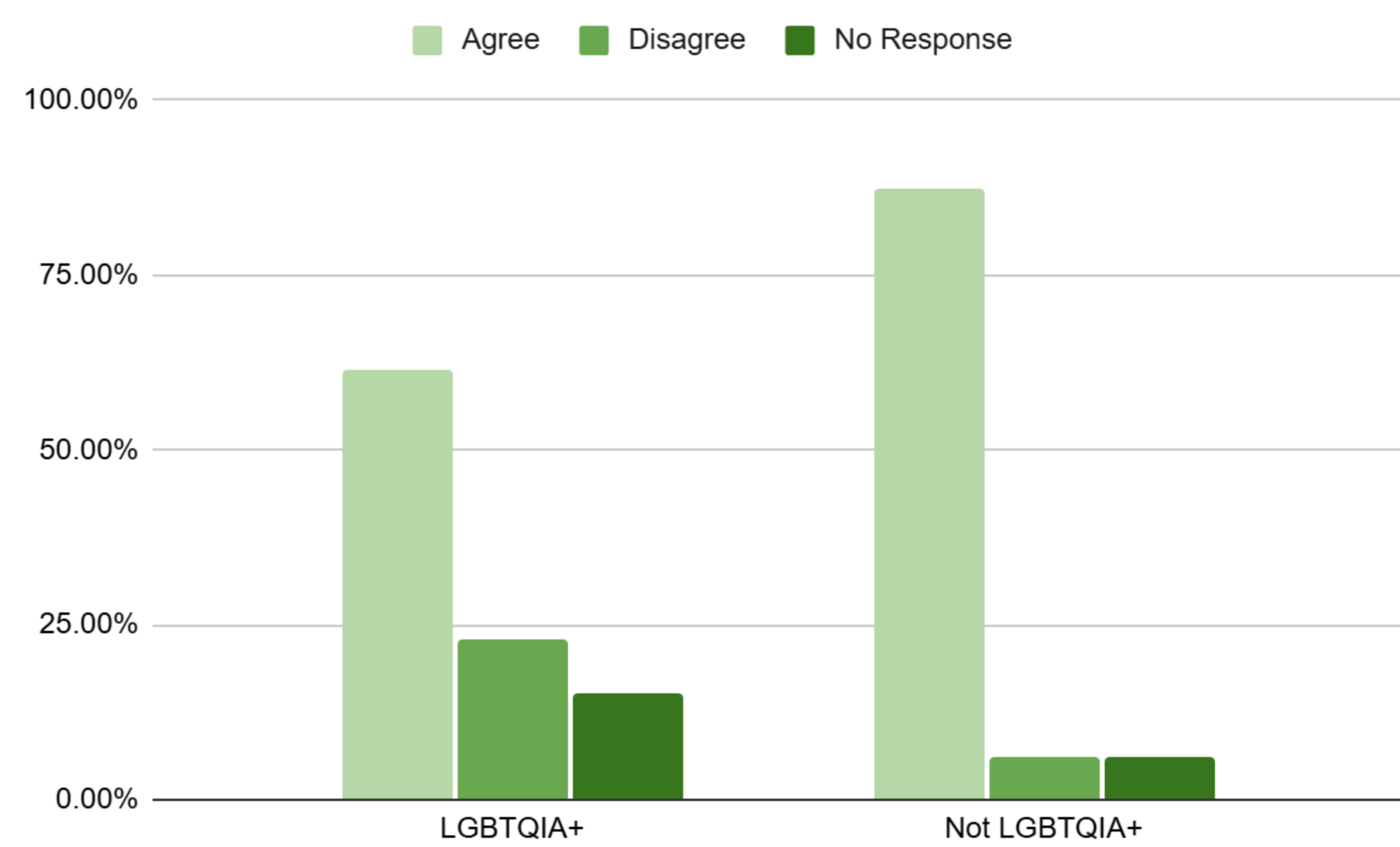


Figure 2: People in the LGBTQIA+ community have additional obstacles to accessing healthcare.

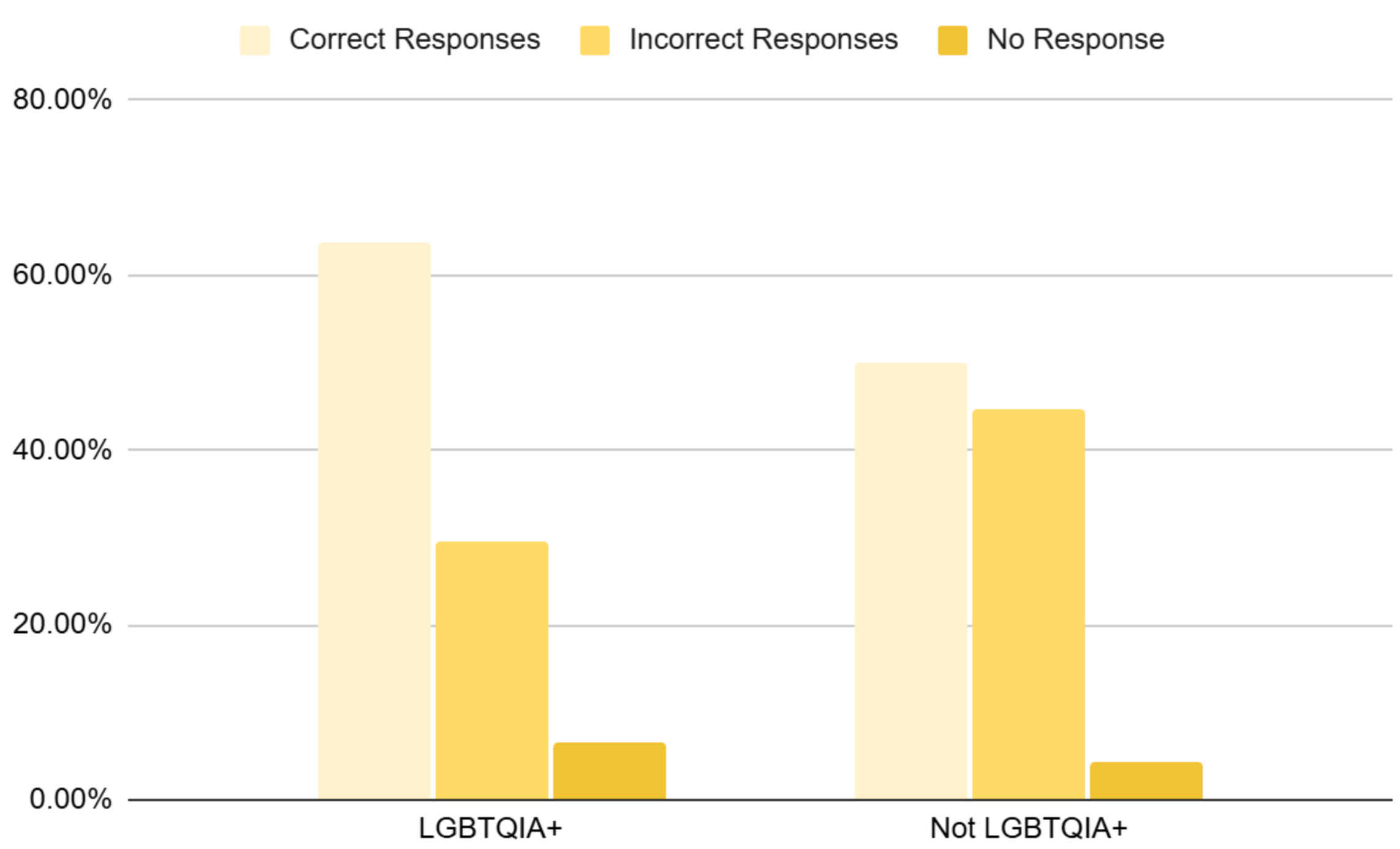


Figure 3: Oral Health Literacy

Conclusions

Further research is needed to fully understand these complex findings, as the LGBTQIA+ community is diverse, with individuals holding varied experiences and perspectives. This study highlights the need for increased inclusivity in dental settings, including provider training on cultural sensitivity and LGBTQIA+ health concerns. Additionally, targeted interventions may be needed to address the specific barriers faced by this population, ultimately promoting equitable access to oral healthcare for all.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Auberle 412 Youth Zone. They have welcomed us as we volunteer to teach about oral health and offer oral healthcare kits to the youth that utilize this safe-haven.

Future Recommendations

This project represents an ongoing collaboration with the 412 Youth Zone. Those within the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine that are passionate about this work will continue to visit the organization to provide interactive oral health education and identify barriers to care. We aim to increase sample size to better understand this population's specific oral health needs. This initiative seeks to empower youth to take control of their oral health and advocate for their own needs, ultimately contributing to the development of a sustainable oral health program that addresses the unique needs of this community.

Resources

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