

Mental Health and Workshops during COVID-19 Summary

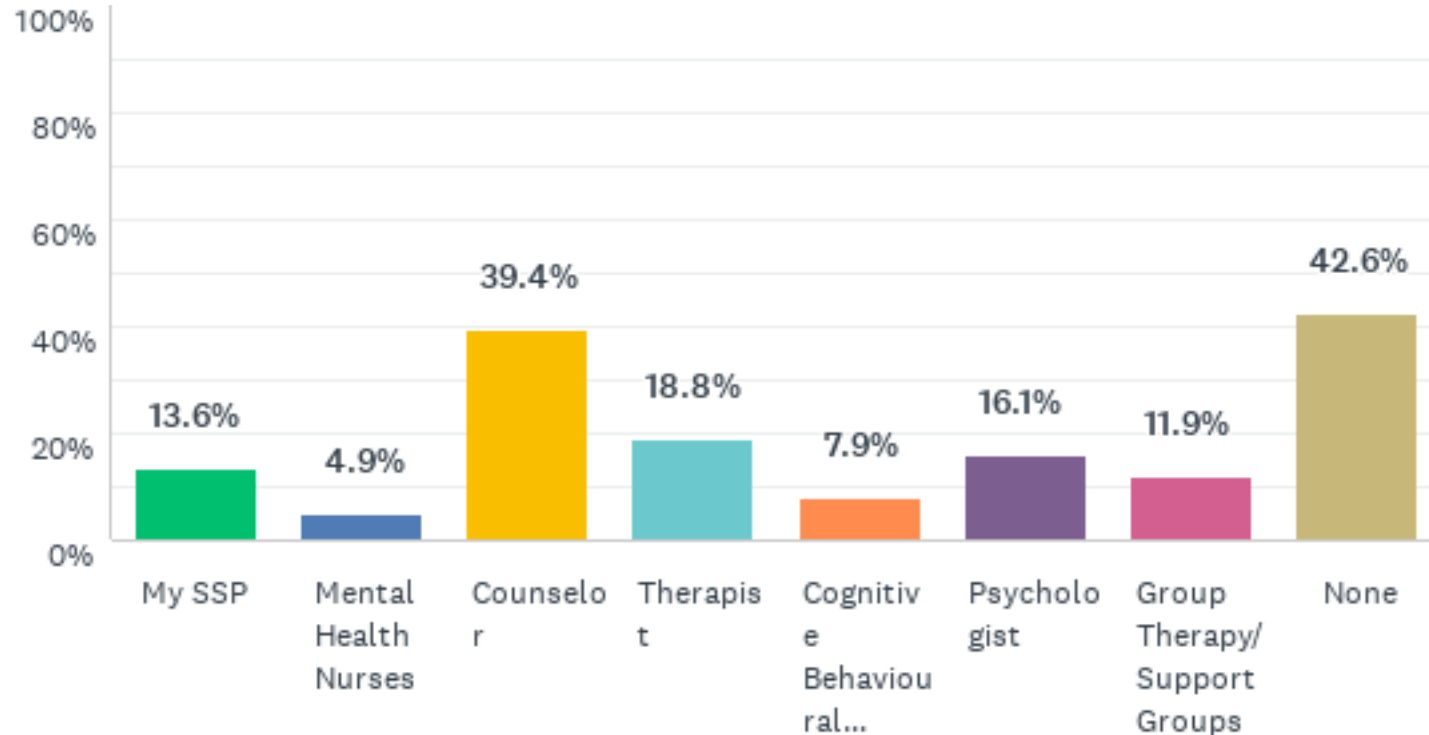
Prepared by Alexi Pauls
GSS COVID-19 Task Force

Survey Details

- Online survey ran from November 10th to December 4th, 2020. The survey was promoted in the GSS Newsletter, GSS Council and through department emails
- Participation was voluntary, but respondents could enter a draw for 5 prizes of \$50 each.
- A total of 573 students responded to the survey with 509 fully complete responses (no skipped questions)
- The goal of this survey was to collect data on graduate students' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic
- A specific end goal of this survey was to create workshops in collaboration with SFU Health and Counselling Services to meet graduate students' specific needs

Overall Mental Health and COVID-19

Q1: What mental health resources have you previously used?

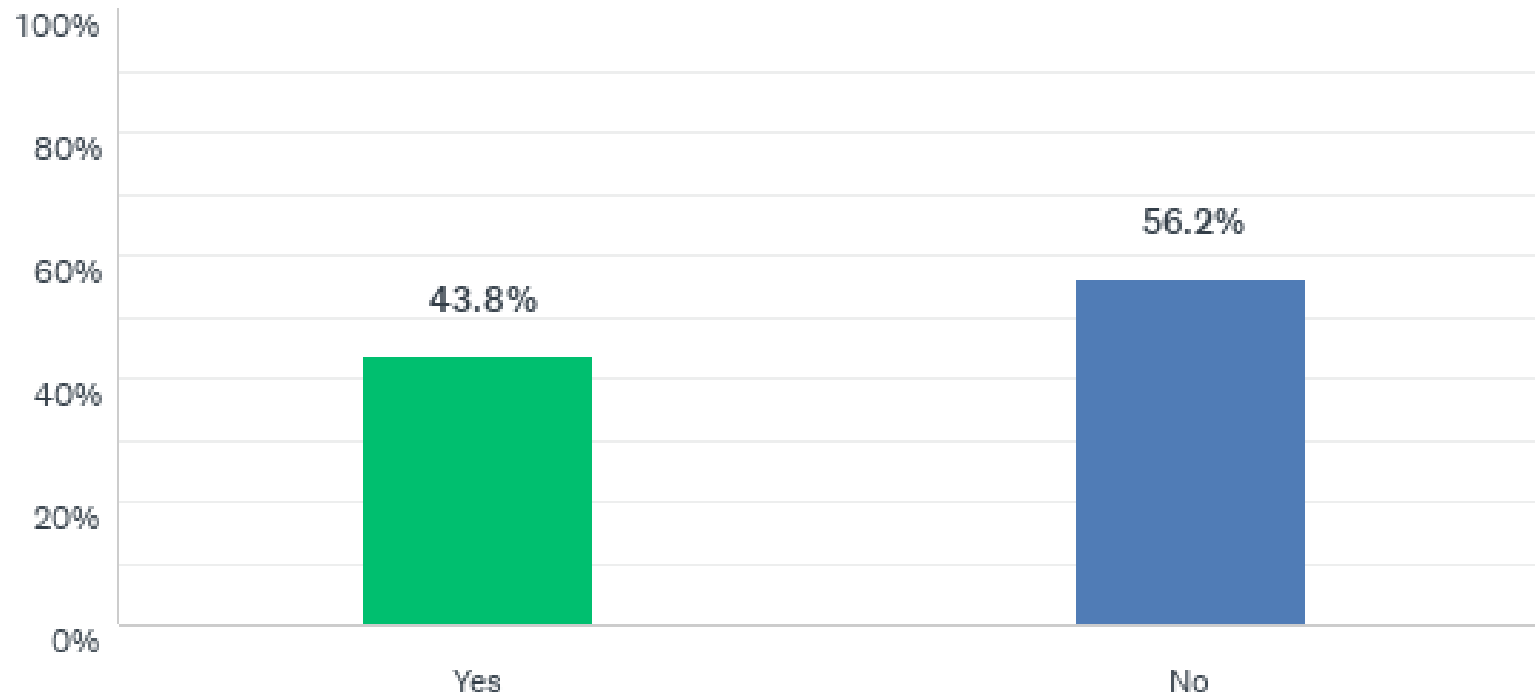


Additional Comments:

- Other forms of therapy such as EMDR, somatic and dialectical behavioural therapy (3)
- Other healthcare providers such as medical doctors, naturopaths and psychiatrists (14)
- Medications such as anti-depressants or anti-anxiety (3)
- Other phone apps (3)

Answer Choices	Responses	
My SSP	13.61%	78
Mental Health Nurses	4.89%	28
Counselor	39.44%	226
Therapist	18.85%	108
Cognitive Behavioural Therapist	7.85%	45
Psychologist	16.06%	92
Group Therapy/Support Groups	11.87%	68
None	42.58%	244
Other (please specify)		31
	Answered	573
	Skipped	0

Q2: Has confusion about what services are offered and/or covered by your health care held you back from receiving mental health treatment/support?

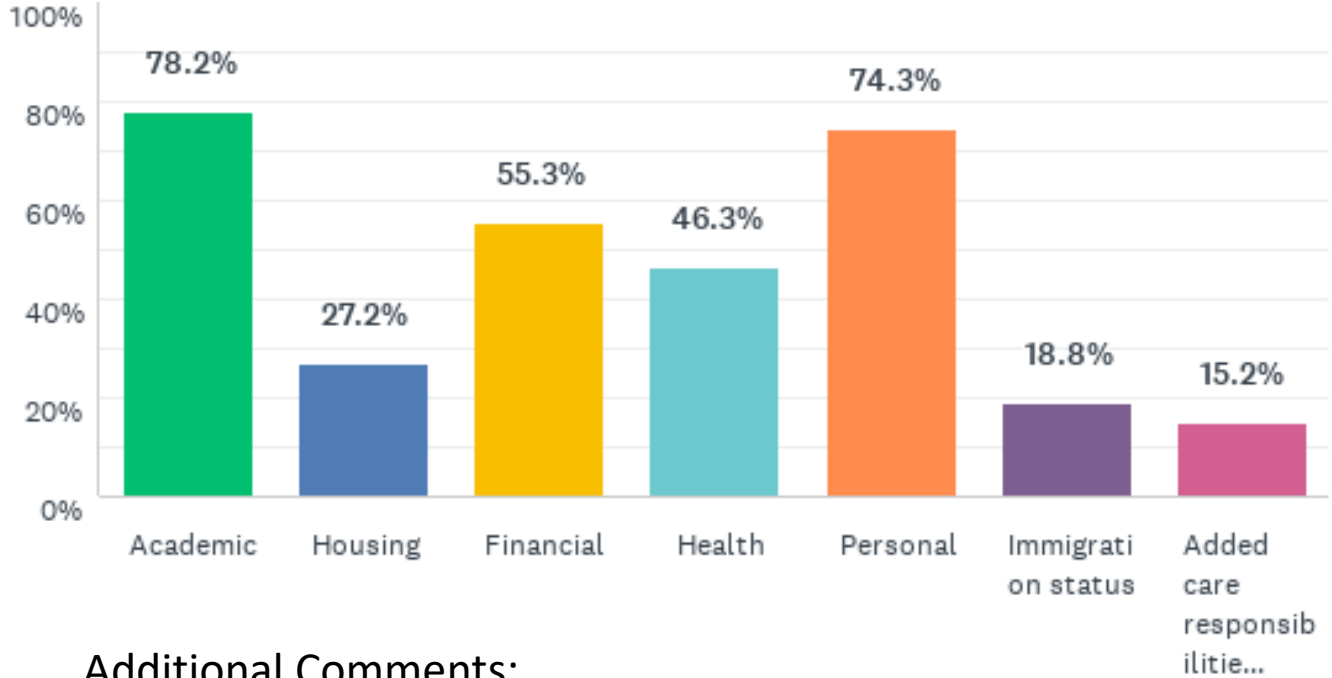


Additional Comments:

- Not located in Canada and this has prevented treatment (1)
- Unclear about the GSS Benefit Plan and so using external insurance to receive treatment (1)
- Hours/availability has prevented treatment (2)

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	43.78%	243
No	56.22%	312
Other (please specify)		11
	Answered	555
	Skipped	18

Q3: Which of the following have issues have impacted your mental health during the pandemic? Select all that apply

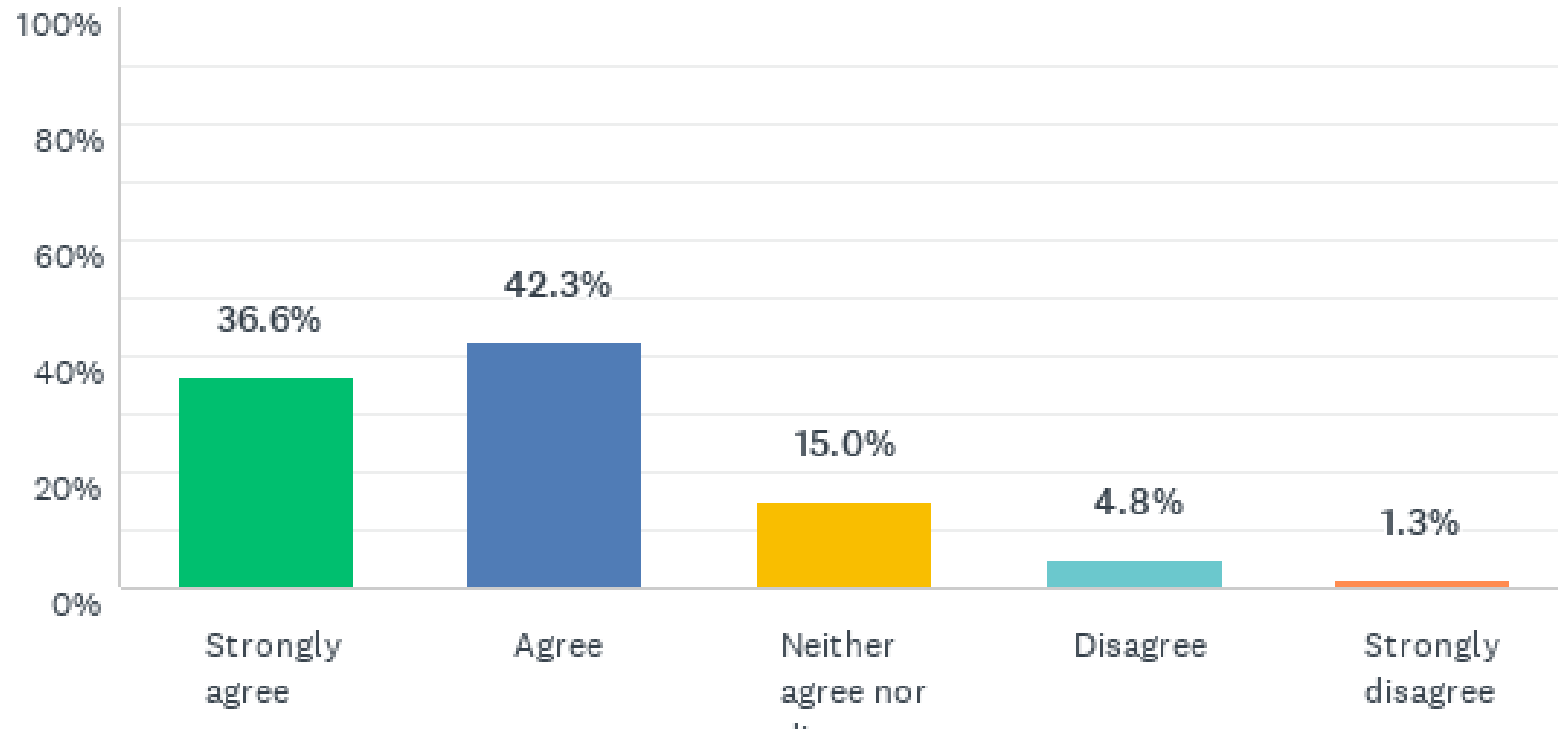


Answer Choices	Responses
Academic	78.24% 41
Housing	27.20% 14
Financial	55.35% 29
Health	46.34% 24
Personal	74.30% 39
Immigration status	18.76% 7
Added care responsibilities (childcare, dependents etc.)	15.20% 10
Other (please specify)	54
	53
	Answered 3
	Skipped 40

Additional Comments:

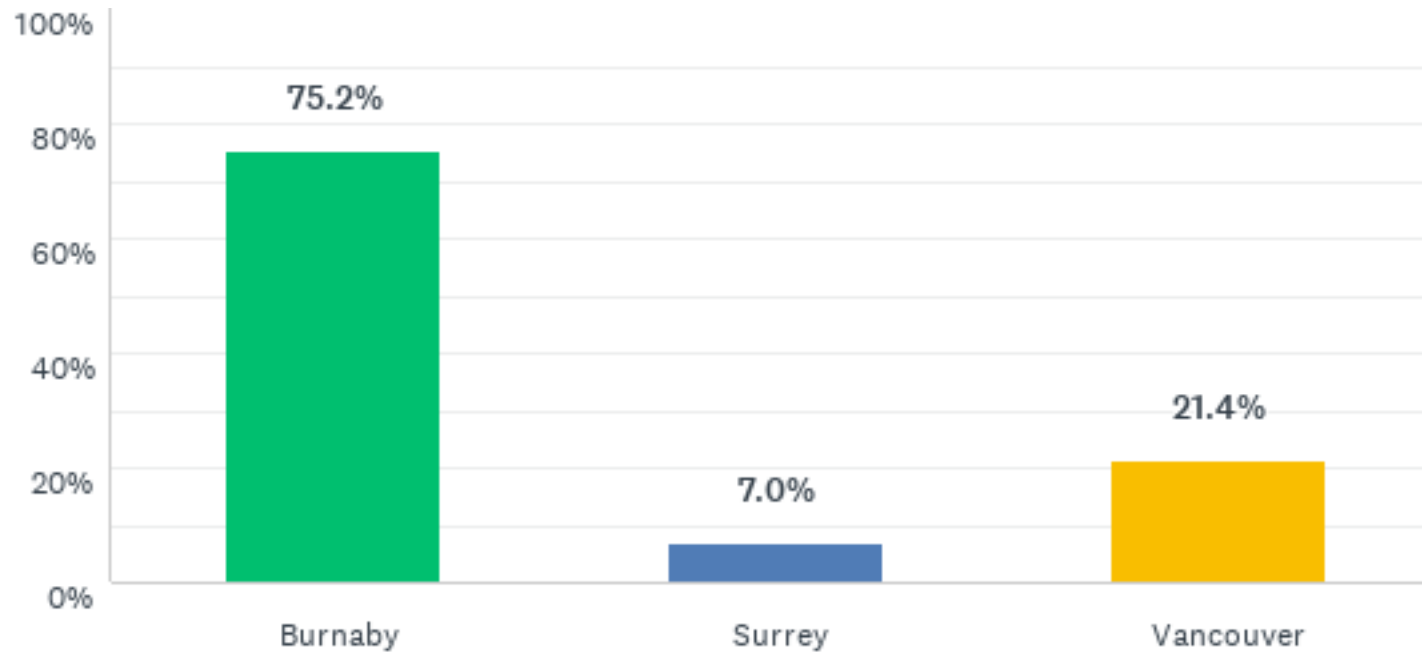
- Working from home (14)
- News/state of the world (8)
- Isolation from family (6)
- Work stress or added work responsibilities (5)
- Anxiety about the future (job prospects, COVID uncertainty) (4)
- Access to mental health treatments, financial stress causing cancellation of treatments or lack of in-person mental health treatment (2)

Q4: My mental health has been worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic



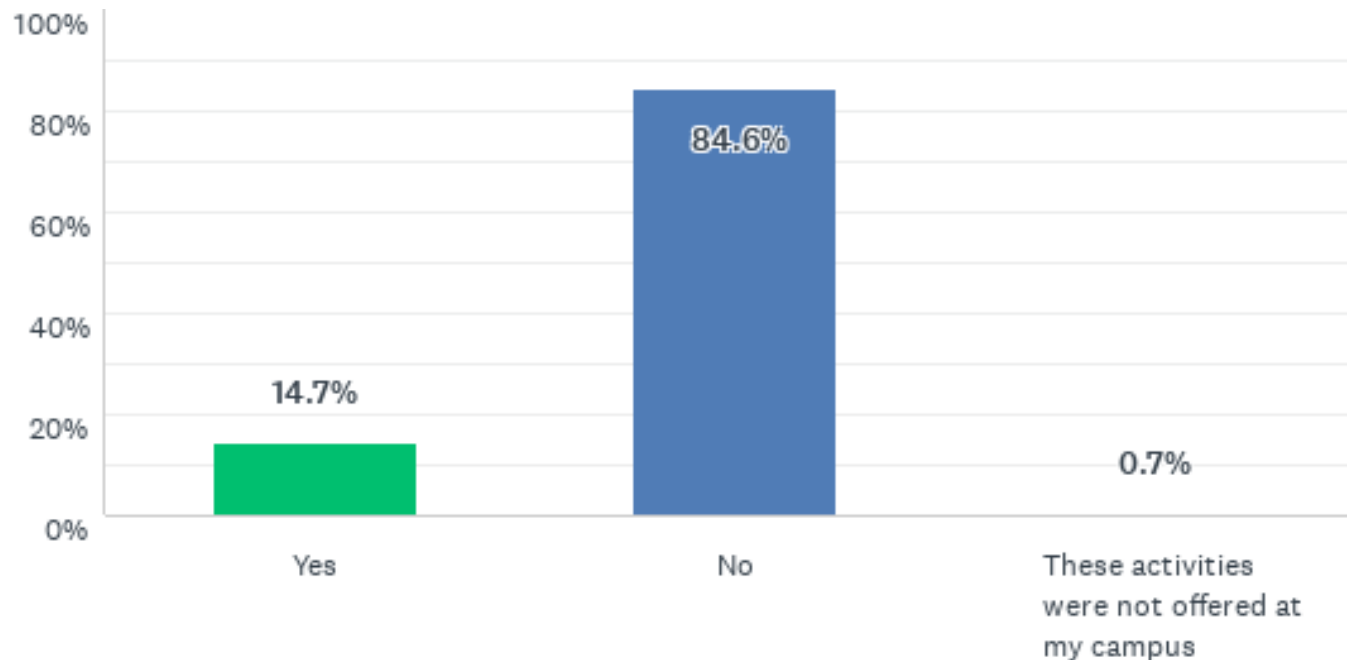
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	36.63%	200
Agree	42.31%	231
Neither agree nor disagree	15.02%	82
Disagree	4.76%	26
Strongly disagree	1.28%	7
Answered		546
Skipped		27

Q5: Which campus are you based out of? If this is your first semester and you are primarily online at the moment, which campus do you expect to be based out of? Select all that apply.



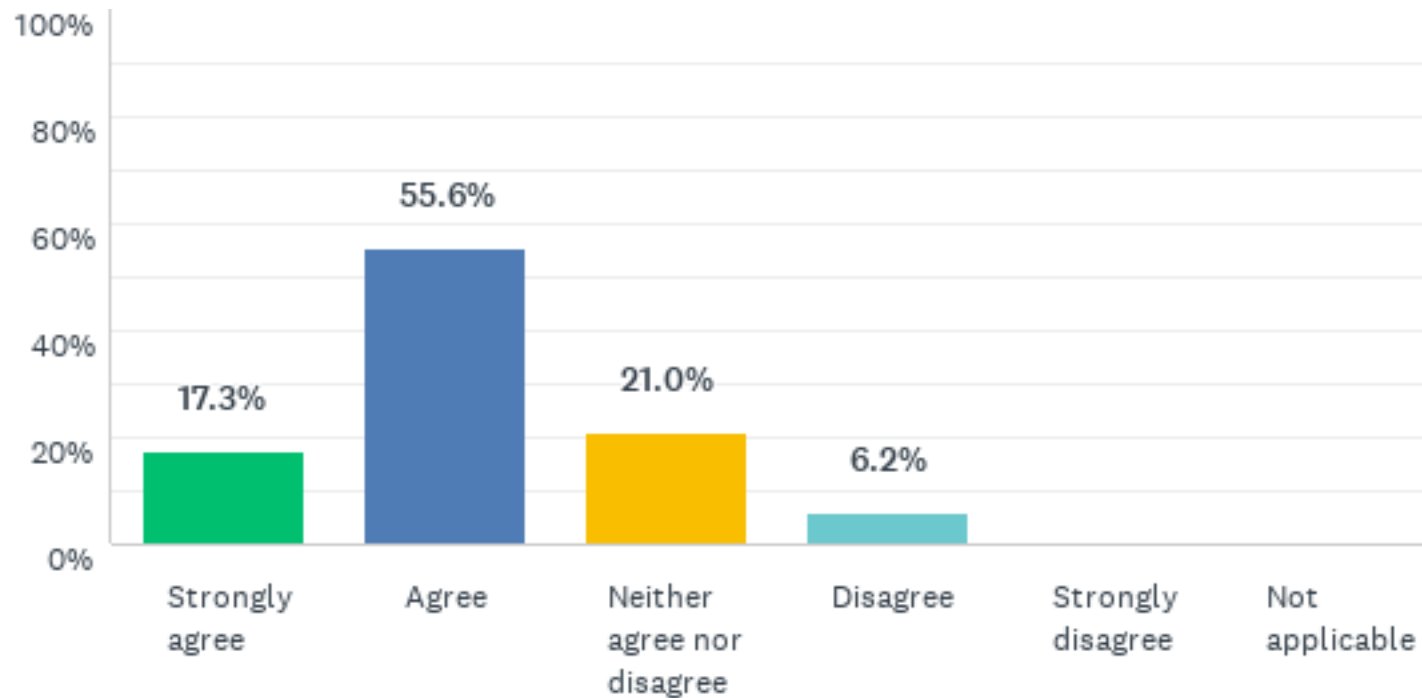
Answer Choices	Responses	
Burnaby	75.23%	407
Surrey	7.02%	38
Vancouver	21.44%	116
Answered		541
Skipped		32

Q6: Have you participated in any of the mental wellbeing activities offered by SFU Health and Counselling prior to COVID-19? Such as mindful meditation, yoga for the mind etc.



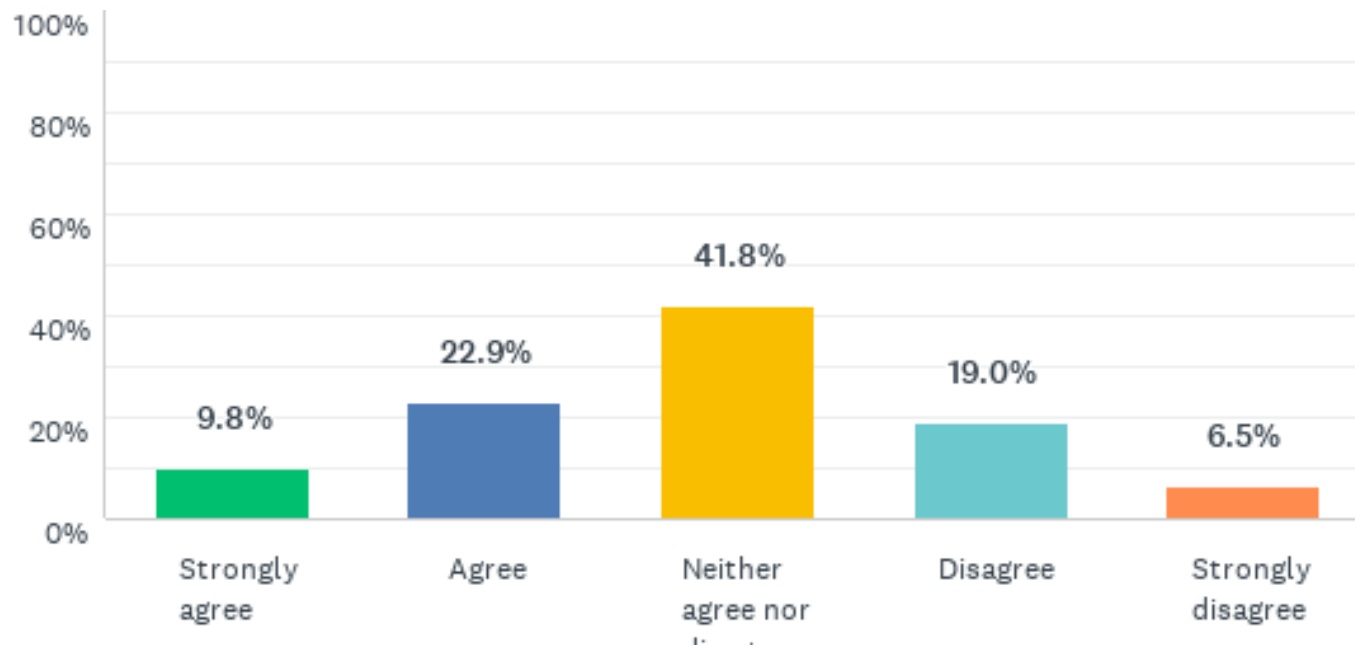
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	14.71% 80
No	84.56% 460
These activities were not offered at my campus	0.74% 4
Answered	544
Skipped	29

Q7: I found these mental well-being activities offered by Health and Counselling beneficial



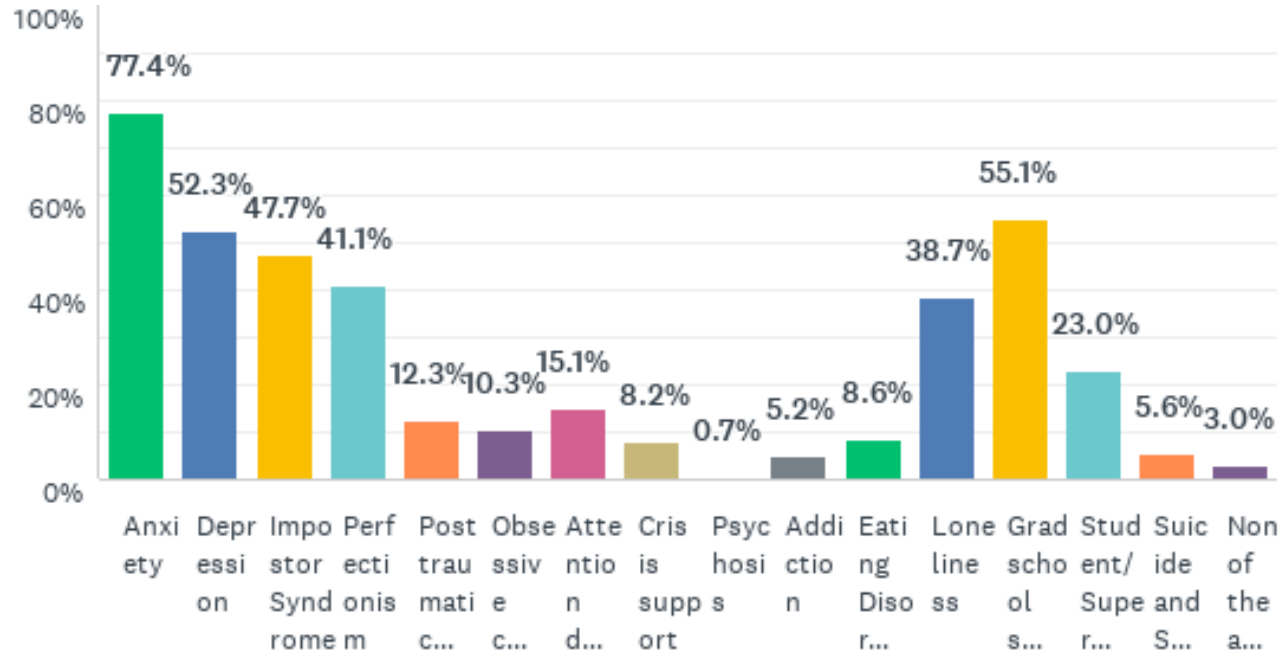
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	17.28%	14
Agree	55.56%	45
Neither agree nor disagree	20.99%	17
Disagree	6.17%	5
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Not applicable	0.00%	0
Answered		81
Skipped		492

Q8: The lack of in person treatment options, such as mental wellbeing activities (mindful meditation, yoga for the mind, wellbeing activities off-campus etc.), therapy, or other activities that may have been cancelled or postponed has negatively impacted my mental health



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	9.80%	53
Agree	22.92%	124
Neither agree nor disagree	41.77%	226
Disagree	19.04%	103
Strongly disagree	6.47%	35
Answered		541
Skipped		32

Q9: What topics do you feel you could use mental health support for? Select all that apply



Additional Comments:

- Relationship support and family therapy (8)
- Academia supports (separation of school/work from life, what is normal to feel during a PhD, loss of networking opportunities due to COVID, coping with systemic problems in academia) (6)
- Feeling overwhelmed, stress and anxiety (5)

Answer Choices	Responses
Anxiety	41
Depression	28
Impostor Syndrome	25
Perfectionism	5
Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	22
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	0
Attention deficit disorder (ADD)/Attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)	66
Crisis support	55
Psychosis	15.14%
Addiction	81
Eating Disorders	44
Loneliness	8.22%
Grad school support	4
Student/Supervisor relationship	28
Suicide and Suicide Prevention	20
None of the above	8.60%
Other (please specify)	7
	29
	5
	12
	3
	30
	16
	38

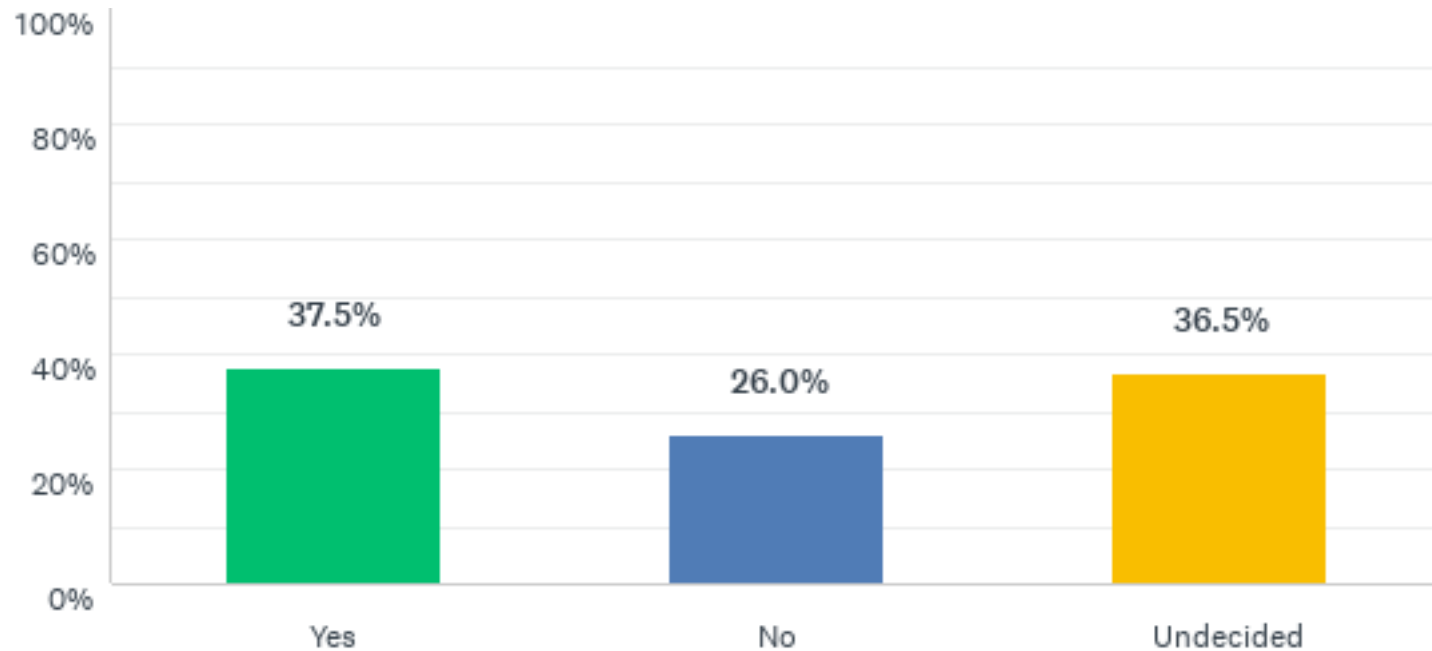
Answered 53
Skipped 38

Summary for Overall Mental Health

- Graduate students are seeking mental health support mainly from counsellors, however 42.6% have not used mental health resources
- 43.8% said that confusion about mental health services has held them back from receiving support
- Overall graduate students' mental health has worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic (78.9% agree or strongly agree), mainly due to academic, personal and financial matters
- Most (84.6%) have not participated in SFU HCS well-being programs prior to COVID-19, but those that did participate found these activities beneficial (72.9% agree or strongly agree)
- Graduate students felt they could use mental health support most strongly for anxiety, depression, grad school support and loneliness

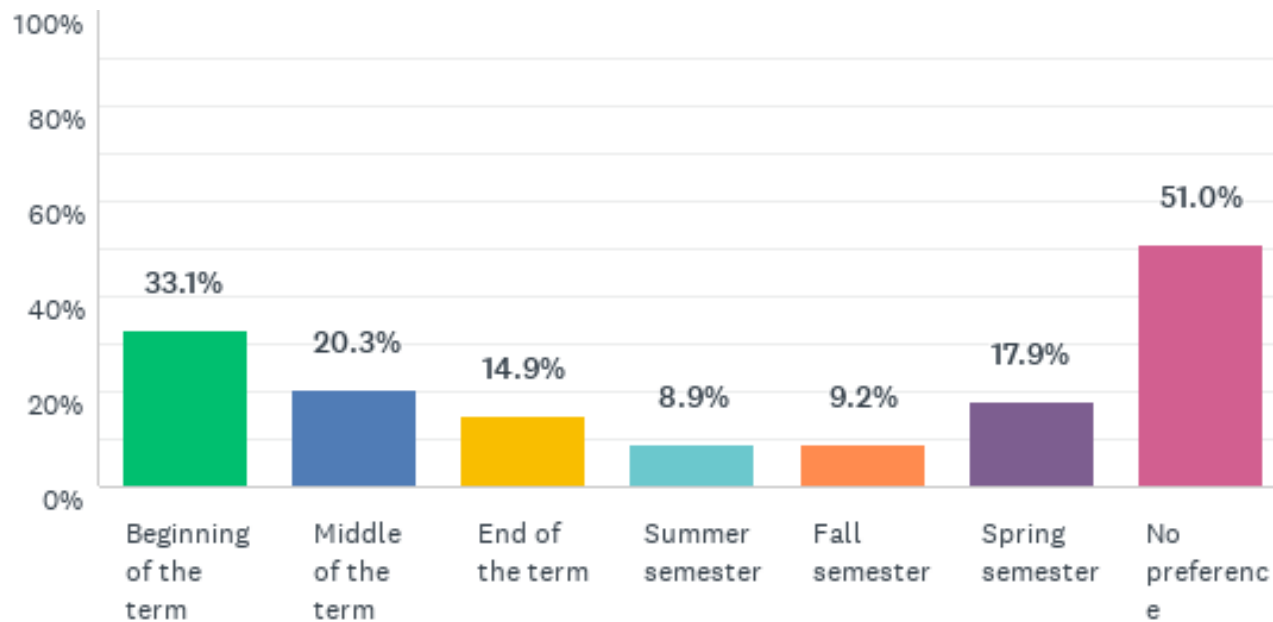
Mental Health Workshop

Q10: Are you interested in attending mental health workshops (either over Zoom or in person COVID-19 permitting)?



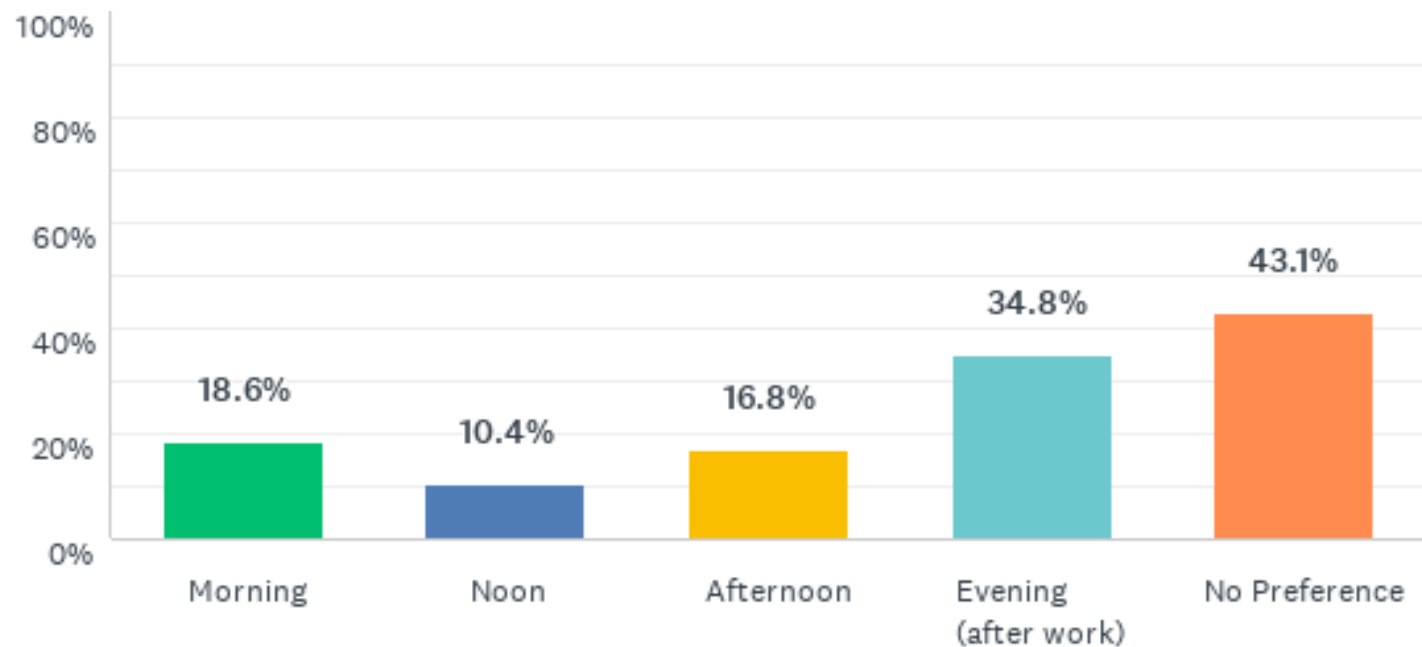
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	37.45%	200
No	26.03%	139
Undecided	36.52%	195
Answered		534
Skipped		39

Q11: When would be a good time to attend these workshops? Select all that apply



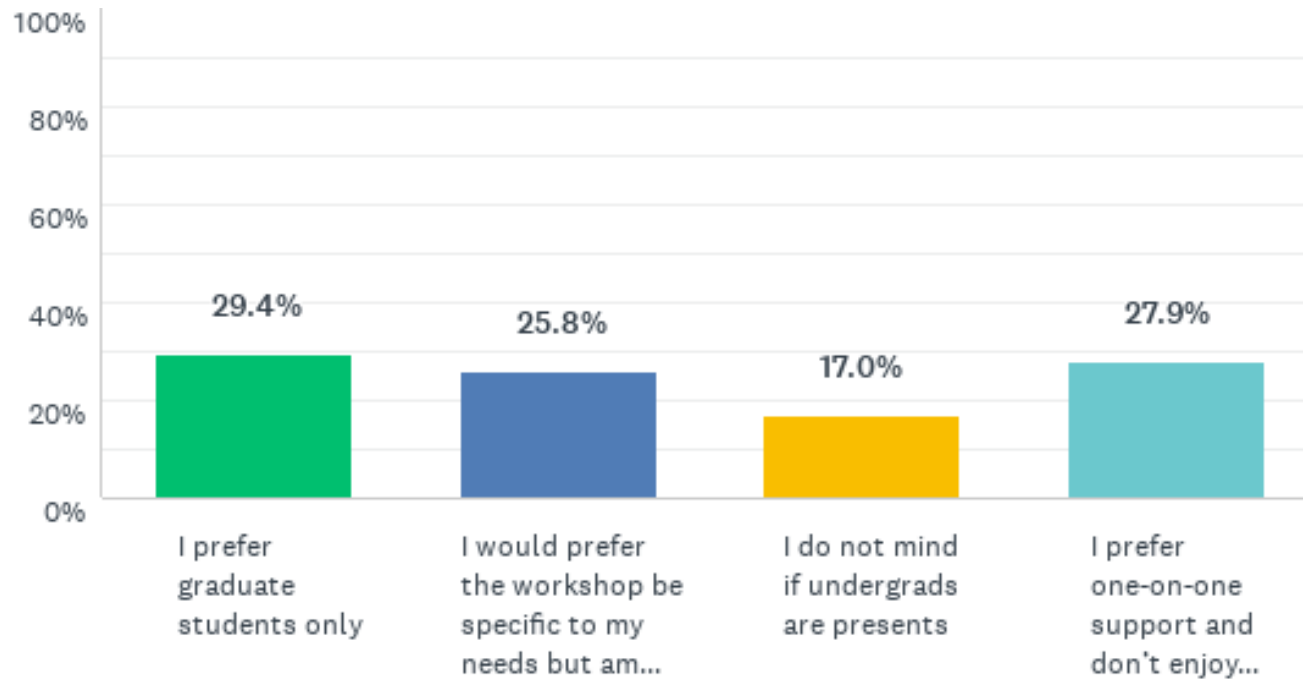
Answer Choices	Responses	
Beginning of the term	33.15%	176
Middle of the term	20.34%	108
End of the term	14.88%	79
Summer semester	8.85%	47
Fall semester	9.23%	49
Spring semester	17.89%	95
No preference	51.04%	271
Answered		531
Skipped		42

Q12: Do you have a preference for the time of day for the workshop?



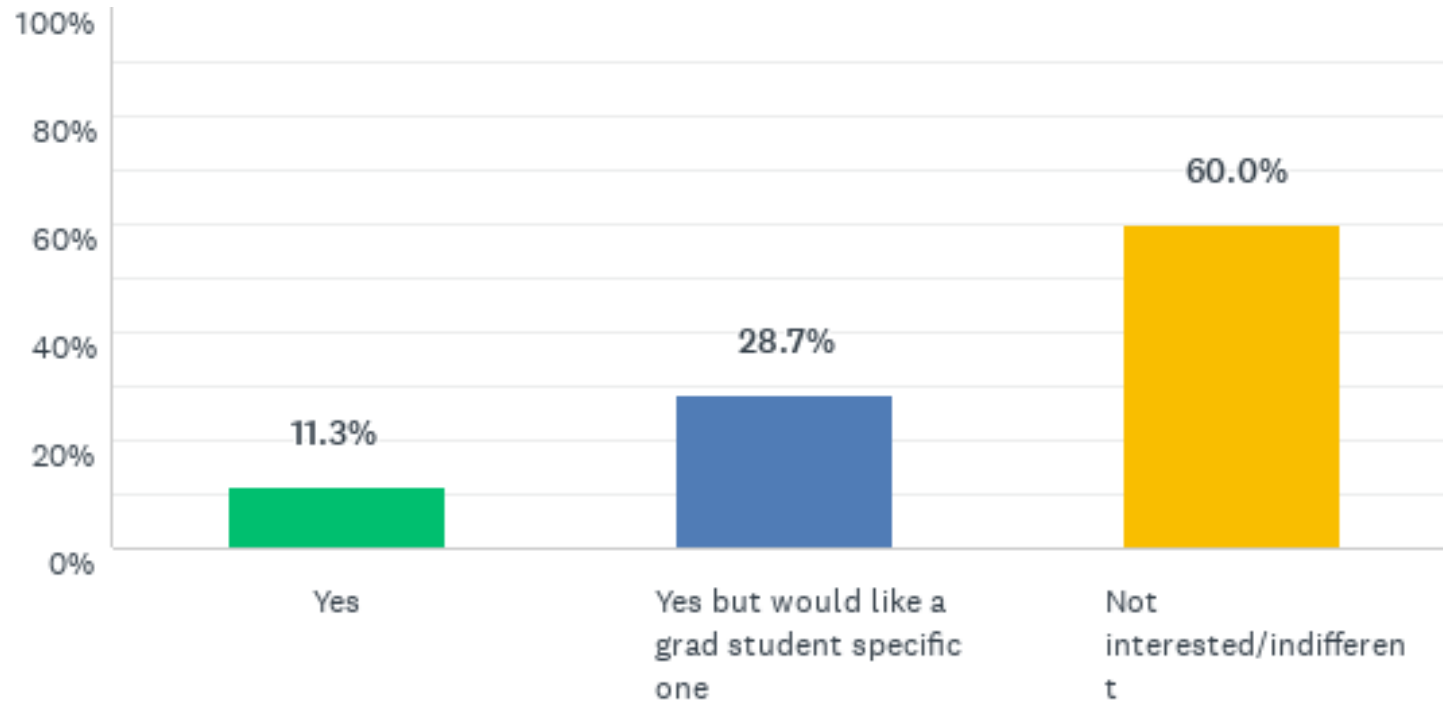
Answer Choices	Responses	
Morning	18.64%	99
Noon	10.36%	55
Afternoon	16.76%	89
Evening (after work)	34.84%	185
No Preference	43.13%	229
Answered		531
Skipped		42

Q13: How do you feel about attending group workshops with undergraduate students present?



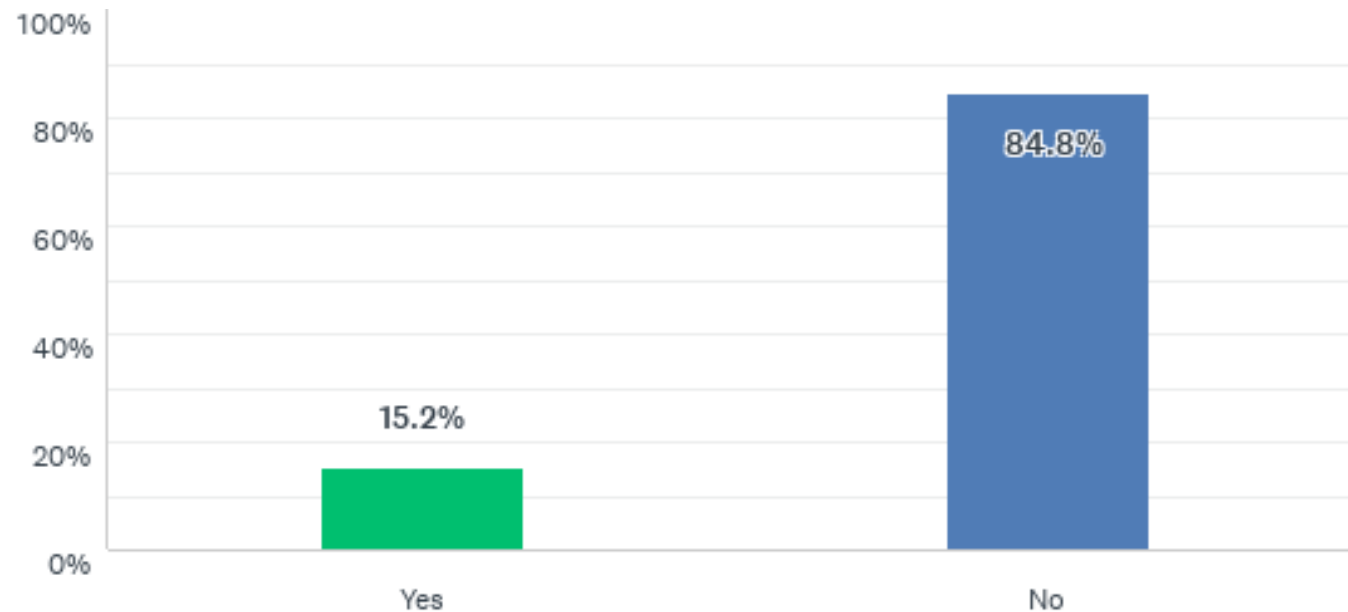
Answer Choices	Responses
I prefer graduate students only	15 29.39% 4
I would prefer the workshop be specific to my needs but am comfortable if undergrads are presents	13 25.76% 5
I do not mind if undergrads are presents	16.98% 89
I prefer one-on-one support and don't enjoy workshop formats	14 27.86% 6
Other (please specify)	12
	52
	Answered 4
	Skipped 49

Q14: Health and counselling have hosted a “COVID-19 Emotional Support Group” for summer term, would you be interested in this continuing?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	11.30% 59
Yes but would like a grad student specific one	28.74% 0
Not interested/indifferent	59.96% 31
	52
	Answered 2
	Skipped 51

Q15: Have you attended any previously held workshops through Health and Counselling?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	15.16%	79
No	84.84%	442
Answered		521
Skipped		52

Q16: Is there a particular reason why you haven't attended any of the offered workshops? (Optional)

Question was available for those that answered “no” to Q15 and gave a total of 232 answers.

Common Themes From Written Responses:

Answered	232
Skipped	341

- **Unaware of these resources (55)**
- **Time didn't match schedule/ too busy, time zone conflicts (42)**
- **Prefer one on one or not comfortable speaking in a group setting, not wanting to speak about personal issues to strangers, don't like workshop format (32)**
- New grad student, been remote for degree so far (20)
- Too much time on Zoom (10)
- Felt like the workshop would be a lot of generic unhelpful advice (10)
- Distrust in university management of mental health or in Health and Counselling, university won't address systemic issues that are causing negative mental health outcomes for students (9)
- Workshop currently offered do not meet specific needs (6)
- Concerns about being unable to remain fully anonymous over Zoom (suggestion to have no name and no camera on during the workshop) (3)
- Don't want to be in a workshop with their students or other undergrads (2)
- Transphobia (afraid of being judged as a trans-student) (1)

Q17: What did you like and/or dislike about the workshop?

Question was available for those that answered “yes” to Q15 and gave a total of 57 responses

Answered	57
Skipped	516

Common Themes from Written Responses:

Positive feedback:

- **Great presenters and presentation/content (10)**
- Helped understanding challenges and how to approach them, learnt relevant info (7)
- Positive feedback for the grad student specific workshops, allows students to relate to their peers in common situations (4)
- Small group was best/department level workshops (3)
- Positive feedback on the ADHD workshop and mindful meditation workshop (2)
- Hearing from others helped (2)

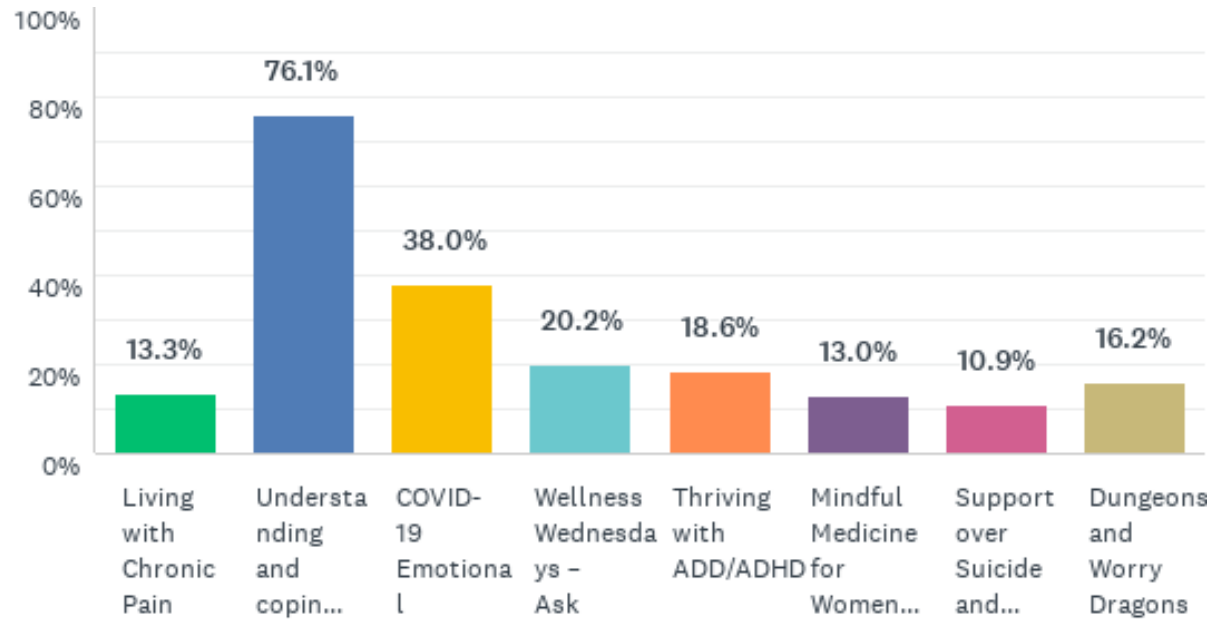
Negative Feedback:

- **Too general (6)**
- Workshops too focused on the undergraduate student experience, did not like when undergraduates were present (5)
- Prefer one-on-one setting (5)
- Time zone differences or time of workshop offering was inconvenient (2)
- Liked the group format but didn't like sharing in a group and uncomfortable attending a workshop that could force sharing (2)
- Felt too impersonal, no cameras on zoom (which though made people anonymous) took away from the workshop (2)
- Would like to see the slides after the presentation (1)
- Didn't enjoy the virtual breakout rooms (1)
- Workshops felt rushed (1)

Q18: What topics would you like a mental health workshop to cover? Feel free to provide multiple suggestions.

Common Themes (from 254 responses)	Answered	254
	Skipped	319
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety (67)• COVID support, working from home, isolation, global pandemic (36)• Imposter syndrome (35)• Grad student supports (professor-student power dynamic, what is normal to feel as a grad student, academic burnout) (28)• Depression (25)• Mindfulness and self-care (25)• Stress (20)• Loneliness (20)• PTSD (4)• ADD/ADHD (5)• OCD (5)• Perfectionism (15)• Focus mechanisms, productivity, motivation (15)• Time management (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work-life balance (12)• Workshop on what mental health supports are available (accessing the GSS Benefit Plan, SFU Health and Counselling offerings, external supports, difference between the types of mental health providers such as counselor therapist etc) (11)• Healthy boundaries and coping mechanisms (9)• Financial stress (7)• Suicide and supporting other's mental health (7)• Eating disorder and healthy eating (5)• Relationship support (romantic and non-romantic) (4)• Insomnia and having a proper sleep schedule (4)• Racism (4)• Anger management (3)• Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (3)• Parenting as a student (2)• Chronic Pain (2)• Trauma related workshops (2)	

Q19: Health and counselling offers the following workshops for all students, are there any of these that you would like to be reformatted specifically for graduate students? Please select all the workshops that you would like to be made specifically for grad students. Note: there are already two workshops specific for graduate students, Thriving in Grad School and Thesis/Dissertation Support Group.



Answer Choices	Responses
Living with Chronic Pain	13.30% 50
Understanding and coping with anxiety and depression	76.06% 286
COVID-19 Emotional Support Group	38.03% 143
Wellness Wednesdays – Ask a Nurse	20.21% 76
Thriving with ADD/ADHD	18.62% 70
Mindful Medicine for Women of Colour	13.03% 49
Support over Suicide and Students in Distress	10.90% 41
Dungeons and Worry Dragons	16.22% 61
Other (please specify)	19
Answered	376
Skipped	197

Additional Comments:

- COVID-19 issues (unable to enter Canada, isolated, lost activities due to COVID) (3)
- Toxic environment of academia, further grad student supports including mentorship (3)
- Connection with other grad students, including organized coffee breaks (2)

Specific Individual Responses:

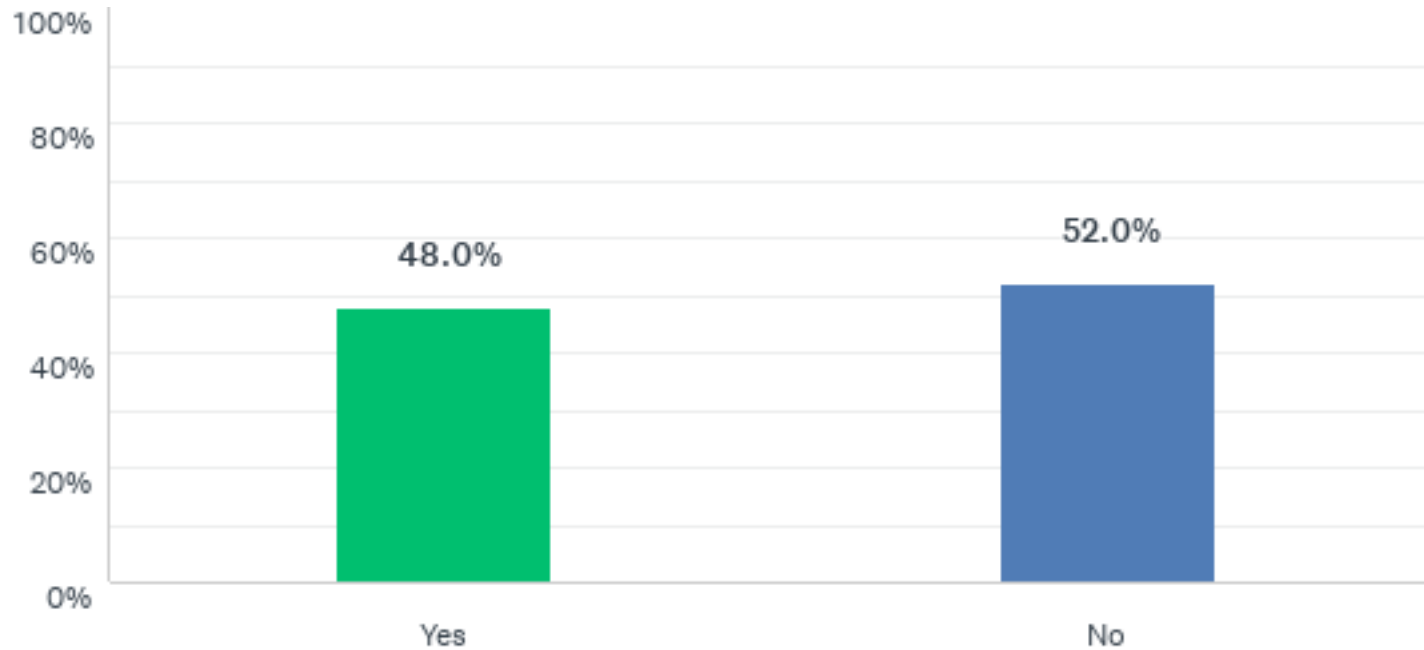
- How to live with a spouse who actively tried to sabotage your PhD.
- Would love for wellness Wednesdays to be issued as a podcast if possible

Summary of Mental Health Workshops

- 74.0% of graduate students would attend (37.5%) or are undecided (36.5%) about attending a workshop on mental health
- Slight preferences were for workshops that would be at the beginning of the term (33.1%) and after working hours in the evening (34.8%)
- Most graduate students are not participating in SFU HCS Workshops (84.8%) mainly because they are unaware of these workshops, the timing does not work for them or they are uncomfortable with group settings for workshop
- Additionally graduate students are uncomfortable with workshops where undergraduates are present (29.4%) or feel that workshops need to address graduate students needs even if undergraduates are present (25.8%)
- Students would love to see a graduate student specific workshop similar to the “Understanding and Coping with Anxiety and Depression” workshop (76.1%)
- The most desired mental health workshop topics were for anxiety, COVID-19 support and imposter syndrome

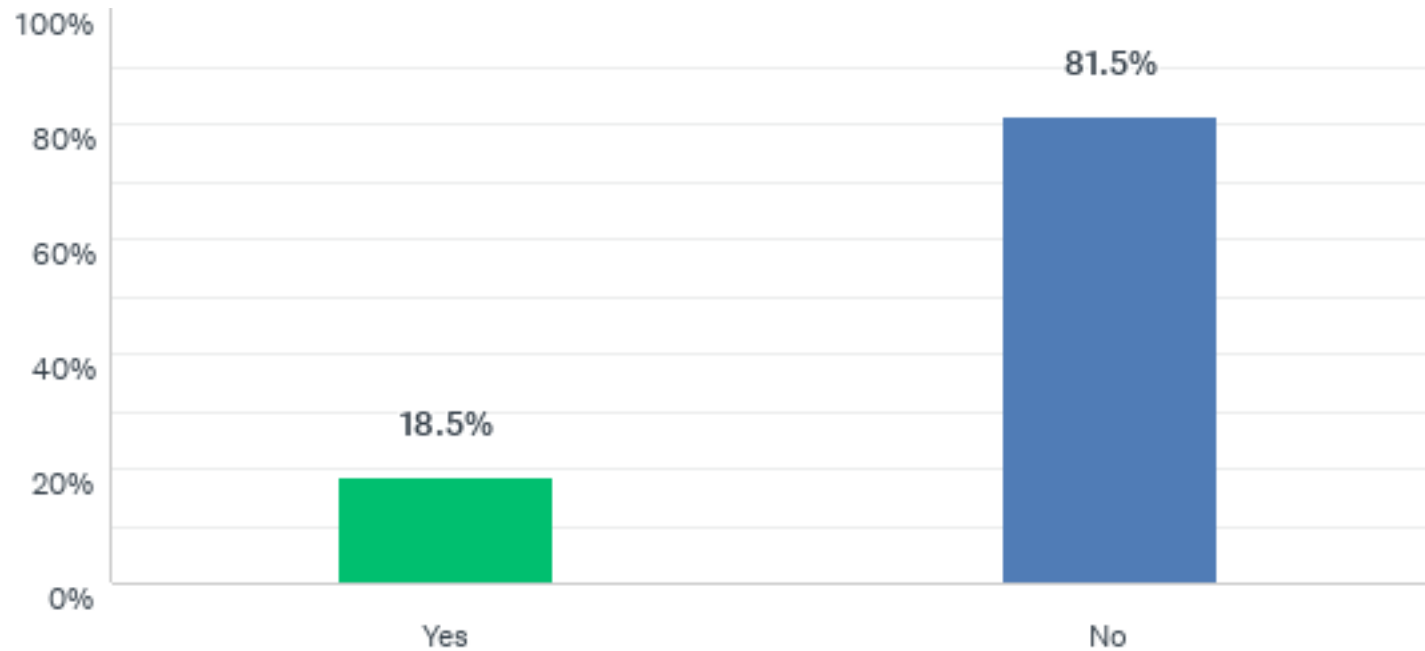
My SSP

Q20: Are you familiar with My SSP? Were you aware that this app is available for free for graduate students?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	47.95%	246
No	52.05%	267
Answered		513
Skipped		60

Q21: Have you used My SSP before?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	18.52%	95
No	81.48%	418
	Answered	513
	Skipped	60

- 52% of participants haven't heard of My SSP
- 81.5% haven't used My SSP before

Q22: Do you have any comments about My SSP? How was it? Why did or didn't you use this service over others?

Answered	204
Skipped	364

Common Themes (from 204 response)

- **Never heard of My SSP before (55)**
- Did not find it helpful, hated it, support was insufficient (17)
- Not a fan of the online/phone approach (15)
- Positive feedback on the service (8)
- Felt impersonal, no connection online, felt like a robotic reply (7)
- Poor layout/disconnection occurred (7)
- Didn't like the counselors (5)
- Scheduling help took a long time or was stood up by counselor (4)
- Felt that My SSP was for more short term problems, need long term support (4)
- Not sure if specific situation was appropriate for My SSP, not sure why it should be used (4)
- Time issues (apparently cut off is 1 am, difficult for international students) (3)
- Heard negative feedback from other students and was put off from using it (3)
- Counselor was not equipped to deal with trauma (2)
- Lack of consistency in use of My SSP (might not get the same counsellor each time, don't have the same experience each time etc) (2)
- Lack of queer specific counselors (2)
- Lack of faith-based counselors (1)
- Didn't use due to privacy concerns (1)

Summary of My SSP

- 52.0% of graduate students were unaware of My SSP and 81.5% had never used it before
 - This was further reflected in the written responses where the most common written response was being unaware of the service
- Common themes from the written responses included that students were unsatisfied with the supports received from My SSP or had a negative experience
- Further responses highlighted the impersonal nature of the phone/online approach and the layout of the software/program