

Blood, Sweat, and Tears

The impact of menstruation, maternity, and menopause on women paramedics.

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Aim

To raise awareness and deepen understanding of how menstruation, maternity, and menopause shape women’s experience of being a paramedic in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Relevance

- Women represent half of the paramedic workforce.
- Experiences of women paramedics are under-explored.^{1,2}
- Literature largely reflects negative experiences.

Methodology

- Mixed methods.
- Anonymous, online survey.
- Concepts of Appreciative Inquiry.³
- Reflexive thematic analysis.⁴

The analytical story: Blood, Sweat, and Tears

The physical toll of the frontline

“I suffer from heavy bleeding and frequently get stuck on jobs away from a bathroom and leak right through my uniform. Awful.”

Failing the frontline

“I often pumped [breast milk] in the back of the ambulance as I had no other choice.”

Under fire on the frontline

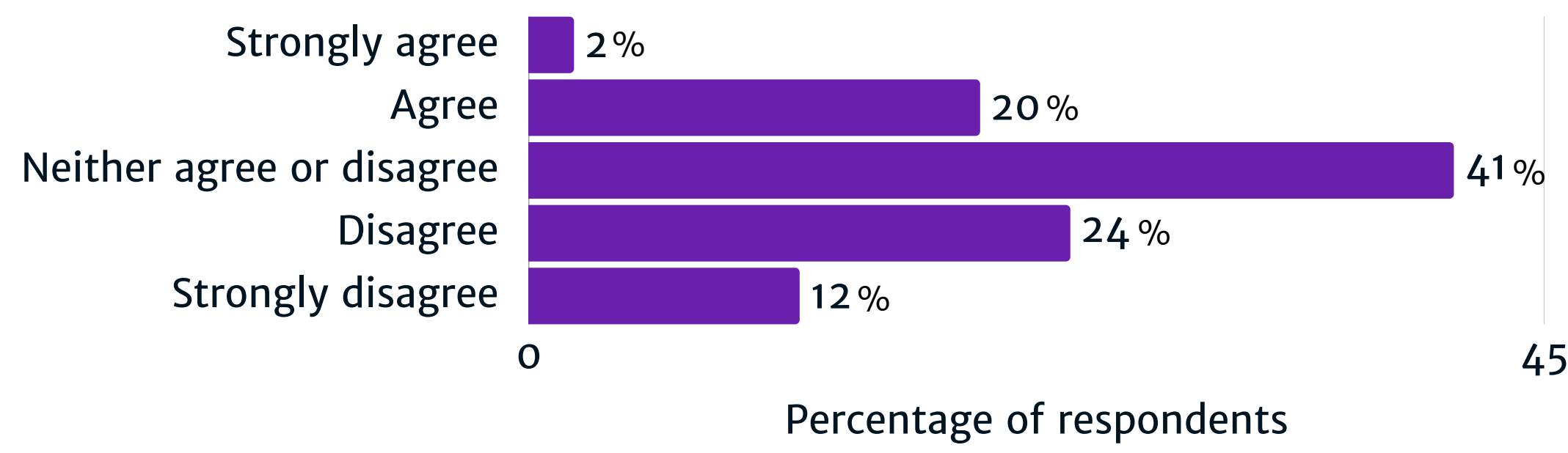
“You are treated [post maternity] as though you have had a brain injury....”

Thriving on the frontline

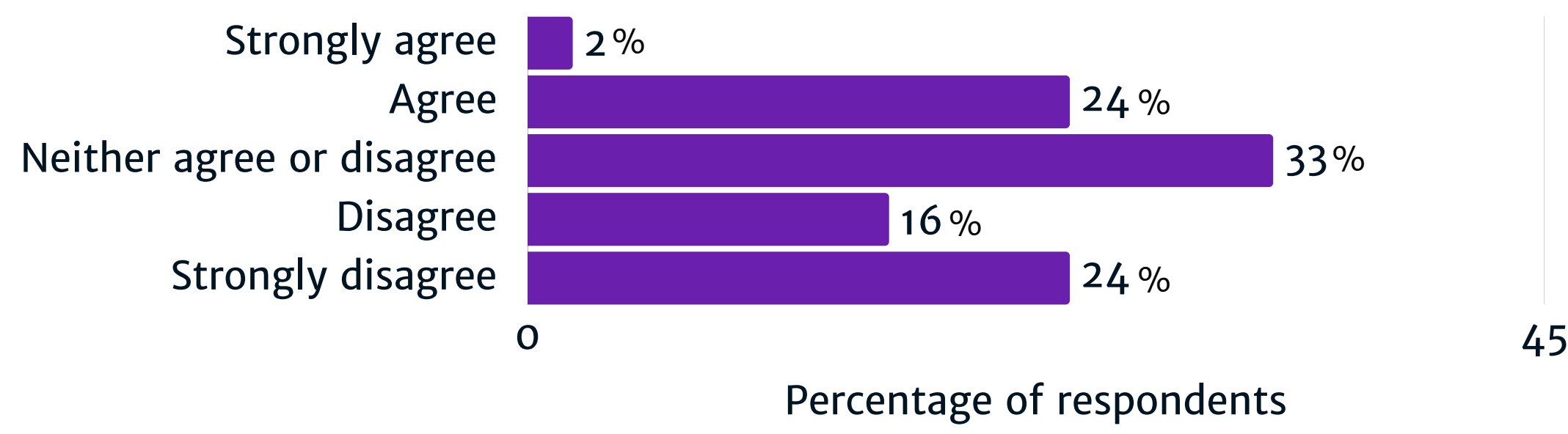
“I am currently pregnant with my first pregnancy and have found [my employer] to be very supportive.”

Experience ratings

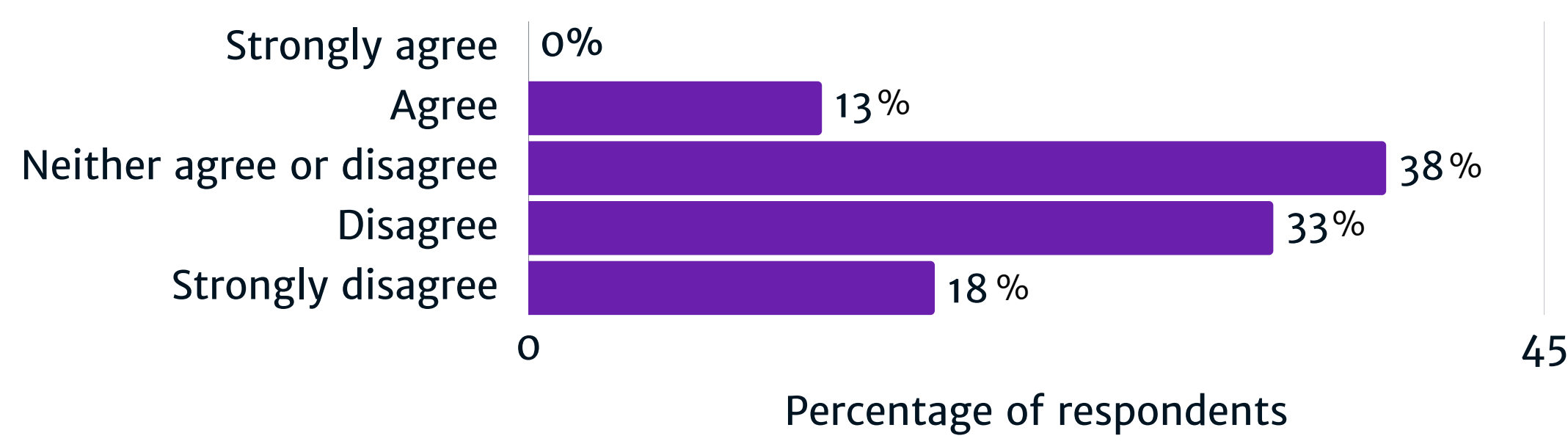
"My experience with menstruation at work has been positive" (n=123)



"My experience with maternity issues at work has been positive" (n=45)



"My experience with perimenopause and/or menopause at work has been positive" (n=40)



Key findings

- Physiology shapes women’s work experiences.
- Systemic shortcomings and gender bias amplify challenges.
- Experiences vary – not all are negative.
- Positive experiences point to practical solutions.

Significance

- Nearly half of Aotearoa New Zealand’s paramedic workforce will experience menstruation, and menopause, and potentially maternity.
- The research offers fresh insights regarding menstruation.
- Physiology is a profound burden for women paramedics.

Policy recommendations

Scan the QR code for policy recommendations informed by the findings, respondent insights and existing research.



These policy changes can:

- Address inequities and foster inclusive workplace cultures.
- Improve wellbeing and empower women to thrive.
- Boost retention and productivity, and reduce absenteeism.
- Set benchmarks and inspire other sectors.
- Normalise these issues and promote wider cultural change.