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# Current Beliefs of Speech-Language Pathologists Regarding Lateralization Errors

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## INTRODUCTION

Lateralization errors (LEs) are typically defined as persistent speech sound errors in which sounds such as /s/ and /z/ are distorted due to air flow exiting the mouth laterally, rather than centrally (McGlone & Proffit, 1973). This results in “slushy” sounding speech (Usdan, 1978, p. 5). LEs are not uncommon in clinical practice (Bernthal, Bankson, & Flipsen, 2013), but the current prevalence of these errors is unknown. Moreover, there are no published data regarding the contemporary assessment and/or treatment challenges experienced by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) who treat these disorders.

## PURPOSE

To explore perceptions of licensed SLPs to describe the following:

- 1) Prevalence of LEs;
- 2) Common causes and co-occurring disorders;
- 3) Perceived public perception of LEs;
- 4) Treatment methods believed to be most effective;
- 5) The perceived utility of individual versus group treatment settings;
- 6) Resources used to learn about treatment of LEs.

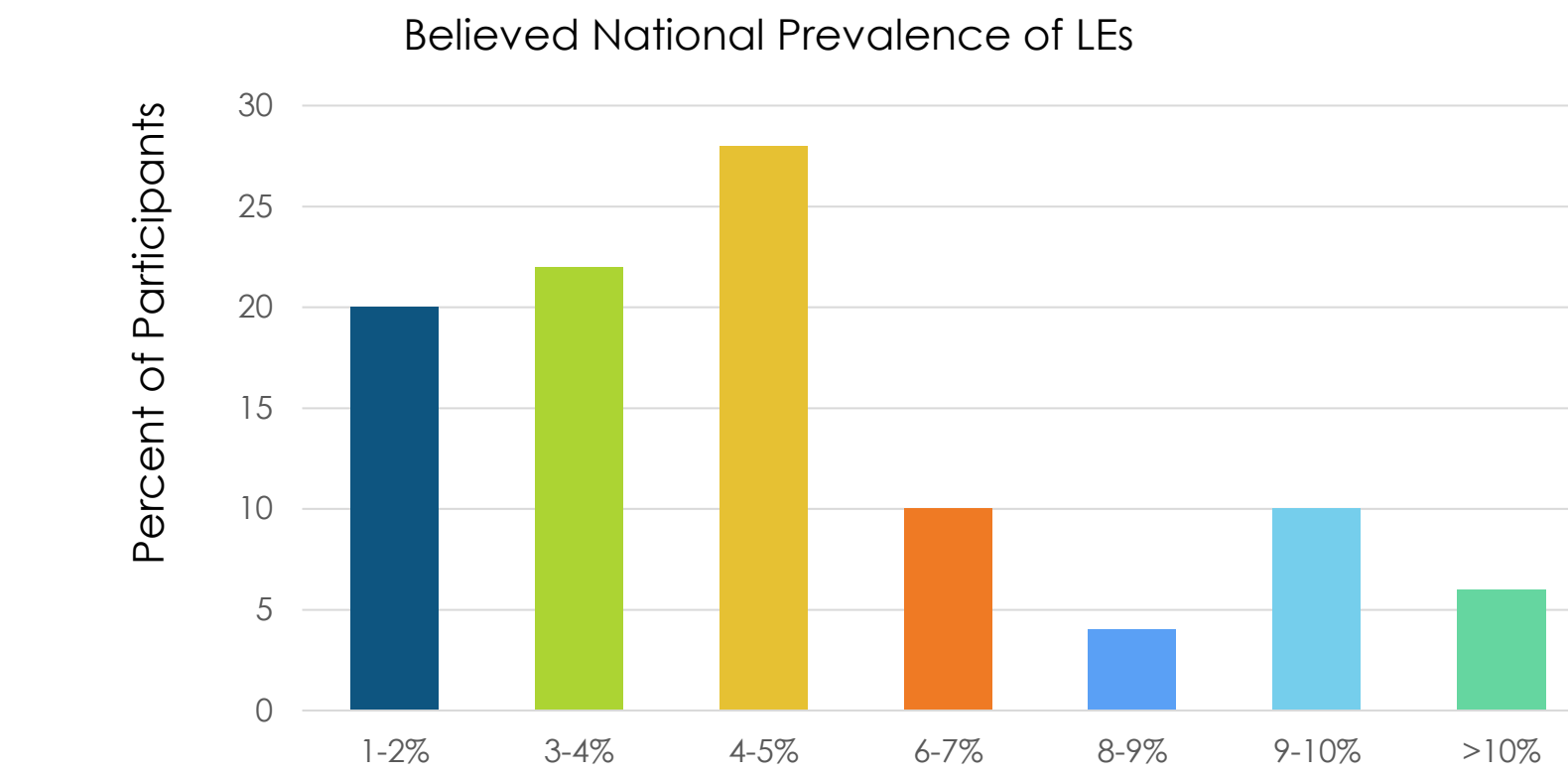
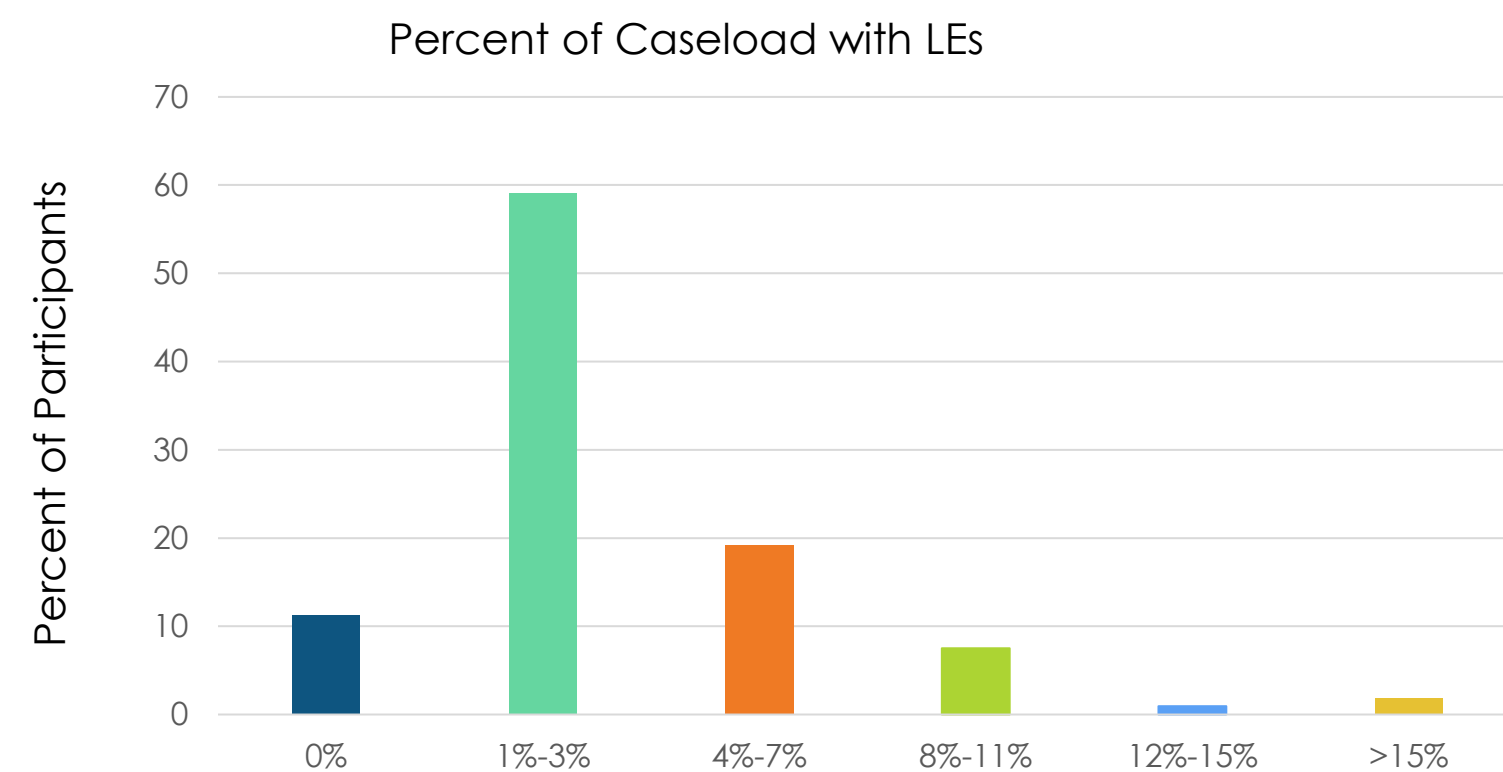
## METHOD

**Participants:** Participants ( $N = 214$ ; 98.12% female, 1.88% male;  $X_{age} = 30-39$  years) had been practicing SLPs for an average of 10-20 years, with an average caseload size 20-40 clients.. Racial and ethnic diversity was limited (98.12% White Non-Hispanic; 0.94% Other (multiple ethnicities or ethnicities not mentioned in this survey); 0.47% Hispanic; and 0.47% Asian). Work settings varied [61.97% school-based; 10.8% private practice; 8.45% university clinic; 7.04% outpatient clinic; and 4.69% Other (preschool, telepractice, etc.)].

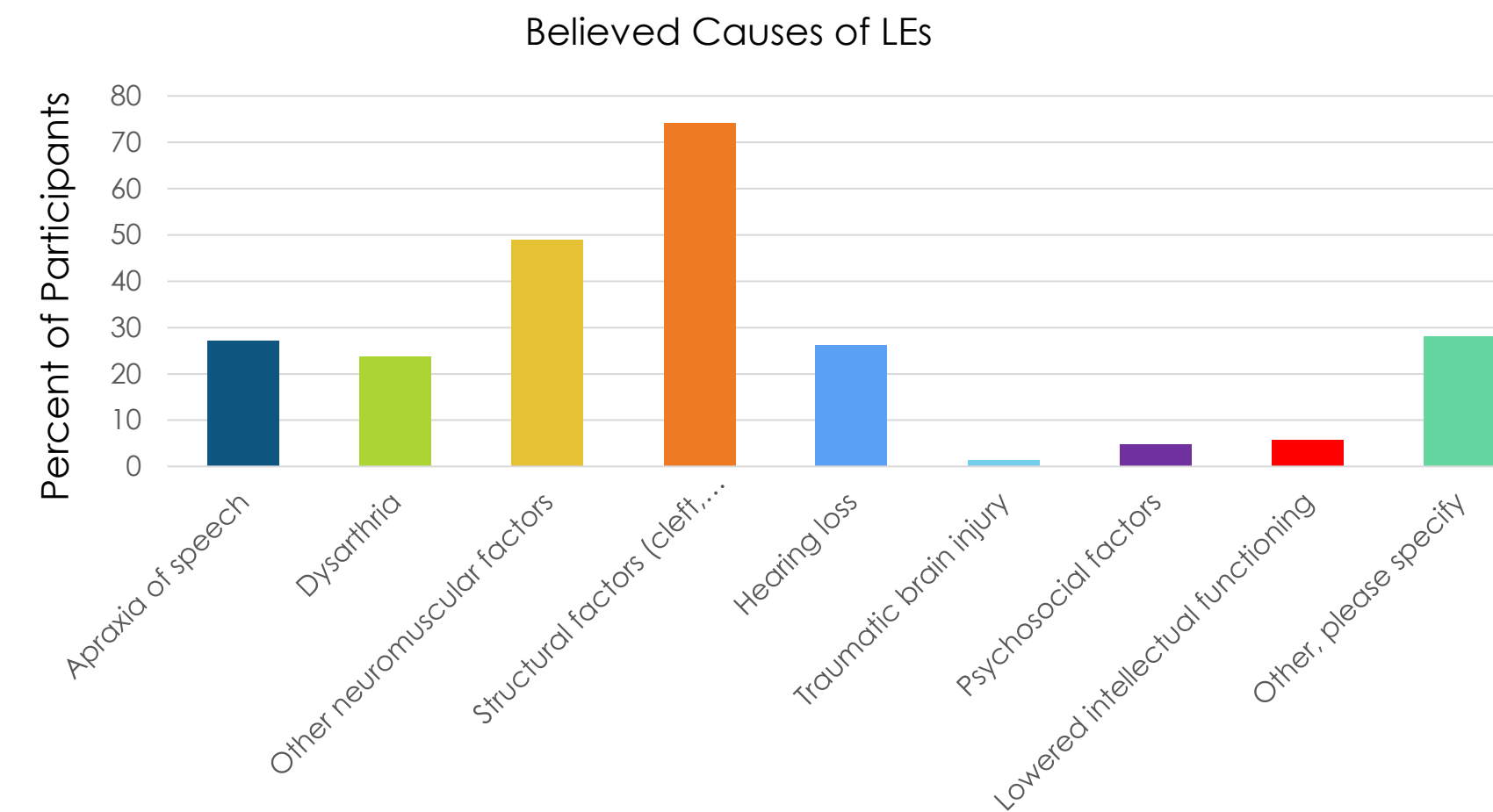
**Procedures:** After identifying gaps in the LE research, we developed a 26-item pilot survey and piloted it with two SLPs. Minor syntax changes were suggested and adaptations were subsequently made. It was distributed through e-mail, social media (e.g., Facebook groups for SLPs), and ListServes using a Survey Monkey link.

## RESULTS

### 1) Prevalence of LEs

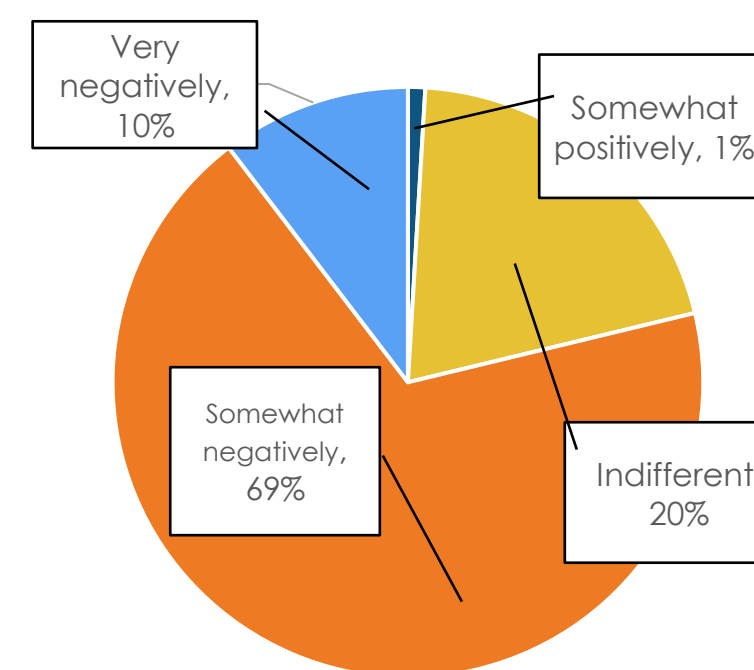


### 2) Common causes and co-occurring disorders (Participants were asked: What do you believe are the common causes of lateralization errors? Select up to three from the following).



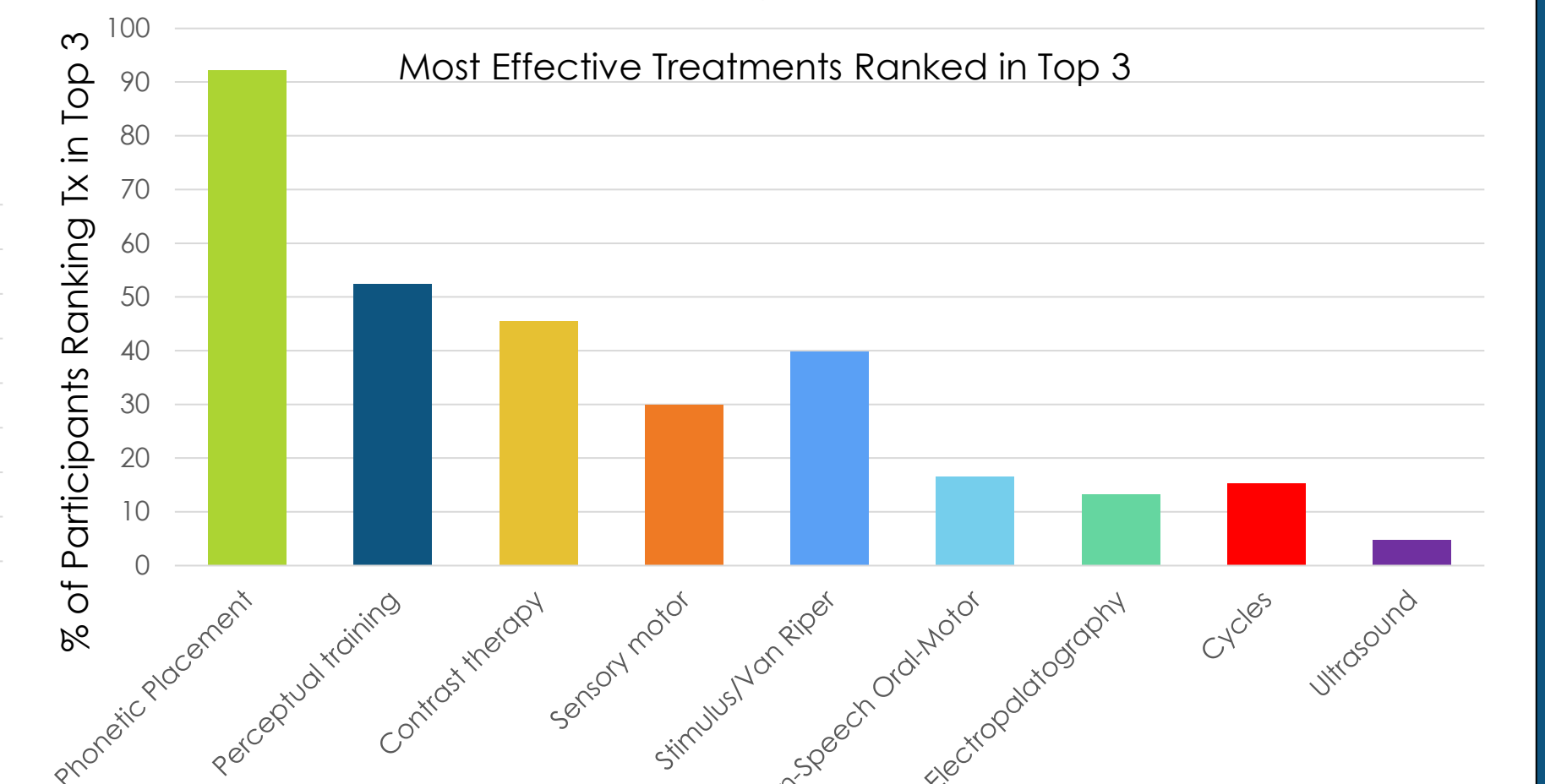
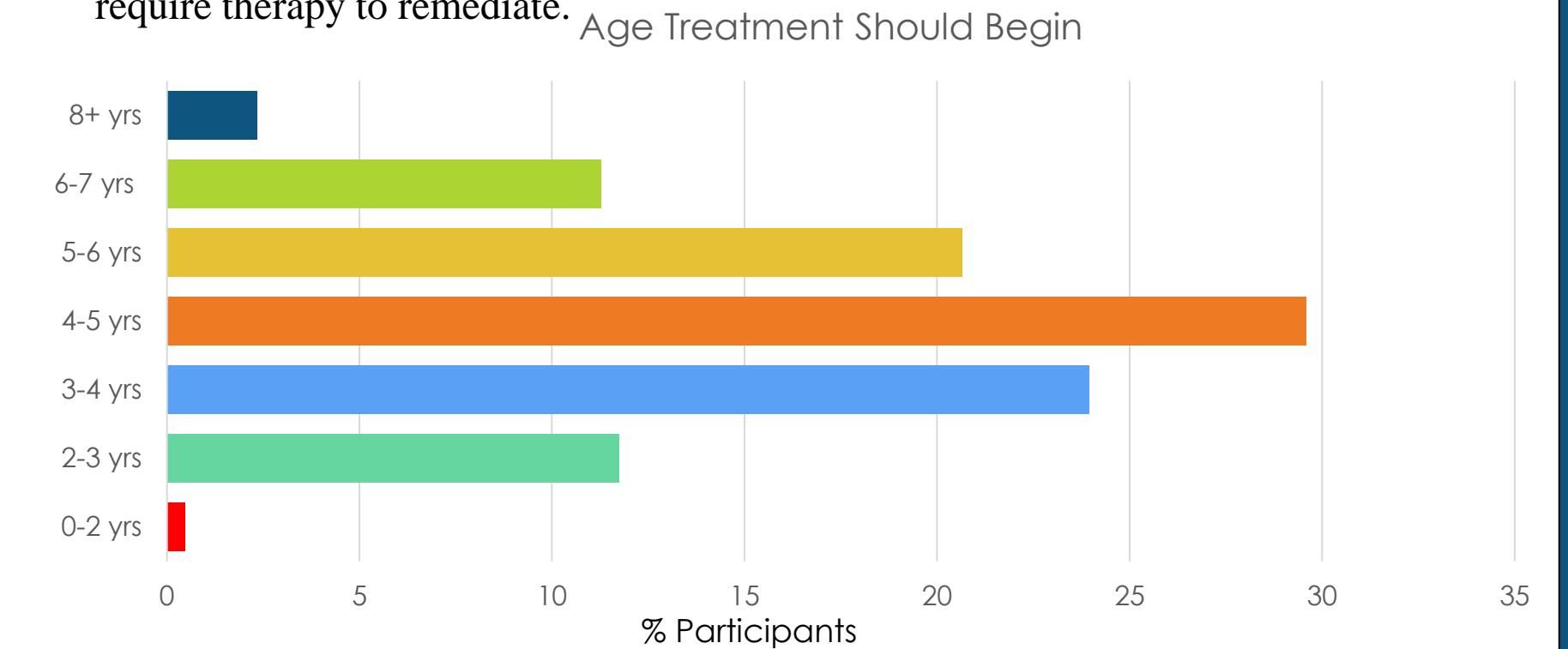
- Half (50.24%) of participants reported that their clients with LEs present with co-occurring disorders.
- The most common co-occurring disorders were other speech impairments and phonological disorders.

### 3) Perceived Public Perception of LEs



### 4) Treatment Methods Believed to Be Most Effective

- 96.71% of participants believed that lateralization errors do not self-correct and require therapy to remediate.



### 5) Utility of individual vs group treatments

- The majority (72.30%) of participants believed that treatment for LEs should be individual, but 27.23% believed that small group (2-3 clients) was ideal.
- Yet, 49.25% reported treating clients individually in actual practice, 49.25% reported treating in small groups, and 1.5% treated in large groups.

### 6) Resources used to learn about treatment of LEs

- The most common resources were colleagues (56.81%), clinical training in graduate school (53.05%), workshops (50.7%), books (46.95%) and ASHA journals (39.44%).

## CONCLUSION

Based on a limited sample of 214 SLPs, the prevalence of LEs on caseloads is on average 1%-3%, though the national prevalence is believed to be slightly higher. The majority of clinicians believe that the public has a negative perception of LEs. There was considerable variation among clinicians regarding the most effective treatments, suggesting disagreement on best practice for lateralization treatment. Clinicians believe that LEs should be treated in an individual setting, but small group treatment is not unusual. Based on our results, it is clear that more research on this topic is needed to ensure that SLPs can provide effective, evidence-based treatment for clients with LEs.