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A Survey of Attitudes and Utilization of Counseling Services Among International Students at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Purpose

A considerable number of international students are represented within the Minnesota State University, Mankato student population. Research indicates that international students face unique and challenging experiences when attempting to adjust to life as a student in the United States. In addition to these unique stressors, research indicates that international student populations utilize campus and community-based counseling services at a lower rate than American students. There are numerous and complex reasons for this utilization trend. A survey of the use of and attitudes toward utilizing counseling services among international students at MSU, Mankato is useful in determining current trends and informs future service planning.

Methodology

Participants

A web-based survey was distributed via e-mail to 678 international students enrolled at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Eighty-nine international students responded to the survey, representing a response rate of approximately 13.1 percent of the entire MSU, Mankato international student population. Slightly over half of the respondents were male. Two-thirds of respondents were undergraduate students. Over two thirds of the sample were between 18 and 24 years of age. The countries of origin most represented in the sample included Nepal (22%), Republic of Korea (12%), India (9%), Pakistan (5%), and Bangladesh (5%). Respondents from Nigeria, Malaysia, and Ukraine each made up 3% of the sample population.

Instruments

International students were asked to complete a web-based survey designed to measure their use of and attitudes toward personal counseling services. The survey began by asking demographic items and continued by asking about stressors and a variety of personal, social and educational concerns. Respondents were asked about their use of the Counseling Center and other community-based agencies. Further questions asked about barriers to accessing counseling services and feelings and attitudes toward services.

Procedure

International students were sent an invitation to participate in this research via e-mail. A direct link to the survey website was provided. The invitation e-mail and opening survey screen contained an explanation of the study, a request for participation, and a statement that responses would remain anonymous and confidential. A description of the web-based survey host company was also given. Two weeks after the initial request was sent, a second e-mail was distributed, again inviting those international students who had not yet participated in the survey to do so.

Limitations

A small sample size and relatively low response rate (13.1% of all international students enrolled at MSU, Mankato) are the most notable limitations of this research. A lack of similar data collected from American students makes comparison of the usage trends across the two groups impossible at this time.

Results

Most of the survey respondents (68.5%) fit within the "traditional student" age group (18-24) and were of the undergraduate enrollment status. The numbers of respondents from each of the countries of origin accurately represented the actual number of students from each of those countries enrolled at MSU, Mankato.

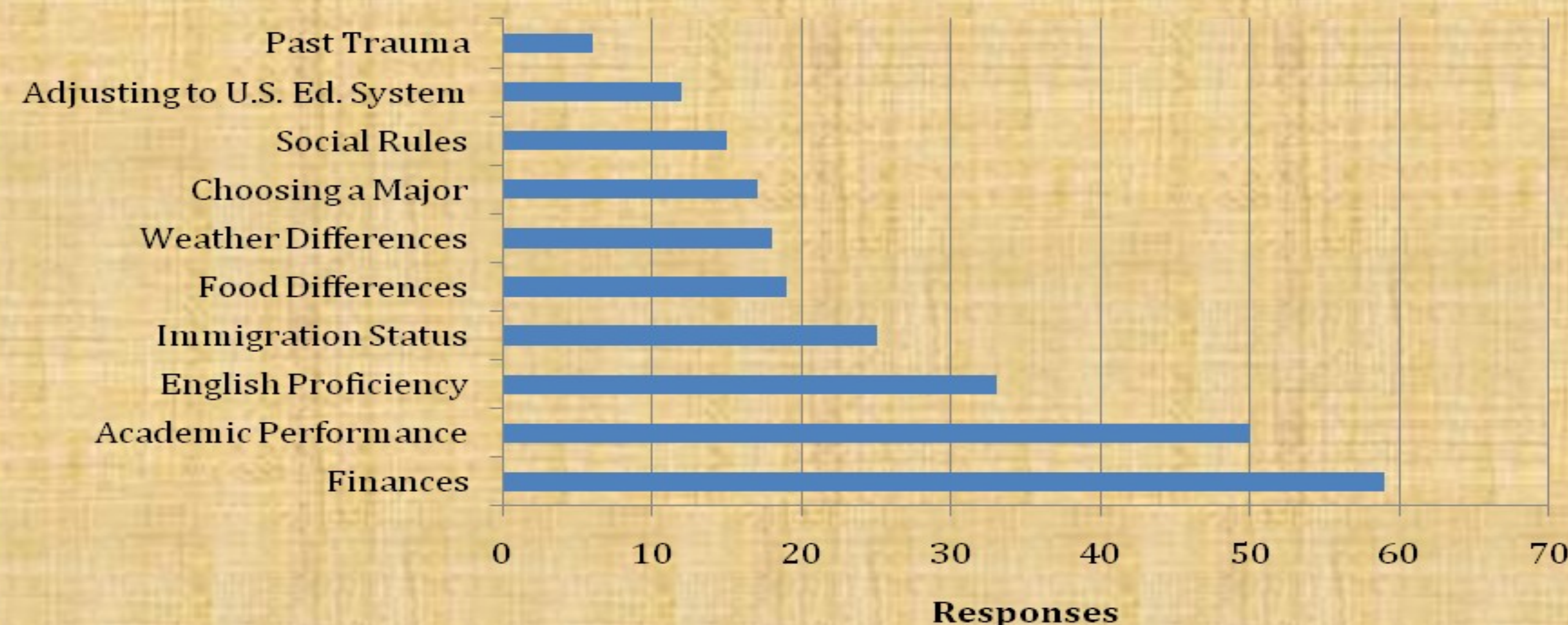
The five most frequently reported stressors experienced by respondents were finances, academic performance, immigration status, differences in food, and differences in weather. The seven most frequently reported personal, social and educational concerns were financial problems, anxiety or nervousness, difficulty concentrating, poor time management, academic problems, social isolation or loneliness, and difficulty sleeping.

Approximately 13% of respondents indicated that they either are currently utilizing services from the MSU, Mankato Counseling Center, or have done so in the past. The majority of these students learned about the Counseling Center during student orientation. Of the respondents who had never utilized the Counseling Center, slightly over half (59.7%) were aware of the existence of the Counseling Center. Of the respondents who were aware of the existence of the counseling center, most indicated that they learned about the service through student orientation or from the MSU, Mankato website.

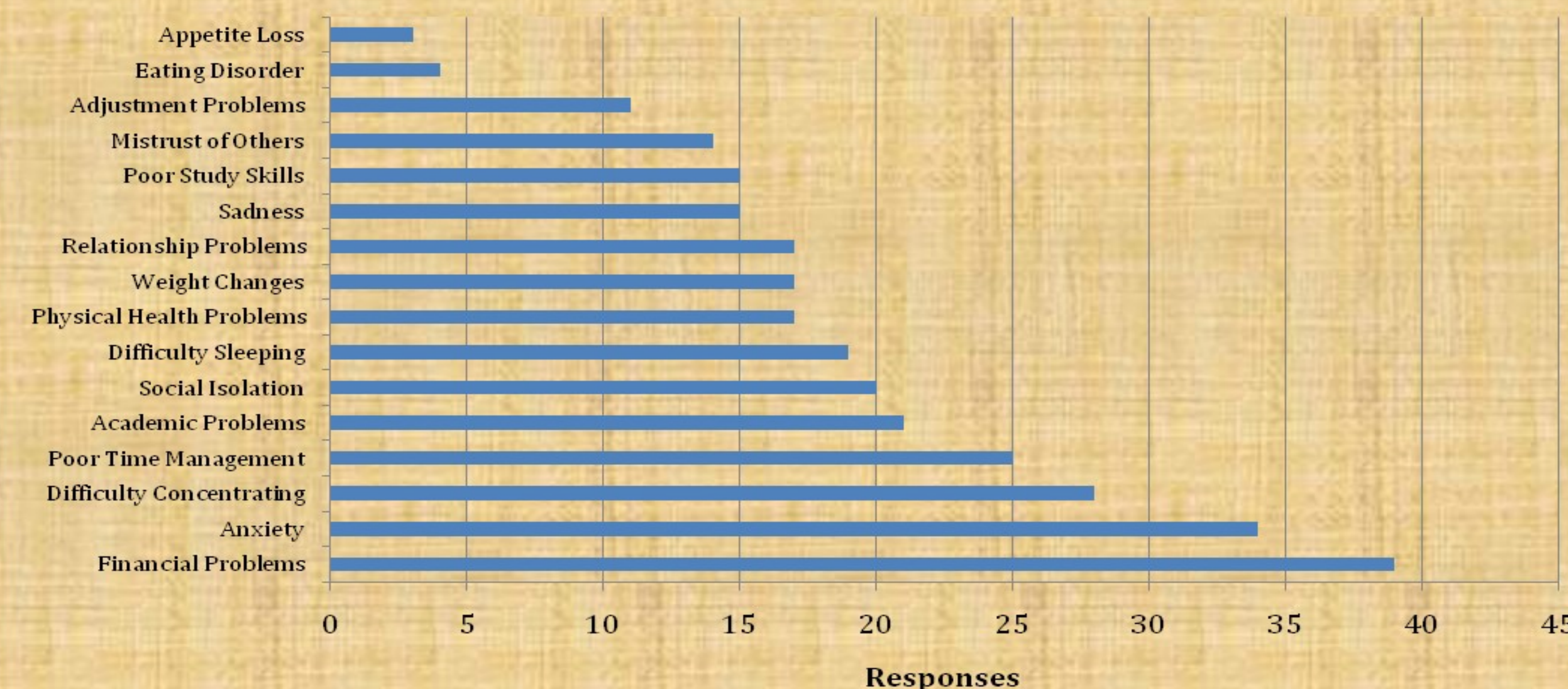
Of those respondents who indicated that they have never utilized the Counseling Center, over half (56.3%) were aware that they were eligible to access free counseling services from the Counseling Center. Only 4 respondents indicated that they are utilizing community-based counseling services. Most respondents (63.4%) were not aware of the location of the Counseling Center. Most respondents (90.0%) were not aware of the hours of the Counseling Center.

Many of the responses to the statements measuring attitude toward counseling services indicated a neutral stance. Most respondents were either neutral or agreed with the statement that they would consider utilizing the Counseling Center if they were experiencing a personal problem. Most respondents were either neutral or disagreed with the statement that they do not believe they would ever have a problem that would be serious enough to need counseling. Most respondents were neutral to the statements regarding the capabilities of Counseling Center staff in helping them address their issues. Most respondents indicated that they would consider accessing counseling services if a friend, faculty member, or family member suggested it.

Stress Experienced in the Past 12 Months Related to...



Personal, Social and Educational Concerns reported within the past 12 Months



Recommendations

Findings indicate that the international student population at MSU, Mankato is experiencing stressors and concerns primarily related to academic performance, financial concerns, and immigration status. This population of students would benefit from workshops or advising opportunities that would address each of these issues in a pro-active manner. General stress reduction techniques would be beneficial to student well-being, as well as specific instruction on managing finances in a foreign country.

The international student population may benefit from an increase in outreach from student services such as the Counseling Center. A good share (slightly less than half) of the international students on campus are not aware of the services that the Counseling Center is able to provide. An informational brochure written specifically for the international student population is needed. It would be beneficial if this brochure could include information regarding student eligibility for services, the fact that services are free, and several statements as to the cultural competency and awareness of Counseling Center staff.

Previous research indicates that international students are likely to have a more positive experience if they have a faculty advisor who is invested in their success. A faculty mentorship program for international students would also benefit this population.

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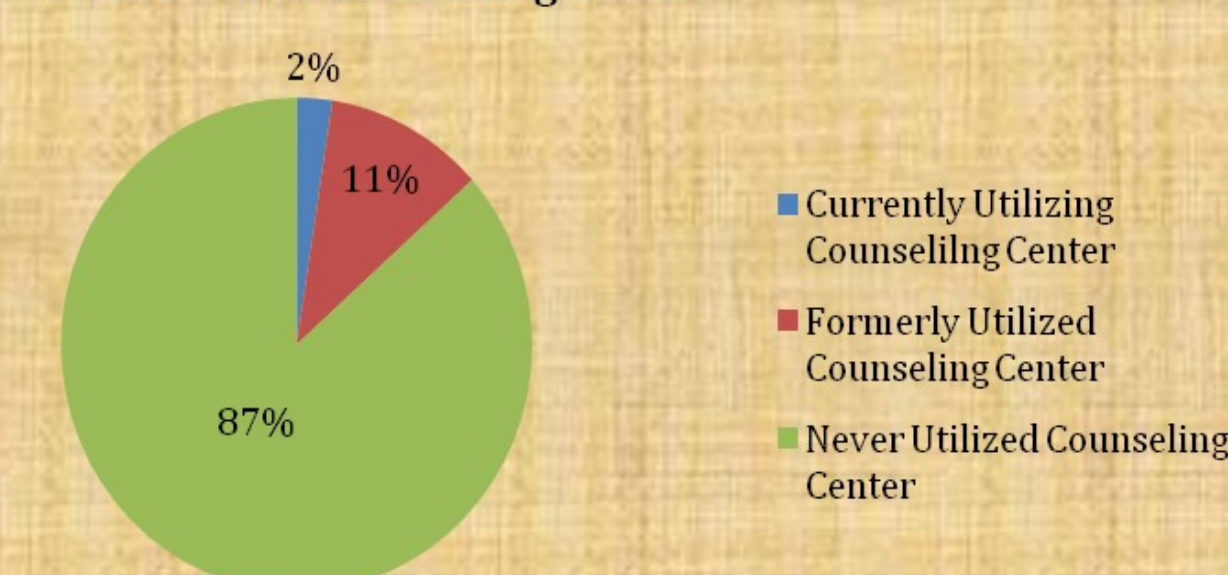
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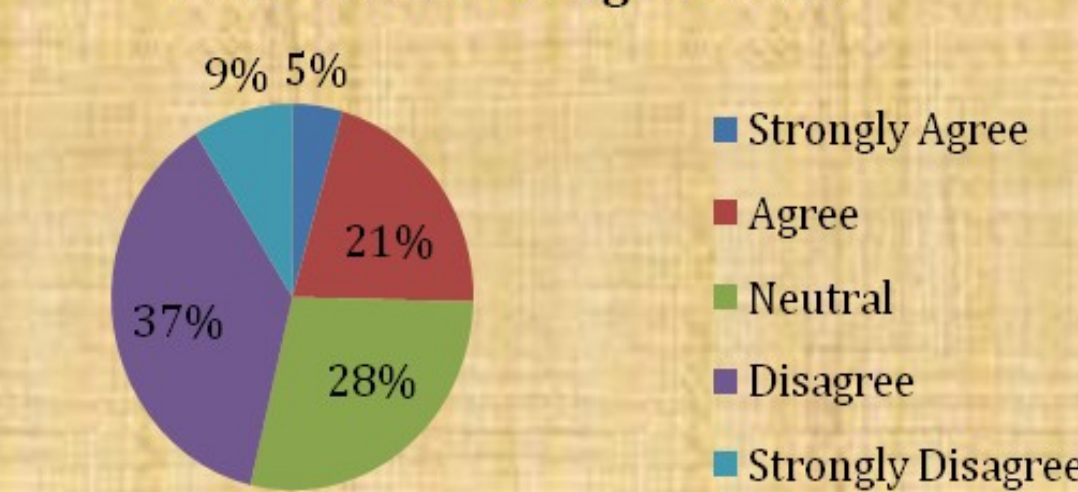
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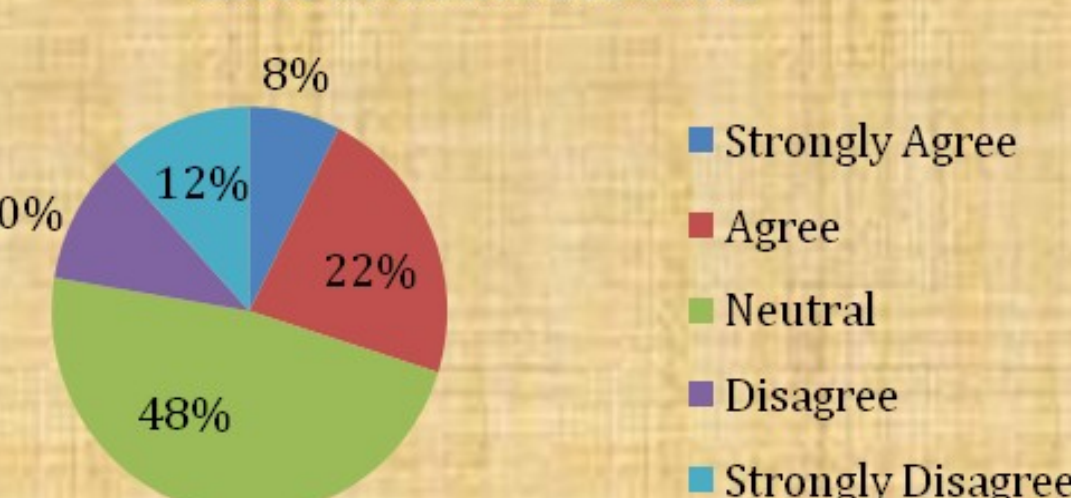
Utilization of Counseling Center



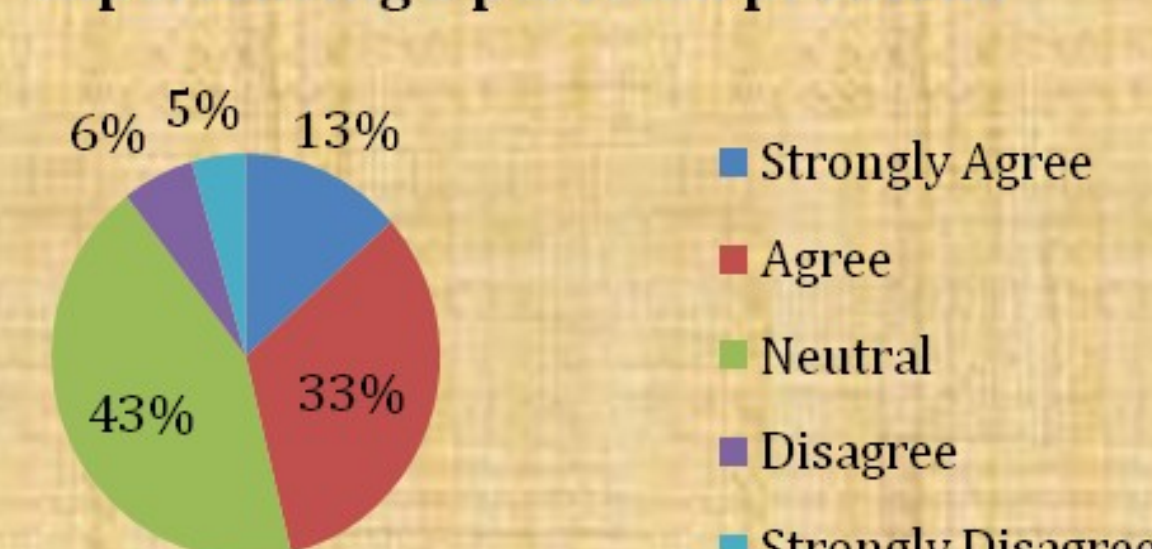
I do not believe I would ever have a problem that would be serious enough to need counseling services.



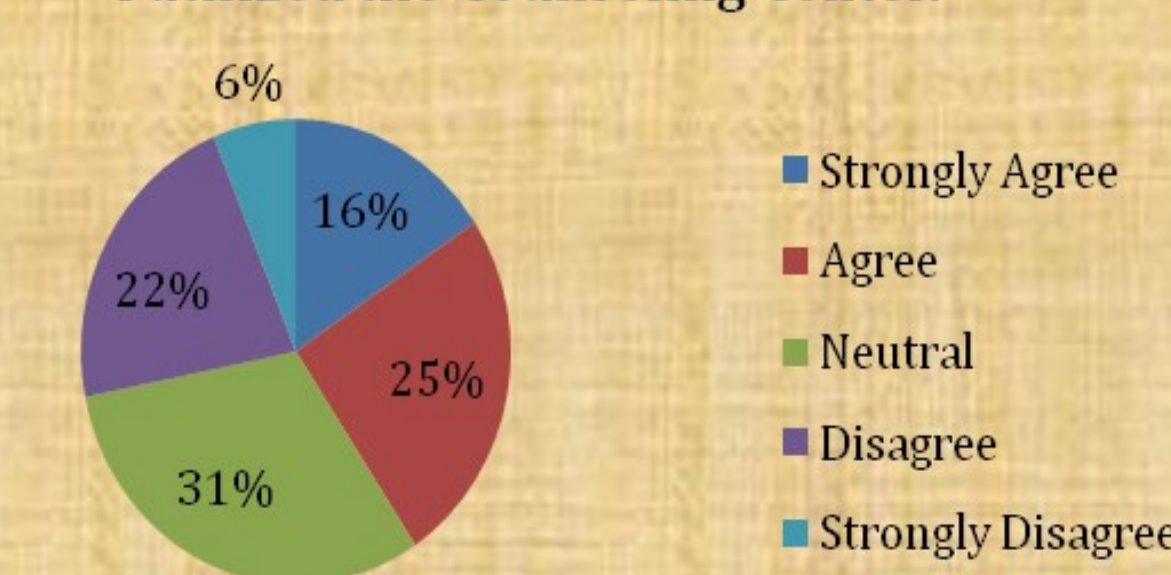
The staff at the Counseling Center would likely be knowledgeable of my unique issues and needs as an international student.



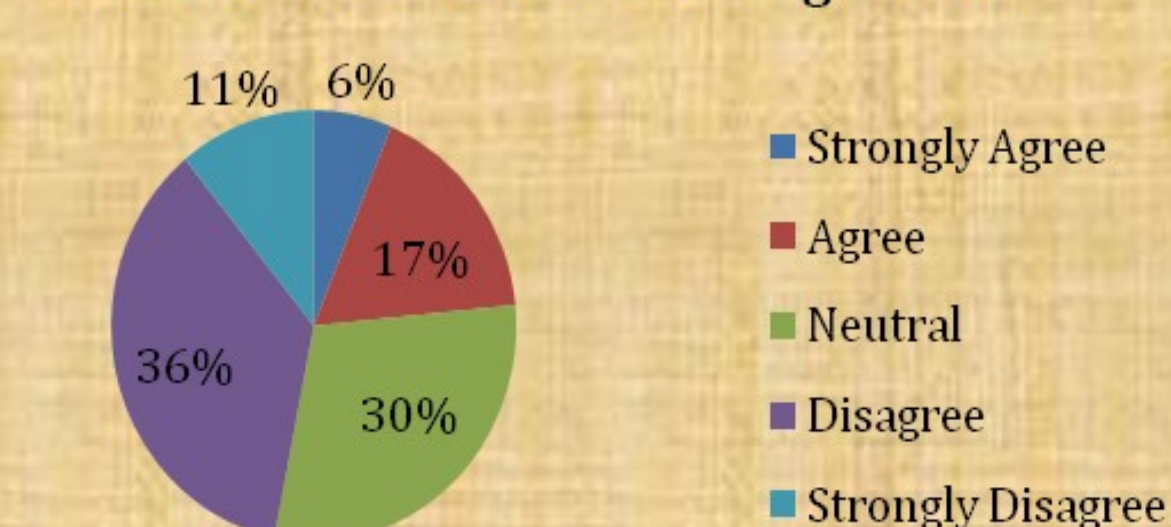
I would consider accessing the Counseling Center if I were experiencing a personal problem.



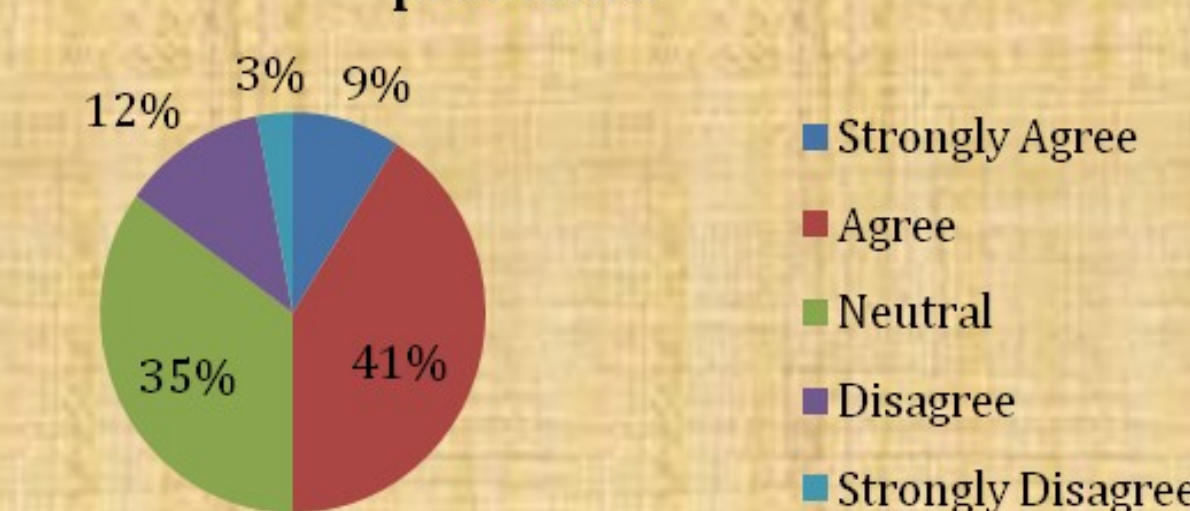
I would be concerned about my privacy if I utilized the Counseling Center.



I would feel ashamed of myself if I needed to use the Counseling Center.



The Staff at the Counseling Center would likely be able to help me with my problems.



I would be concerned about others' opinion of me if they learned I was utilizing the Counseling Center.

