

Exploring Attitudes Toward Adoption



Methodology

After consulting with Lance Kinzer, Director of Policy and Government Relations at 1st Amendment Partnership, and Elizabeth Kirk, Assistant Professor of Law at The Catholic University of America, we developed a survey to assess the attitudes toward adoption of both clients and staff at pregnancy help organizations.

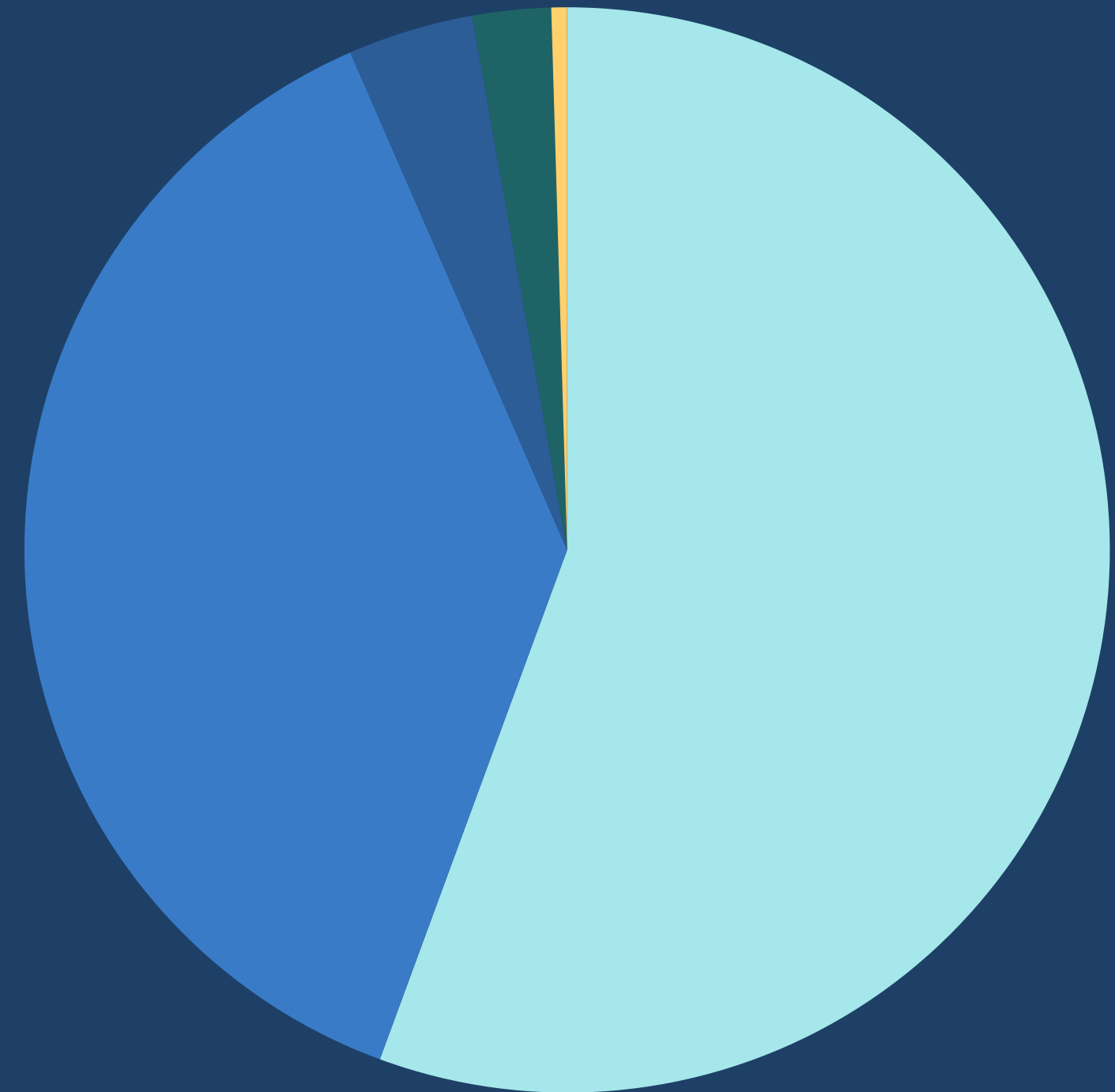
The survey consisted of three primary sections:

1. the pregnancy help organization's demographics and practices around adoption,
2. the attitudes toward abortion of their staff, and
3. the realities of the outlook on adoption that clients they serve show.

We distributed the survey to the staff of Heartbeat Affiliates in the United States. Over the two months of collecting responses, we gathered 214 responses, 97 of whom reported as leaders in their organizations (and therefore answered additional questions about training and staffing). Responses collected represented 42 states and an almost even spread of organizations serving in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Not all questions were required or had responses from all respondents.

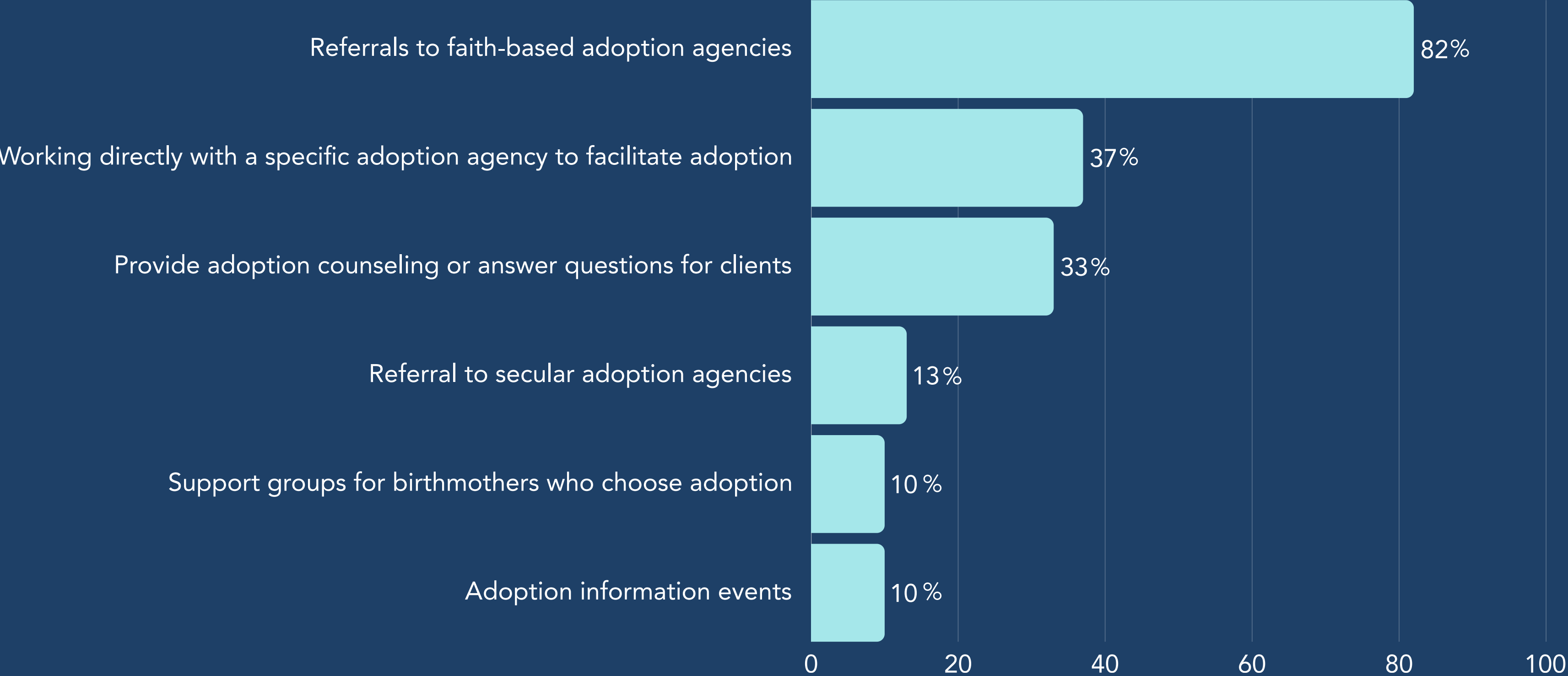
Participant Breakdown (Demographics)

Participating Pregnancy Help Organizations (214 total)

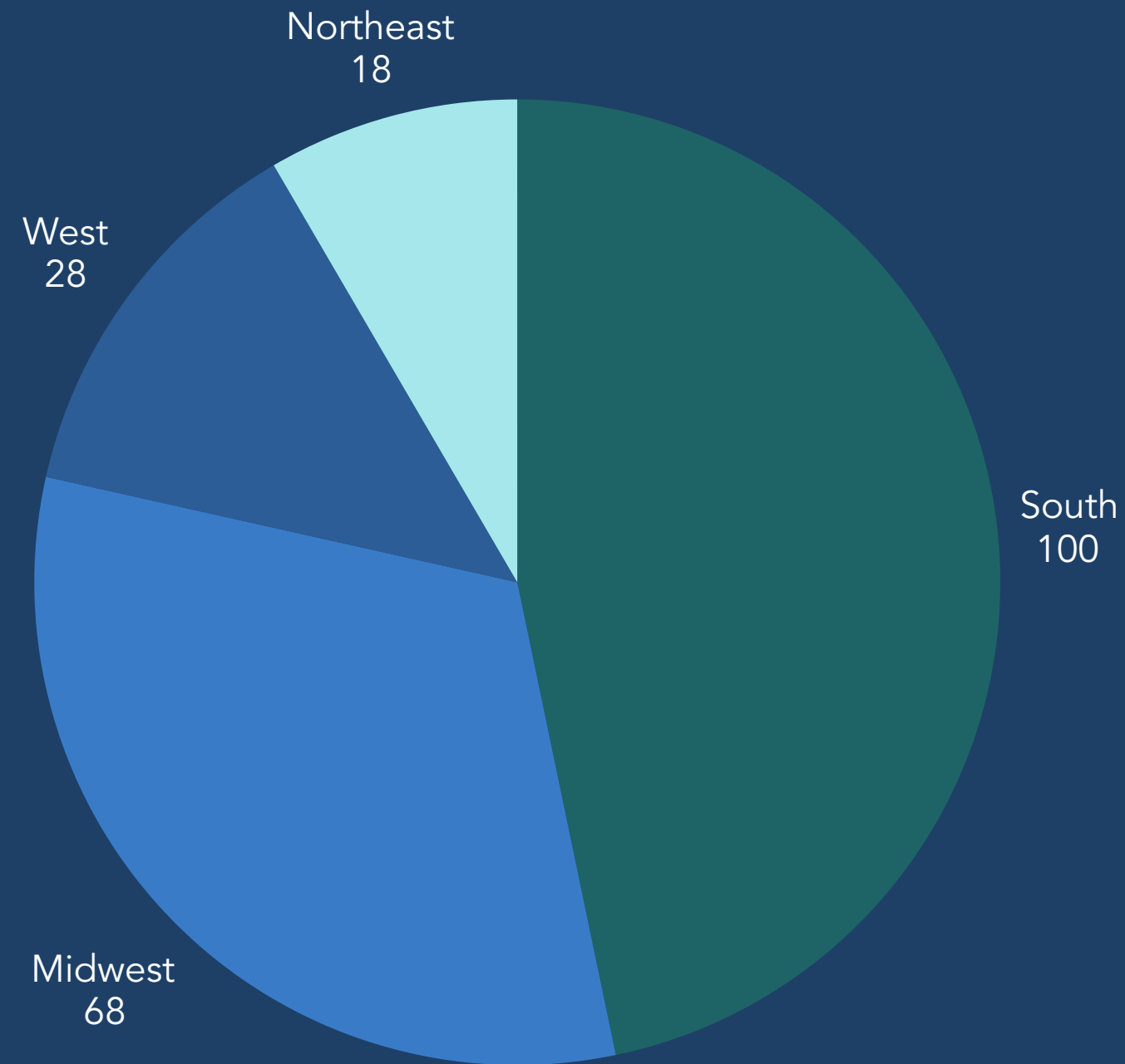


Services Offered

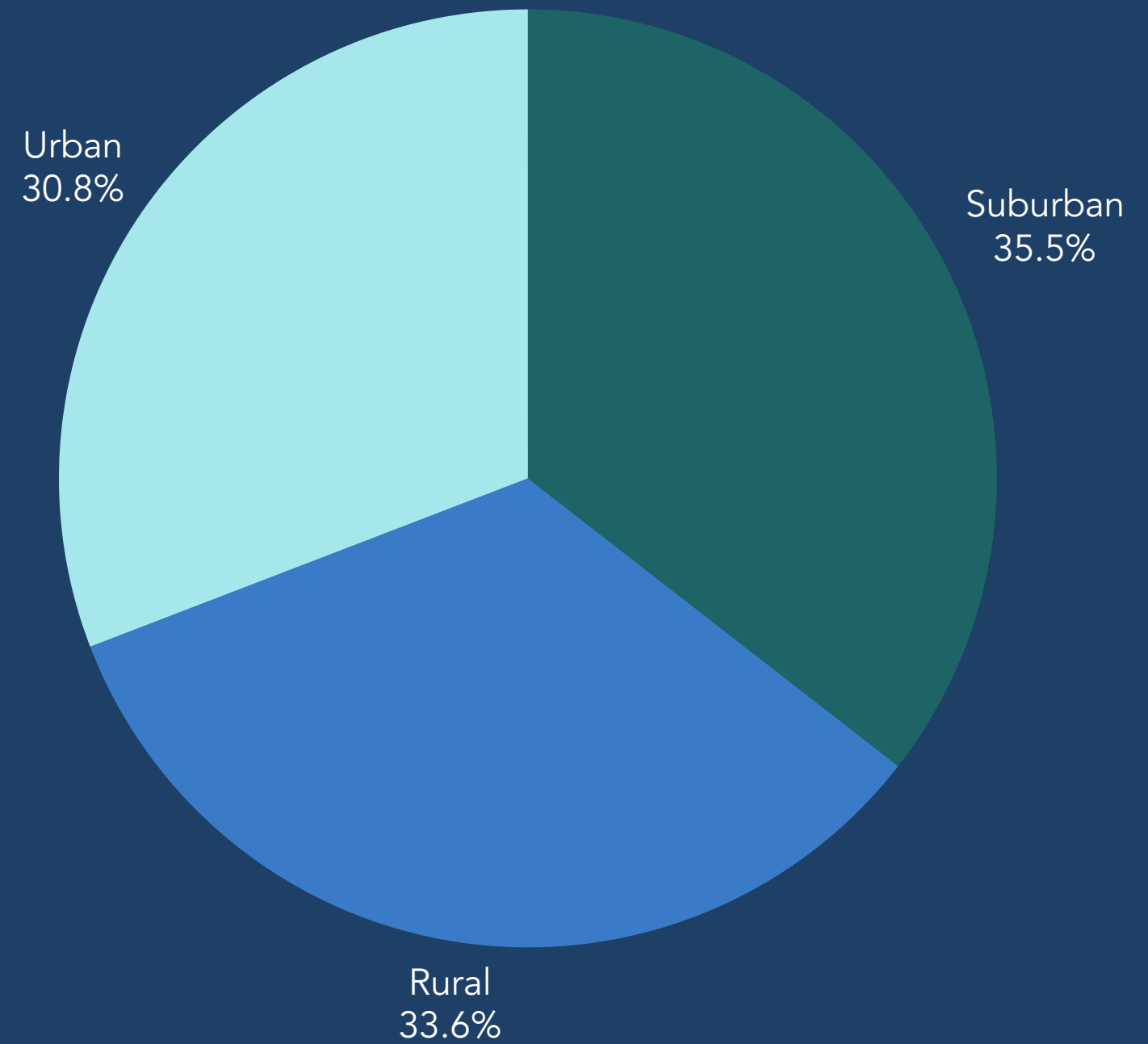
● Percent of organizations surveyed offering this service



Represented States by Region



Community Demographics



Organizational Practices Around Adoption

Attitudes Toward Adoption within Pregnancy Help Organizations

THE QUESTION: Which of the following statements best matches your opinions about adoption?

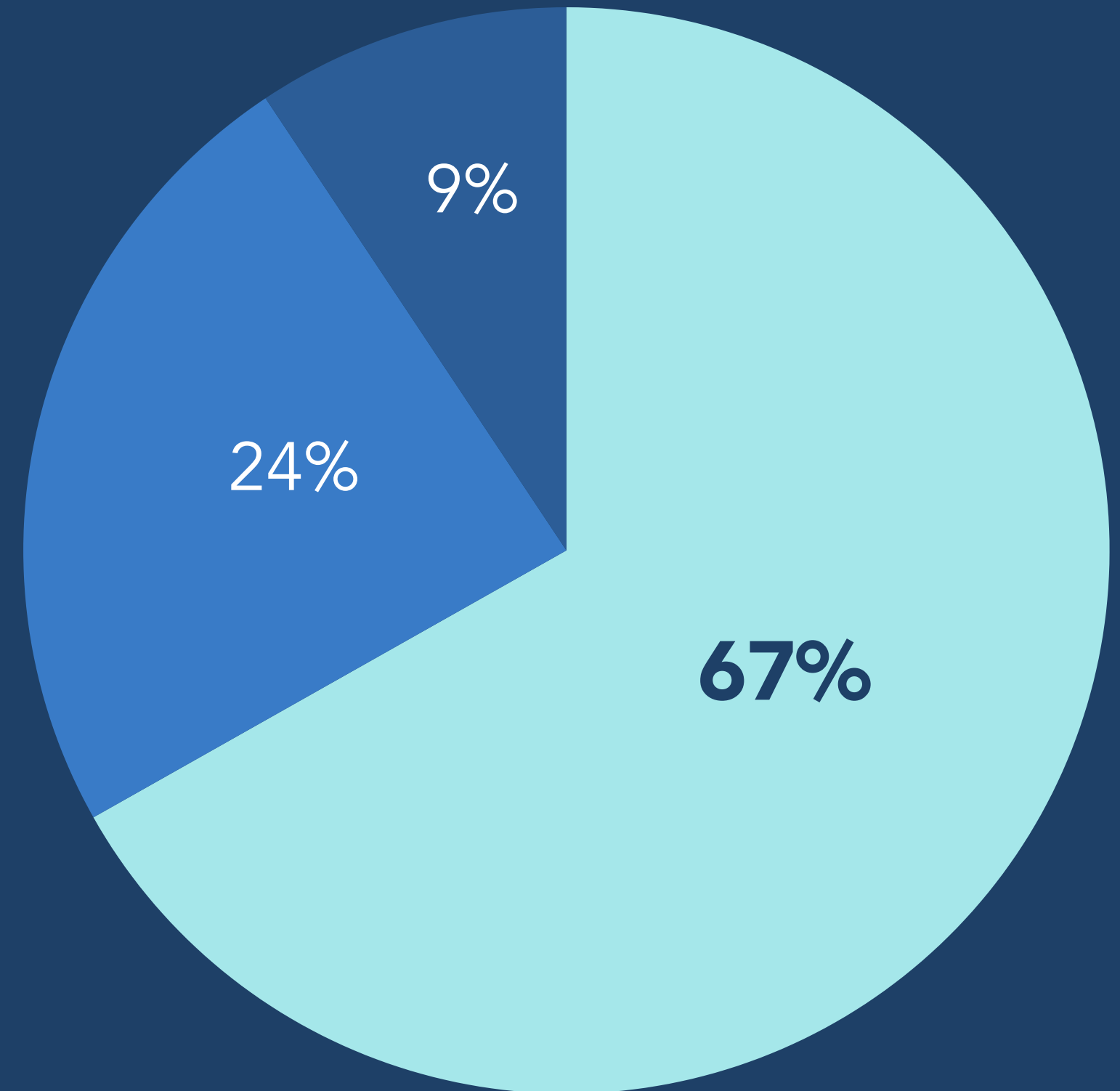
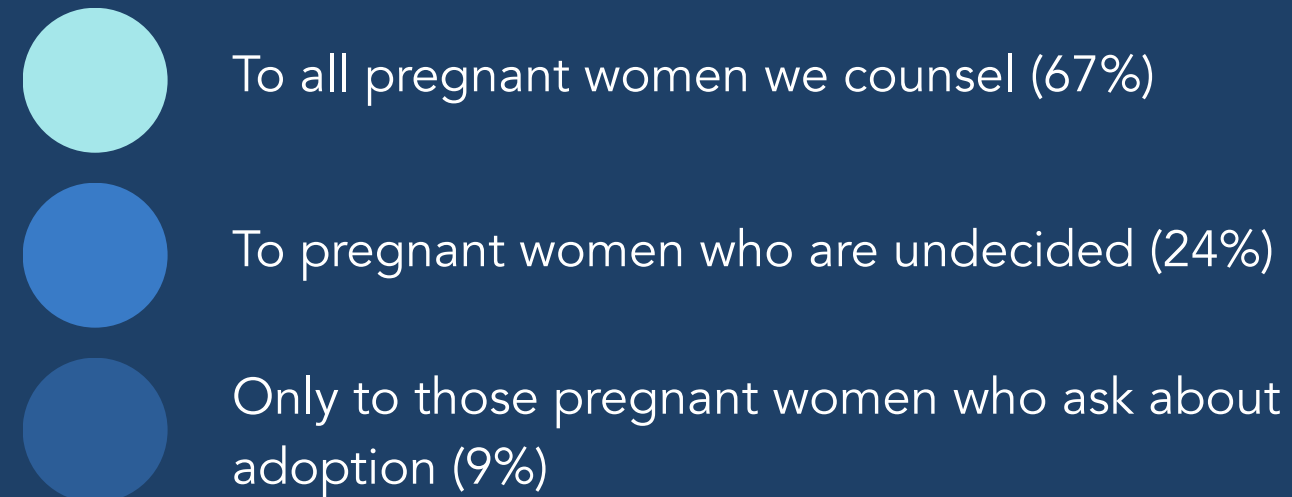
- Adoption is a loving, brave, and redemptive choice for birthmothers who want to provide for their children (191)
- A client choosing adoption allows a family who deeply desires children to grow their family in a beautiful way (16)
- Adoption is an impossibly difficult choice that I can't imagine a client (or myself) making (0)
- Women who choose to place a child for adoption are proving that they wouldn't be fit mothers (0)

91% of respondents hold the opinion that adoption is a loving, brave, and redemptive choice for birthmothers who want to provide for their children.

Additional Responses:

- "Adoption is a very difficult decision. We must acknowledge the loss of the birth mother and assist her to make a birth plan for the best outcome for her child."
- "Adoption is beautiful and painful. I am a birth mother and it's the most difficult, long-lasting pain ever."
- "Our clients show adoption as an unfavorable choice; because of fear of having to surrender their child after making the sacrifice of carrying and getting attached."

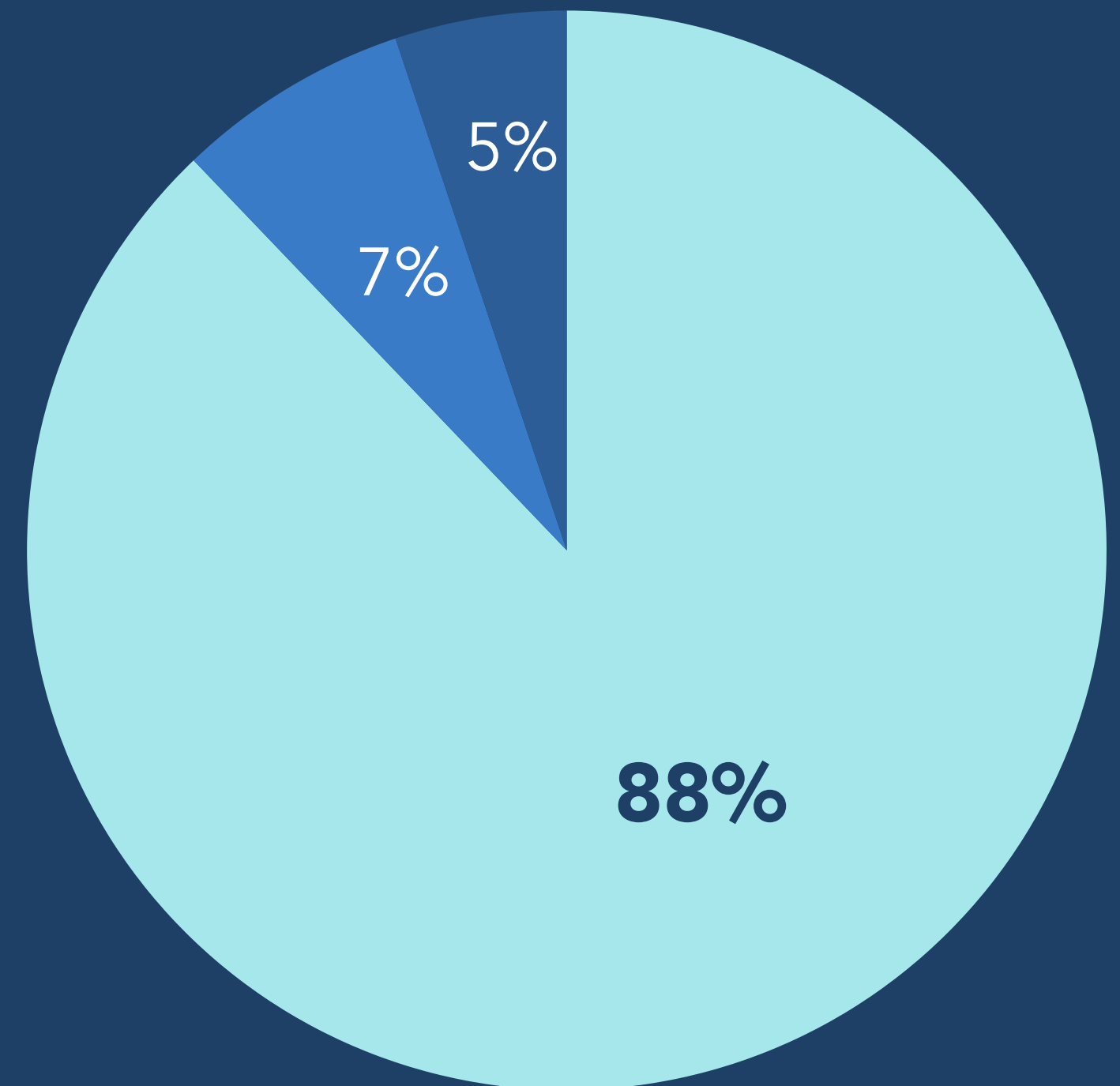
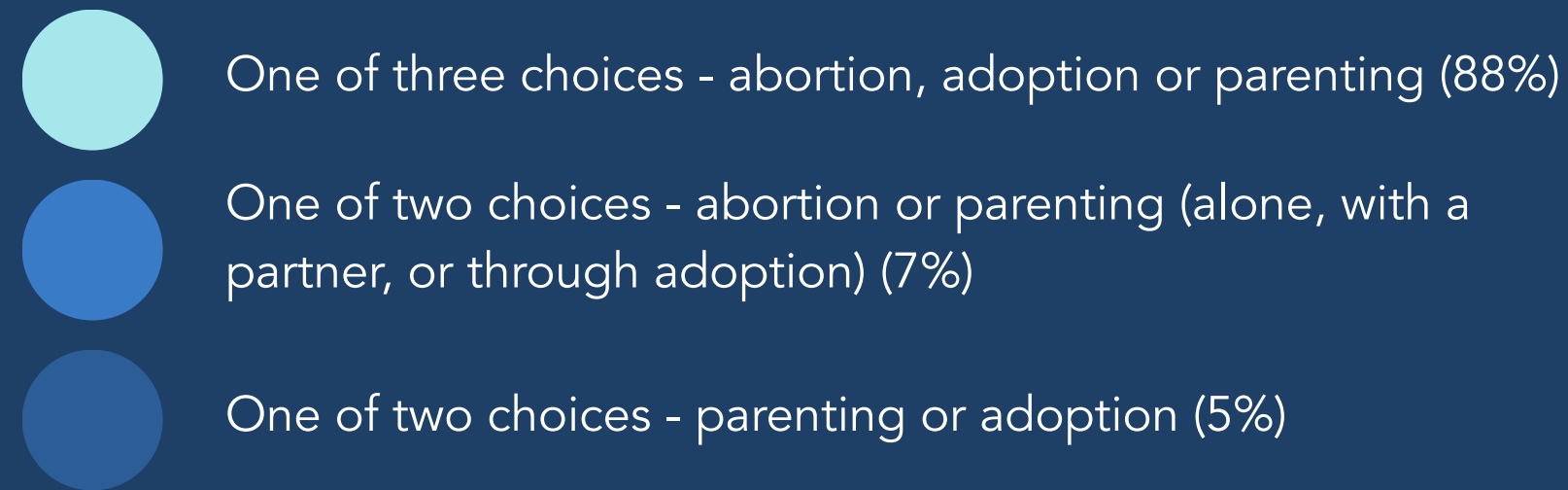
Who is Adoption Being Presented To?



The majority of PHOs surveyed are presenting adoption to all women being counseled. This is good! We want adoption to be presented as a good and valid option. Whether we have a referral to a trusted, compassionate adoption agency could be the difference between life and death for the child in her womb.



In our organization, we present adoption as...



The LOVE Approach, Heartbeat's standard volunteer training, encourages approaching each client individually and addressing each crossroads decision a client faces. Often, as research has taught us, this means the first decision faced is whether to abort or continue the pregnancy; adoption, marriage, or other parenting options don't typically play into the initial choice. If continuing the pregnancy is the path chosen, then the additional options of how to parent arise---including adoption.



Training on Adoption

Staff training on adoption in pregnancy help organizations can vary widely. Those respondents who reported themselves as leaders in their organizations were asked the following questions about training so we can better understand the typical PHO experience.

Results show there is a need for increased training. Regular training on presenting adoption is only offered for about half of PHOs and for some, the last training for staff about adoption was over five years ago. Some PHOs are dedicated to the topic and train yearly or even more often, but additional regular training is clearly needed in the movement.

Heartbeat Academy has a number of webinars, Conference workshop recordings, and training options to help staff and volunteers at PHOs present adoption effectively to clients and cultivate a positive adoption culture. [Click here for more information.](#)



Does your staff regularly train on how to present adoption to clients?



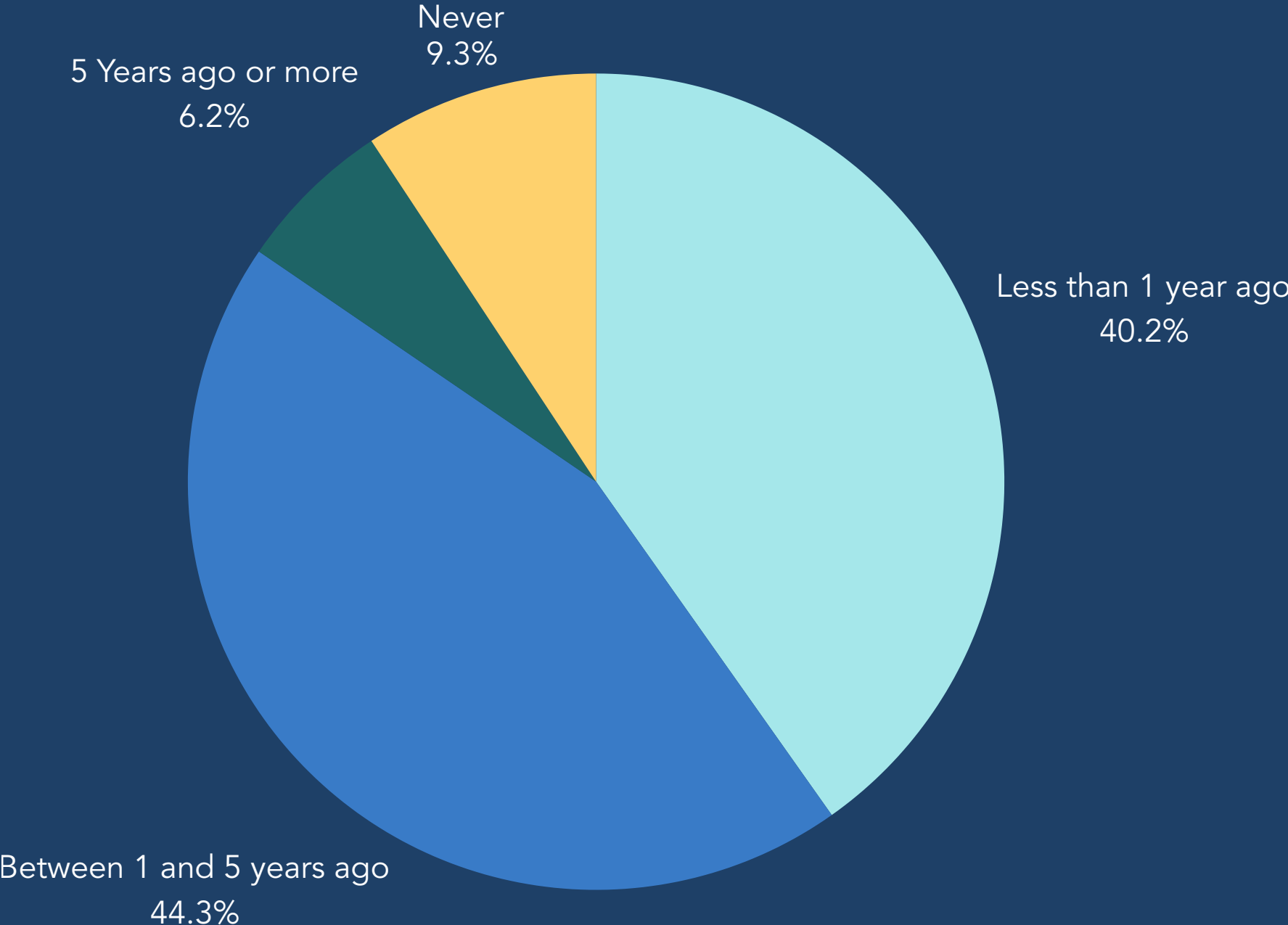
Explore training options for adoption and more at Heartbeat Academy by clicking [here](#)! Consider adding adoption to your custom private course.

No
43.3%



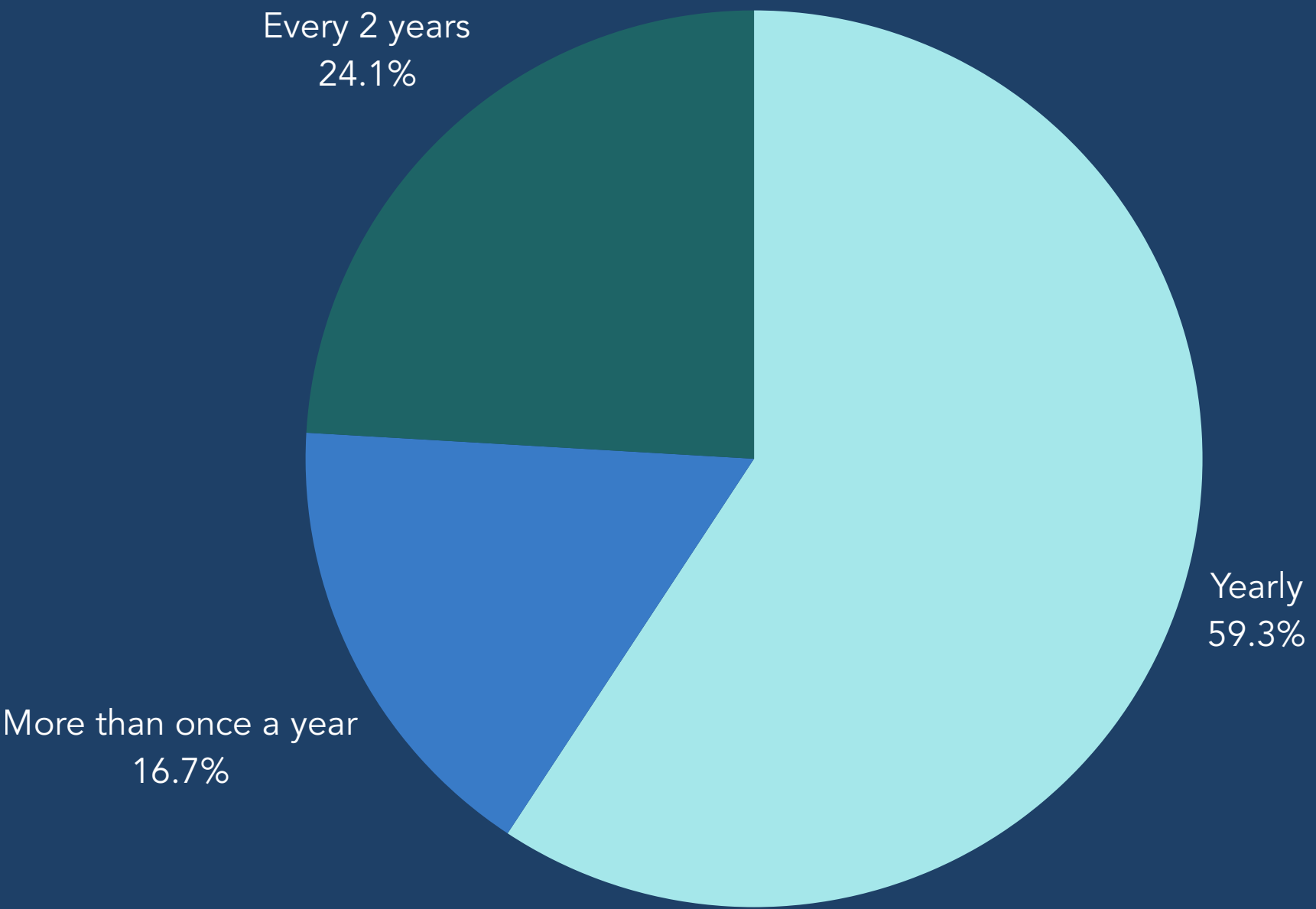
Yes
56.7%

Approximately how long ago was your last training on presenting adoption to clients?



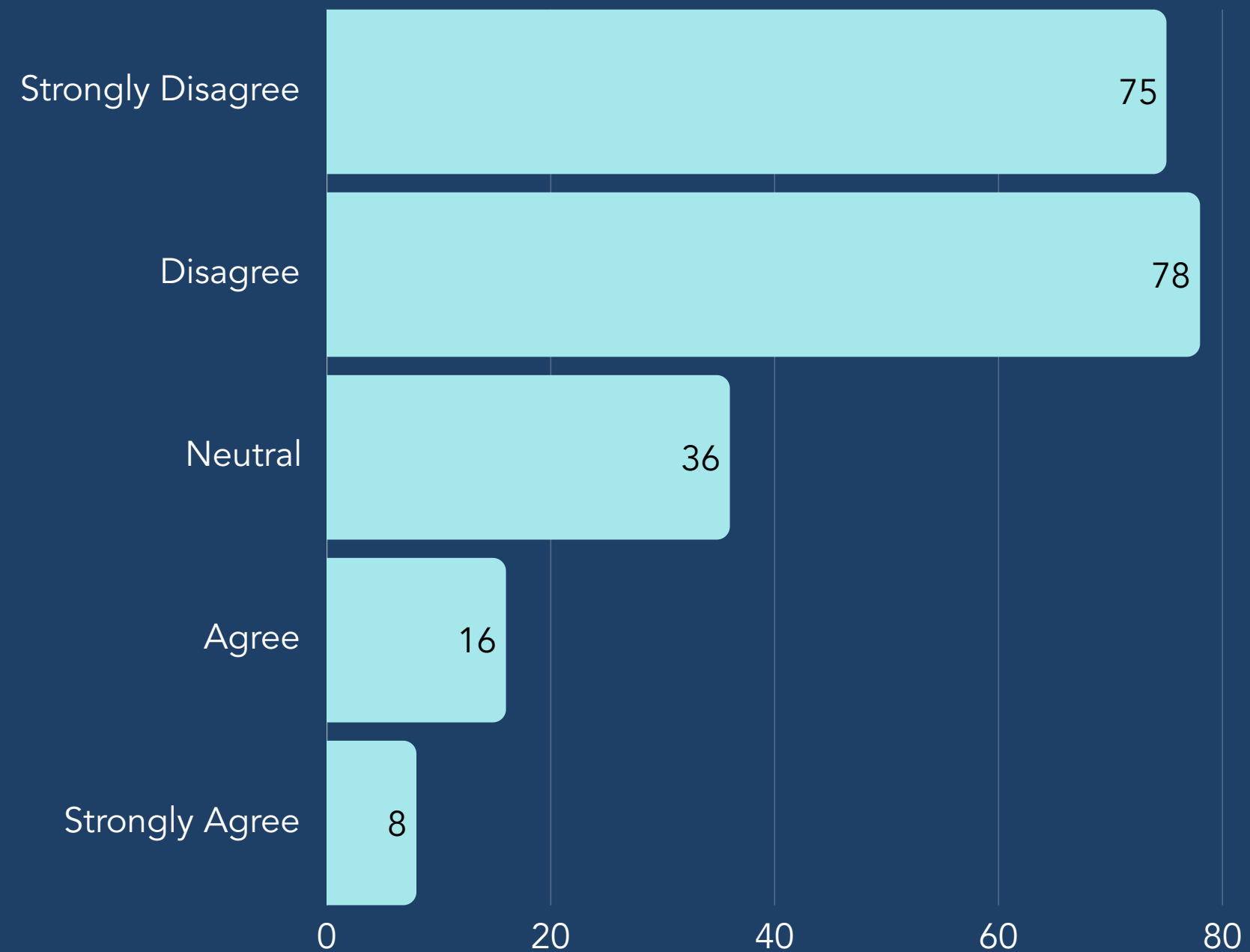
How often does your staff train on presenting adoption to clients?

*This question was provided only to those who answered that their PHOs regularly train on adoption.

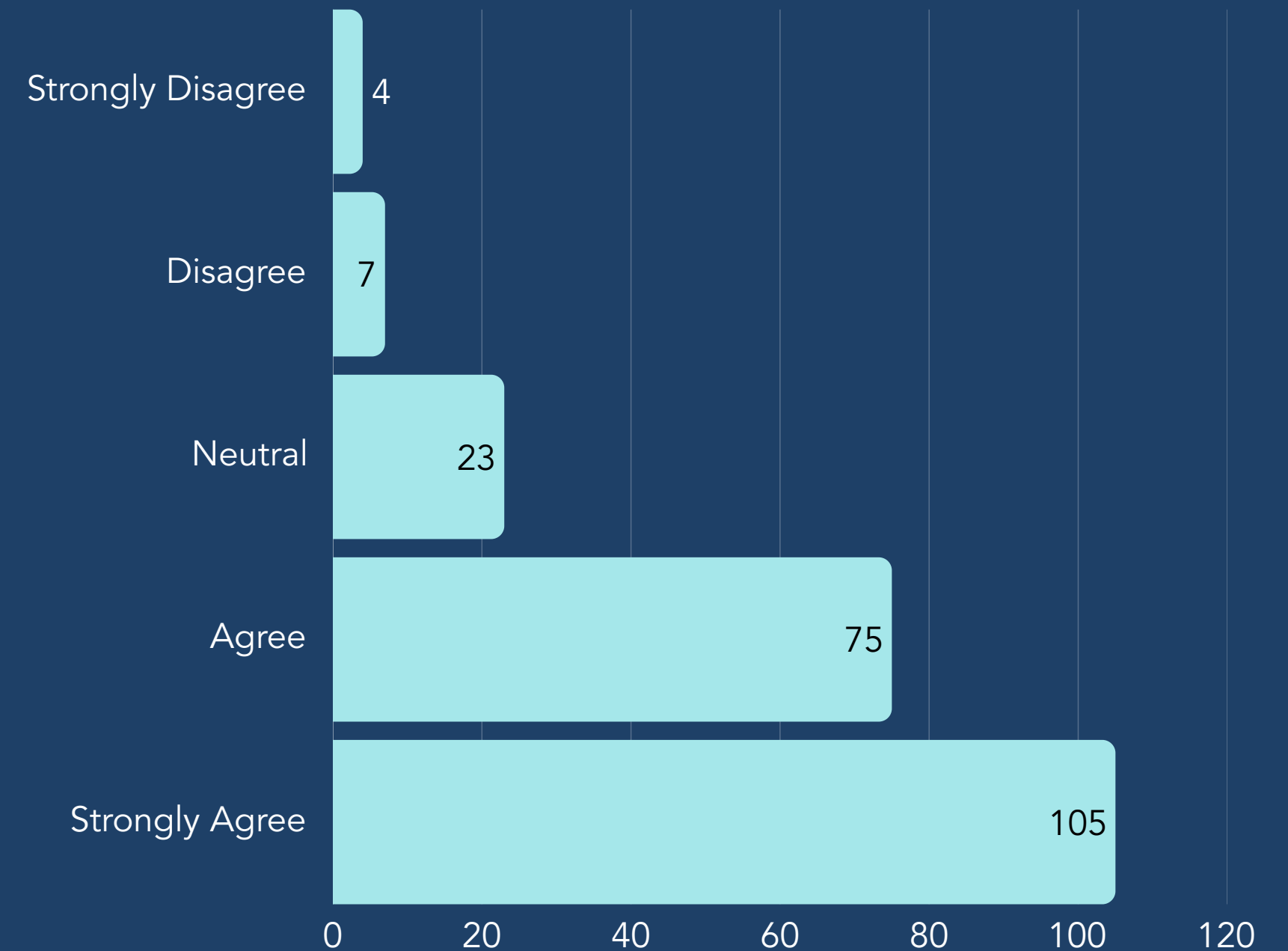


Faith-Based vs. Secular Adoption Agencies

"It makes no difference if a client chooses to work with a faith-based or secular adoption agency."

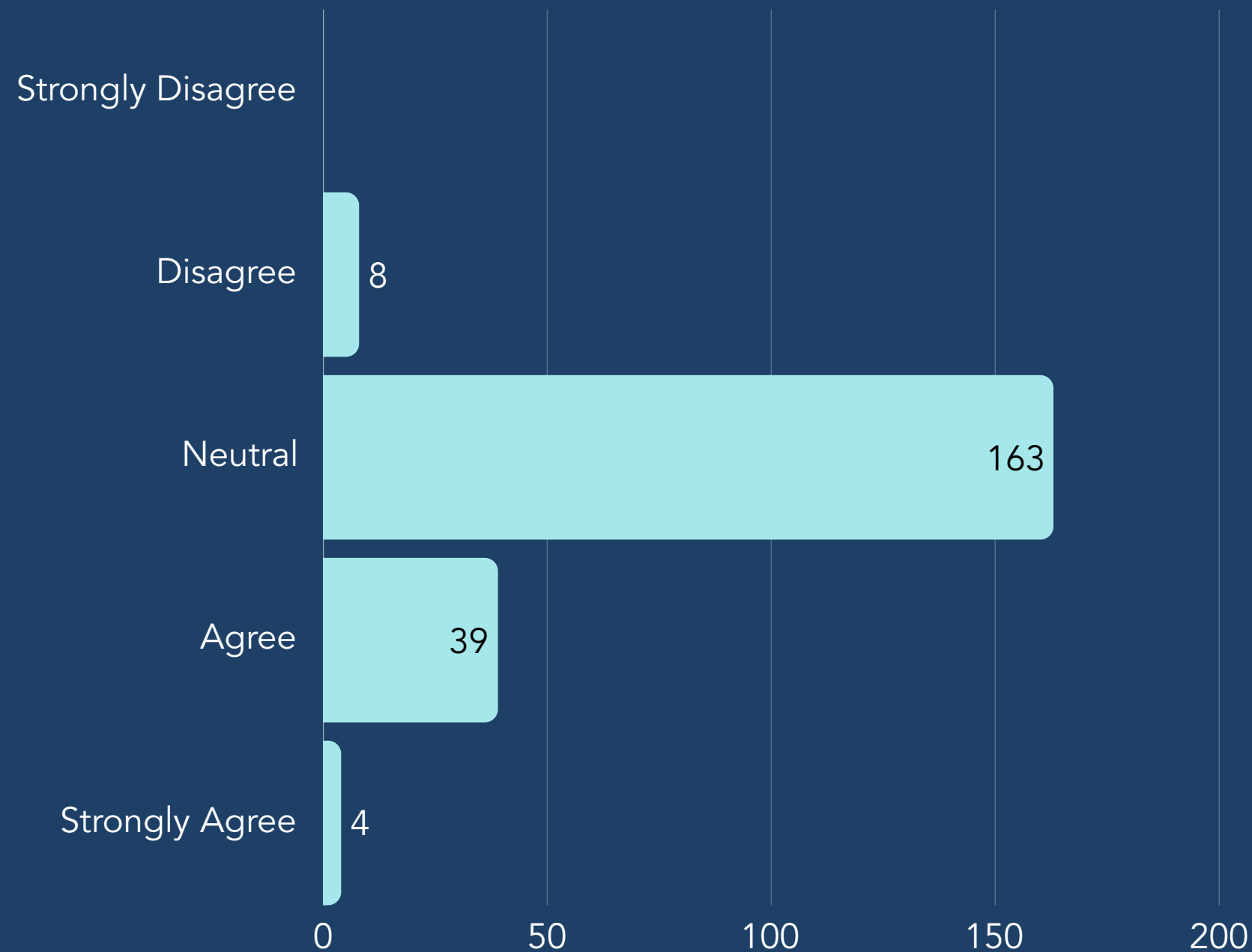


"We prefer our clients to work with a faith-based adoption agency because they are more likely to share our views about life."

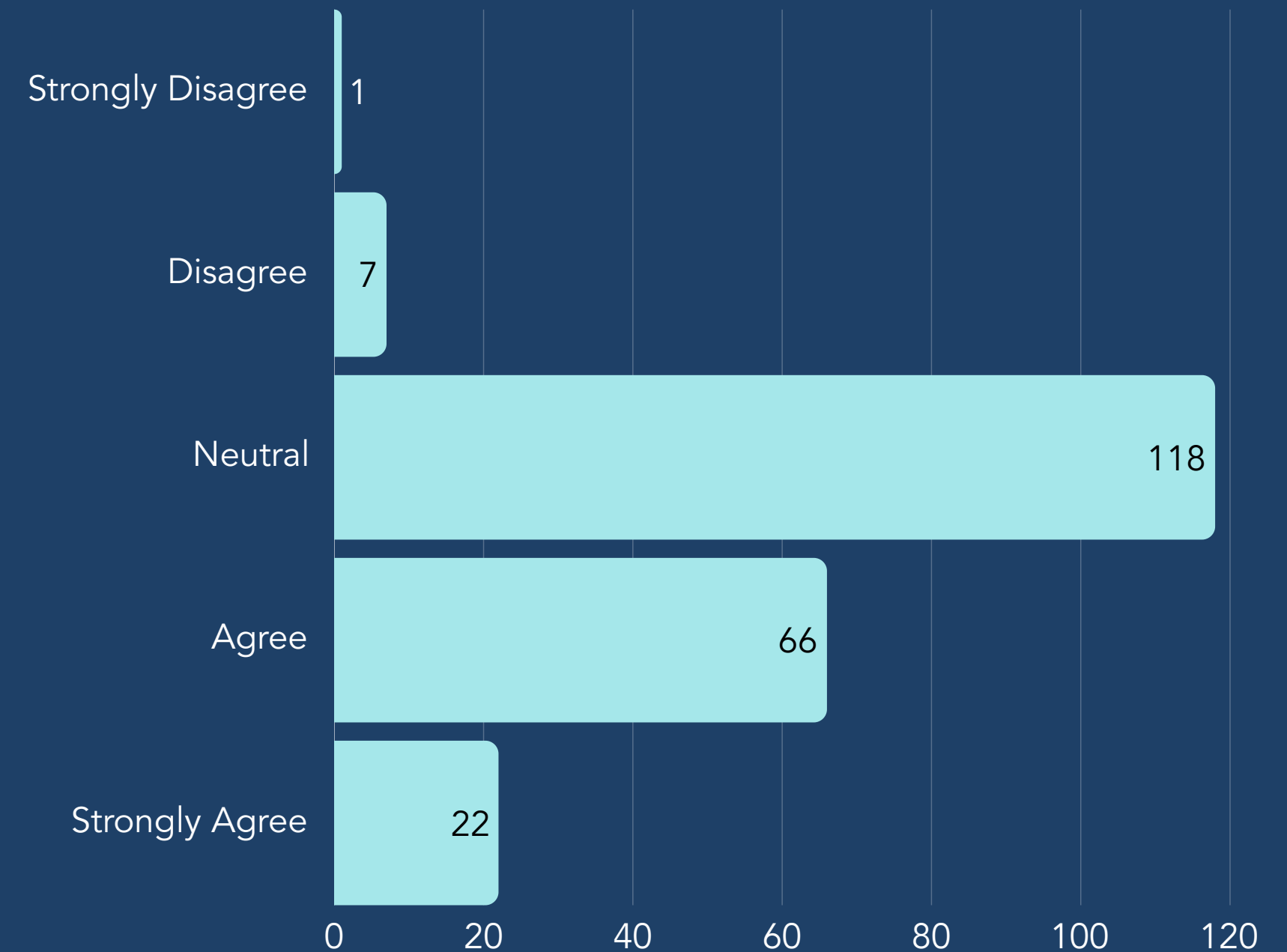


Faith-Based vs. Secular Adoption Agencies

"Our clients prefer to work with faith-based adoption agencies over secular adoption agencies."

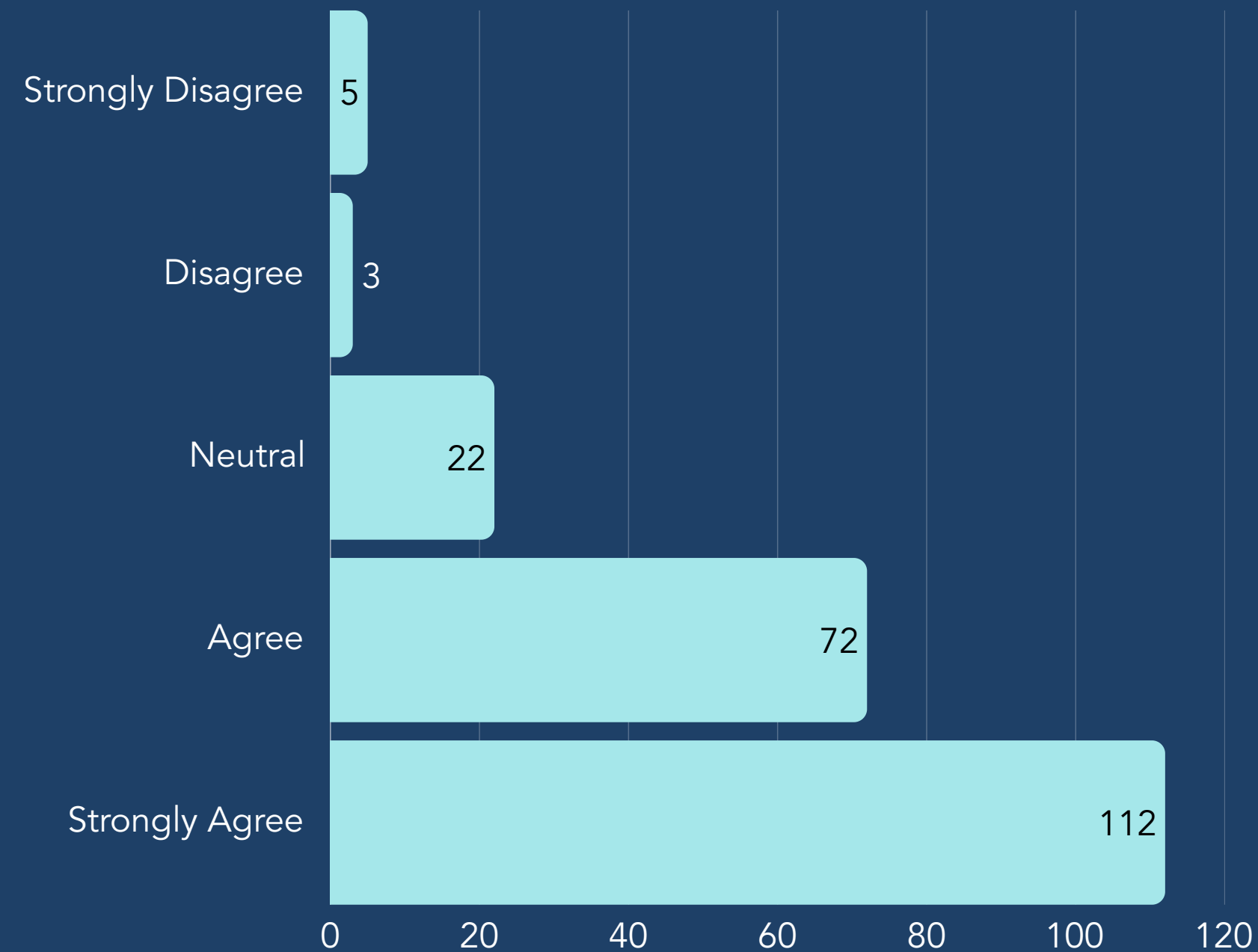


"Our clients feel more comfortable working with an adoption agency that shares their faith commitments."



Faith-Based vs. Secular Adoption Agencies

"Faith-based adoption agencies are more inclined to be supportive of a woman's desire to place with a married mother and father than a secular agency would be."



Analysis:

Faith-Based vs. Secular Adoption Agencies

While it appears that clients do not have a preference about whether they work with a faith-based adoption agency or a secular adoption agency, pregnancy help organizations generally hold that it makes a difference if a client chooses to work with a faith-based adoption agency instead of a secular adoption agency.

Also, pregnancy help organizations generally prefer to work with faith-based adoption agencies because they are more likely to share their views about life. They generally hold that faith-based adoption agencies are more inclined to be supportive of a woman's desire to place with a married mother and father than secular agencies would be.

Pregnancy help organizations can use the Life Links webpage to find a number of adoption resources and faith-based adoption agencies. [Click here to explore.](#)

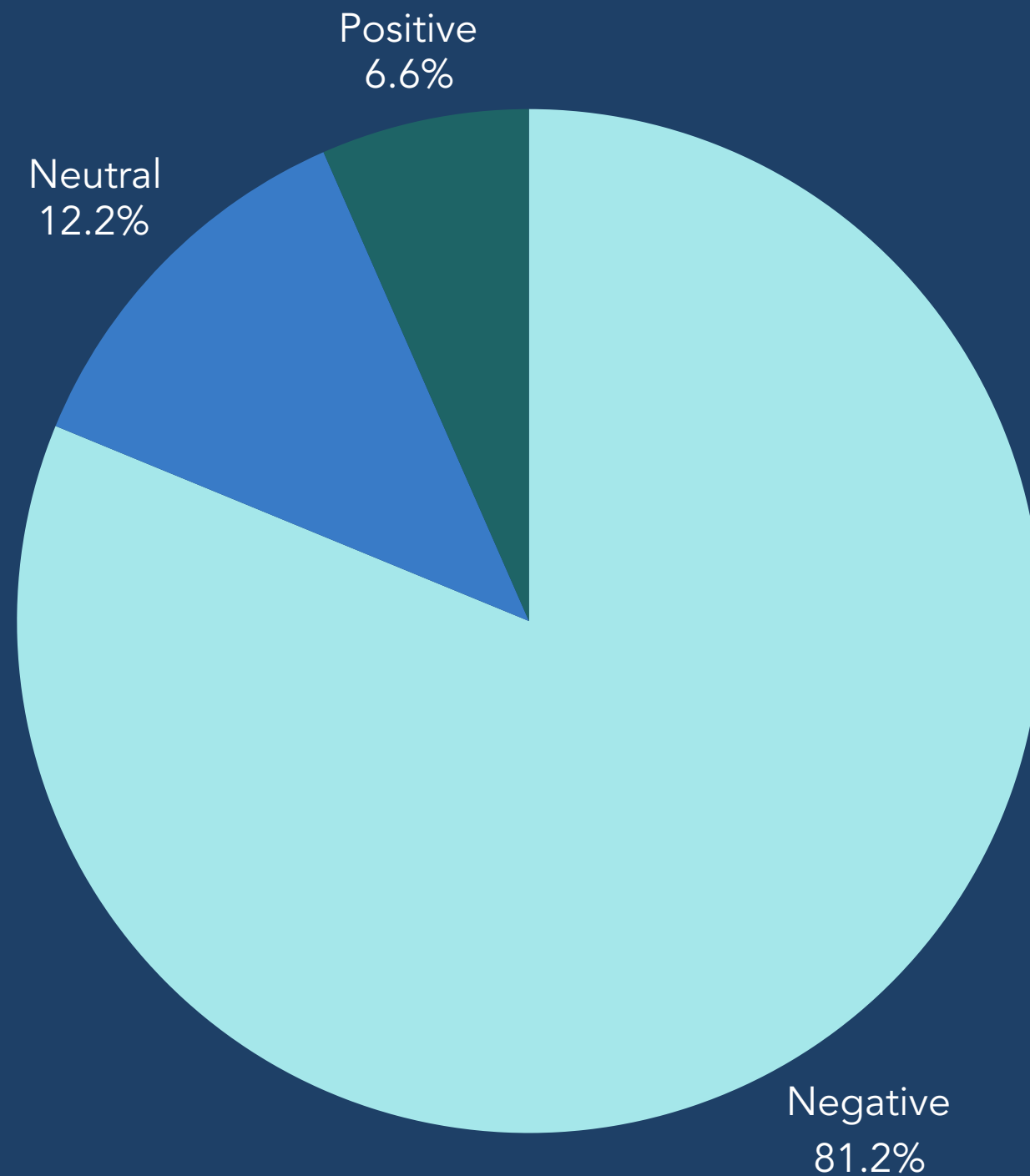


Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

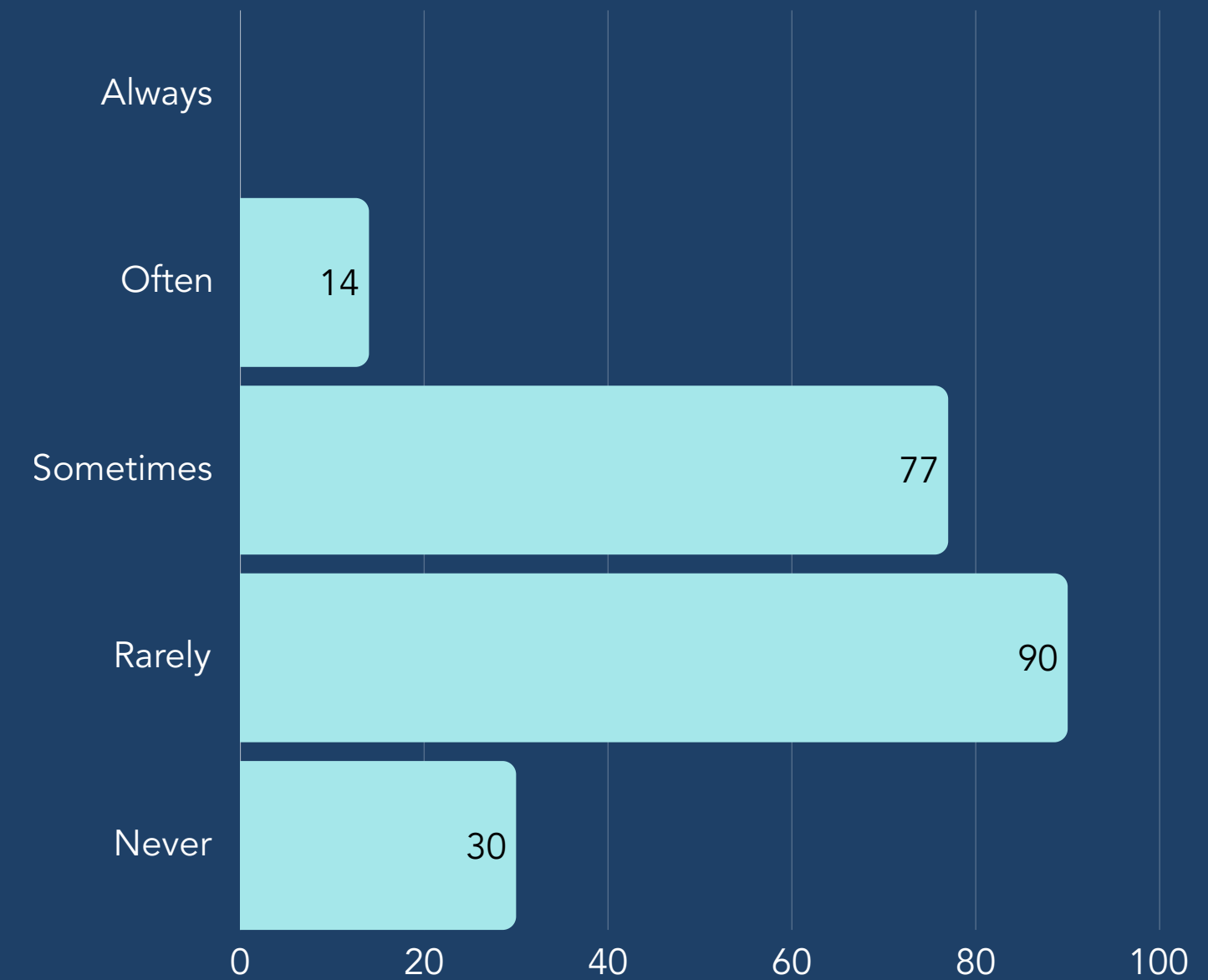
In this section, we explore what PHO staff and volunteers think about the attitudes of their clients. While this is a step removed from actually communicating with those faced with adoption as a choice, we see great value in hearing from those staff and volunteers who spend their time presenting adoption to clients in the valley of decision.

Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

In your experience, what is the initial attitude of most of the women you serve regarding adoption?

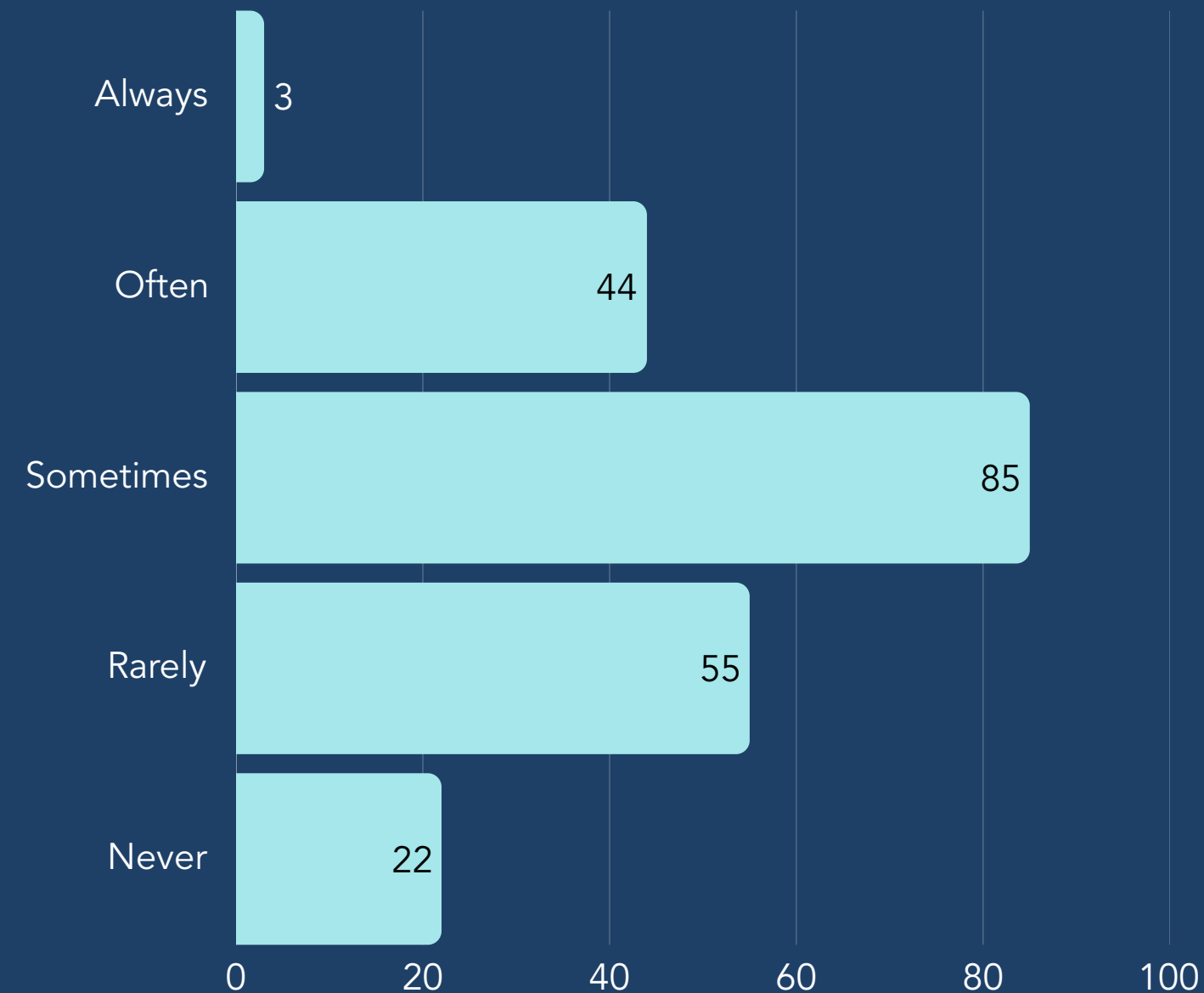


How often do your clients report that they've had a bad personal experience with adoption?

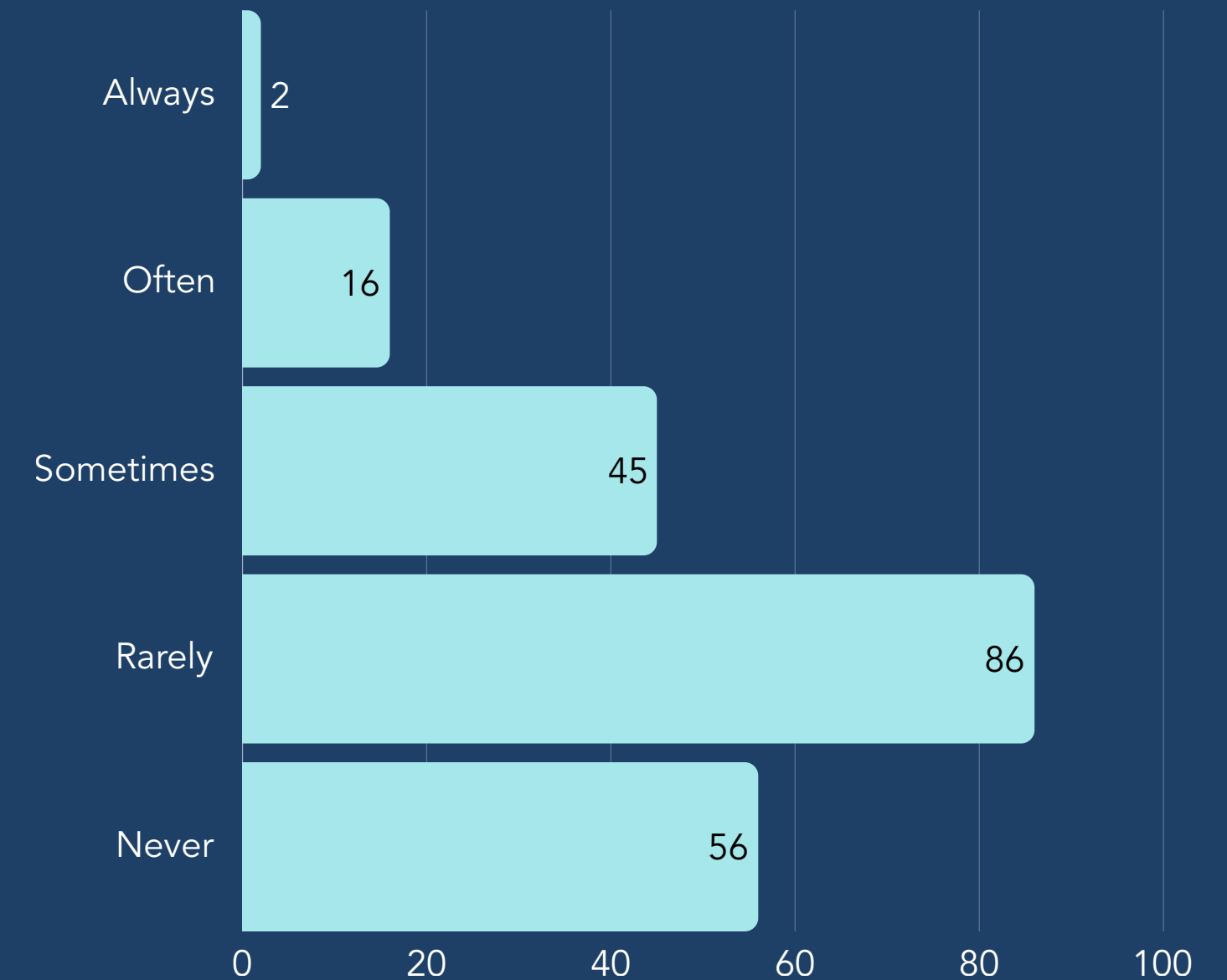


Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

How often do your clients report that the adoption process is too confusing or overwhelming?

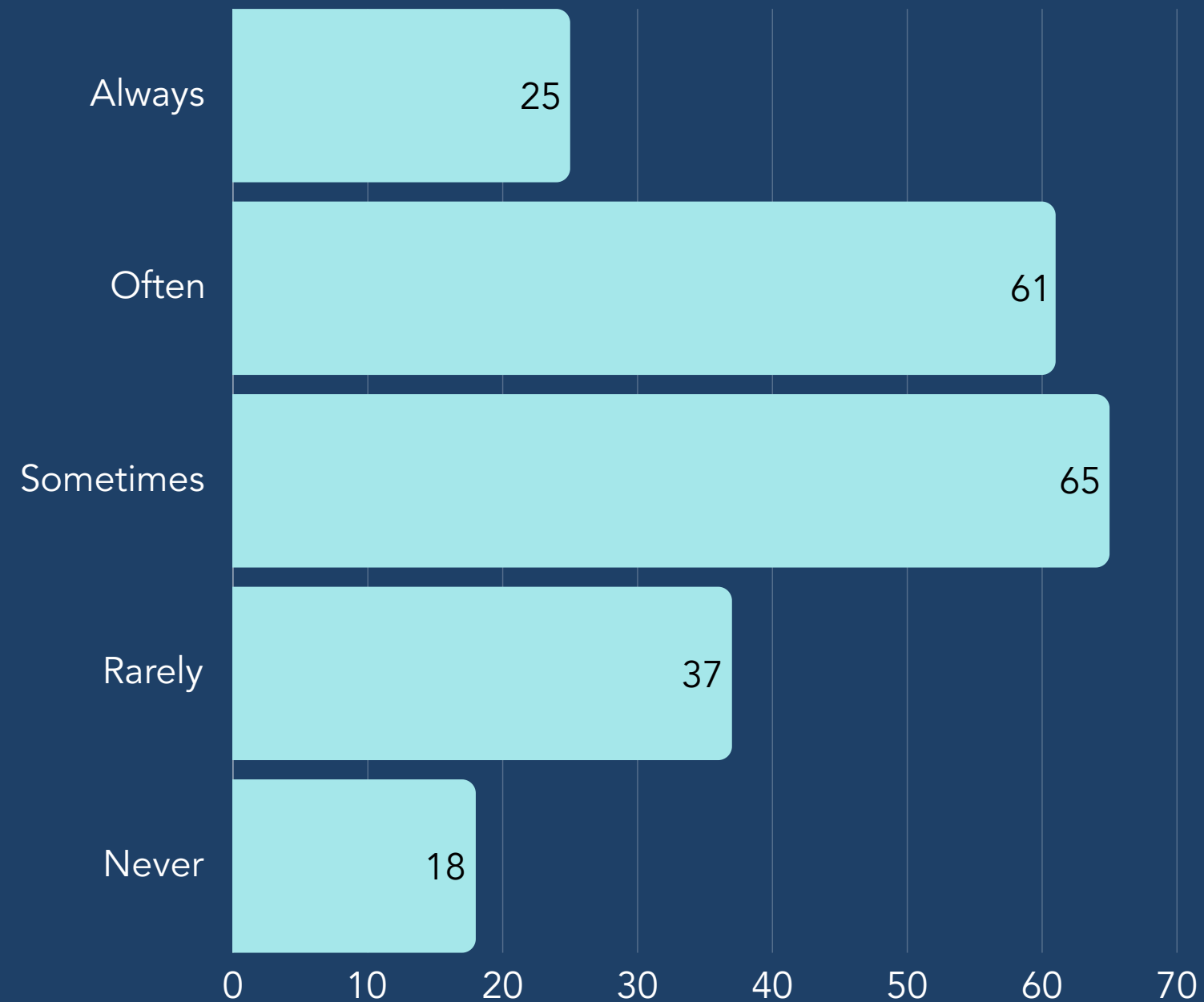


How often do your clients report a fear that her child will contact her in the future?

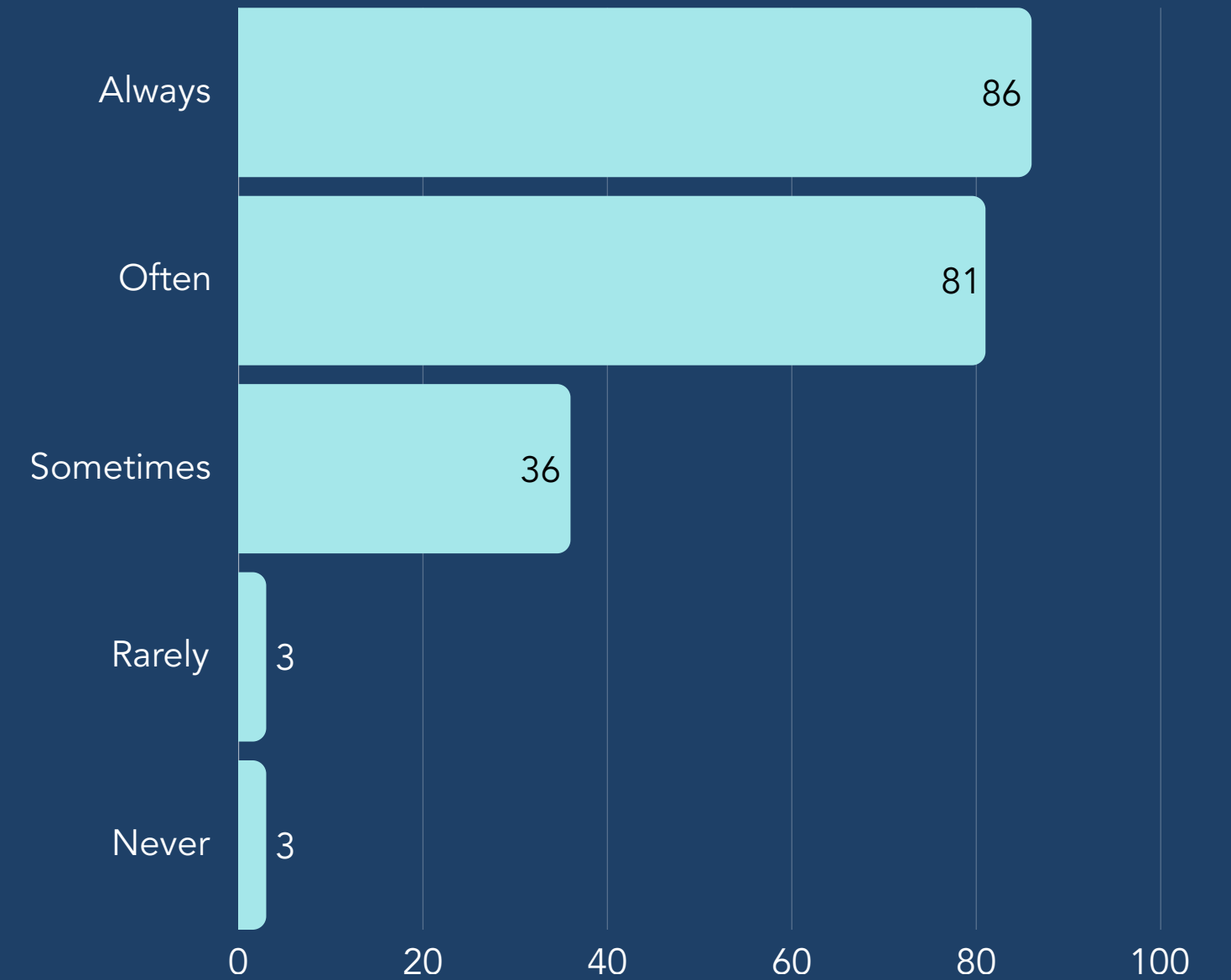


Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

How often do your clients report a fear of losing contact with her baby?

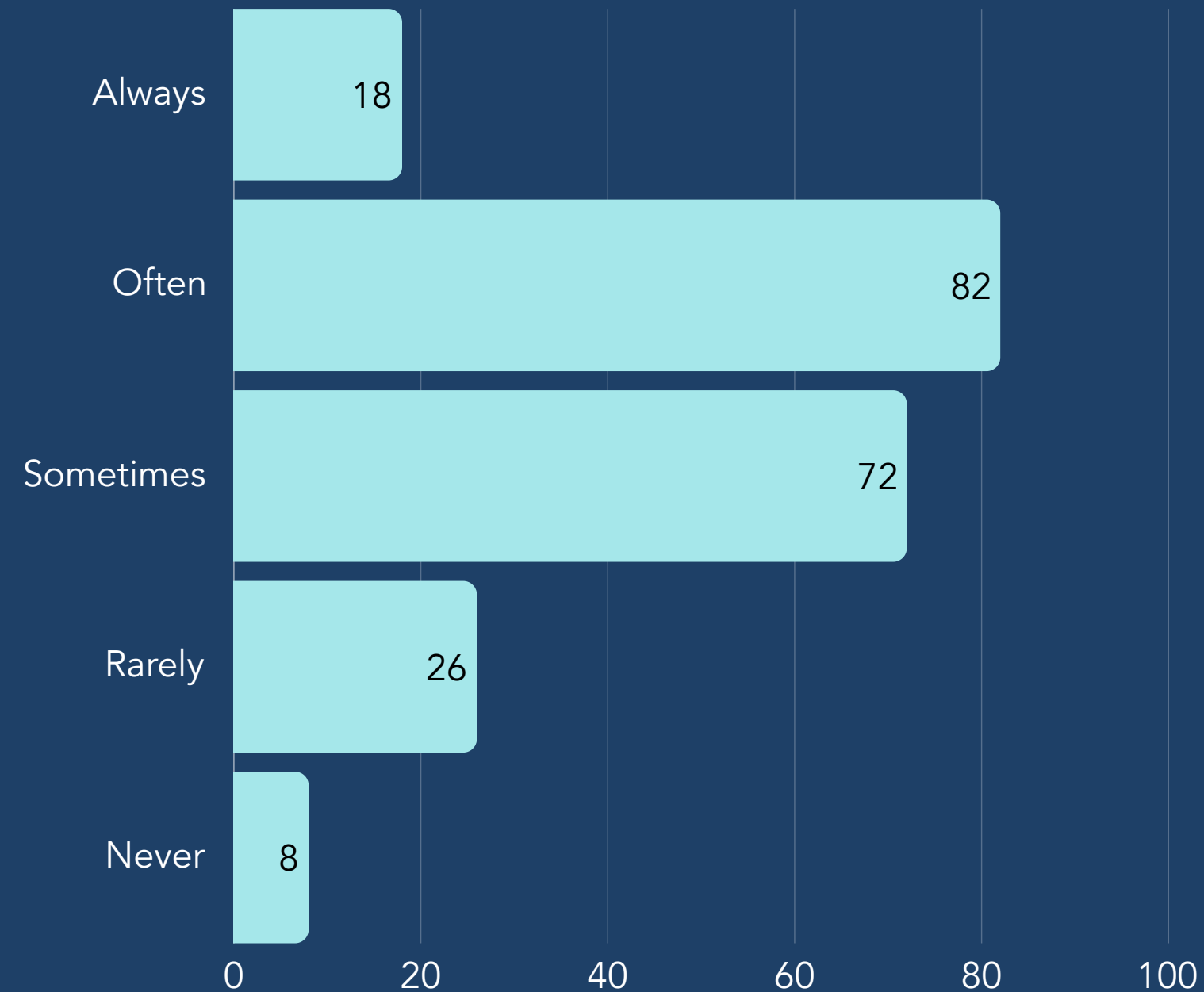


How often do your clients report a fear that "giving up" her baby after bonding during pregnancy will be too hard?

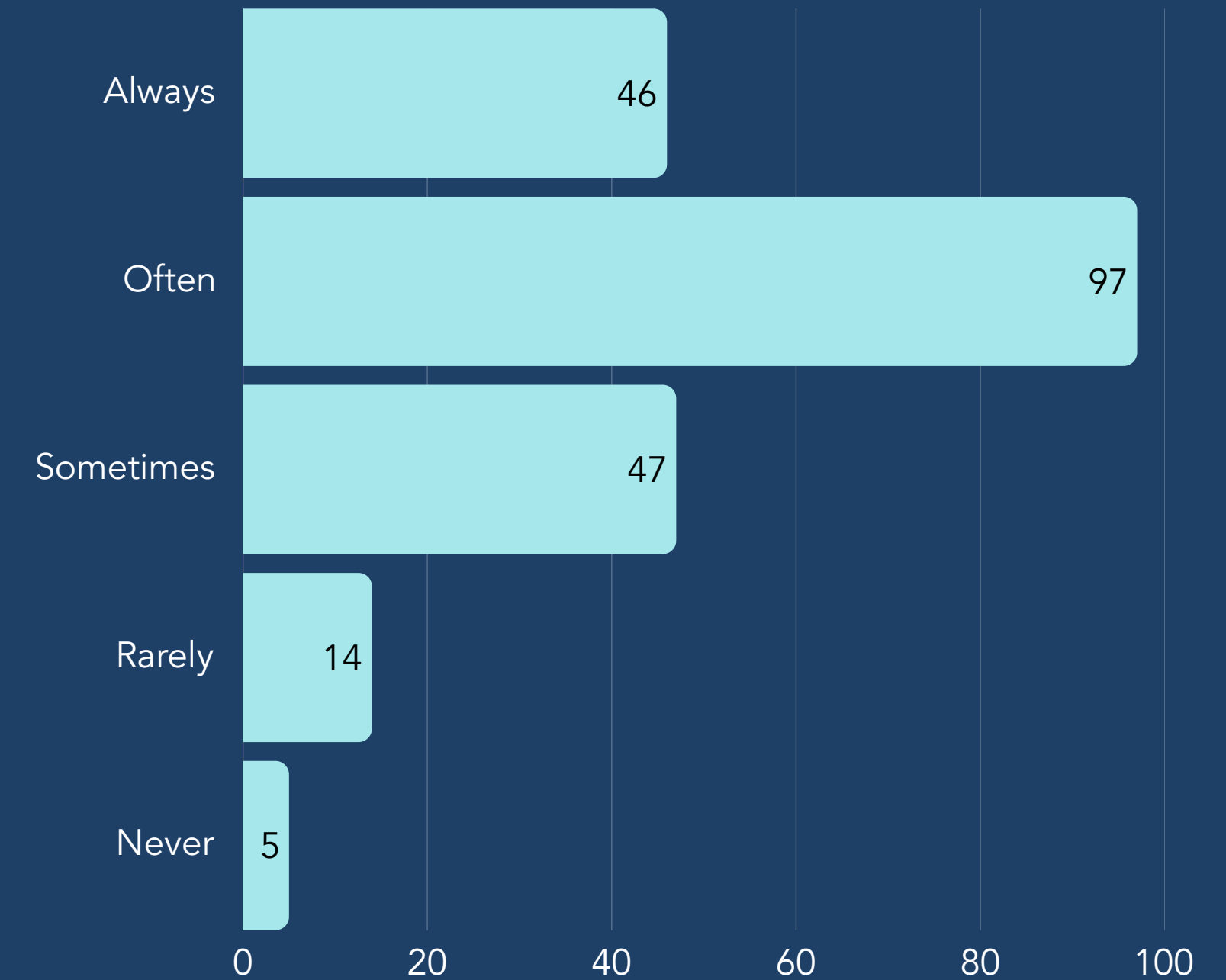


Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

How often do your clients report external pressure from others that adoption is not a loving choice?

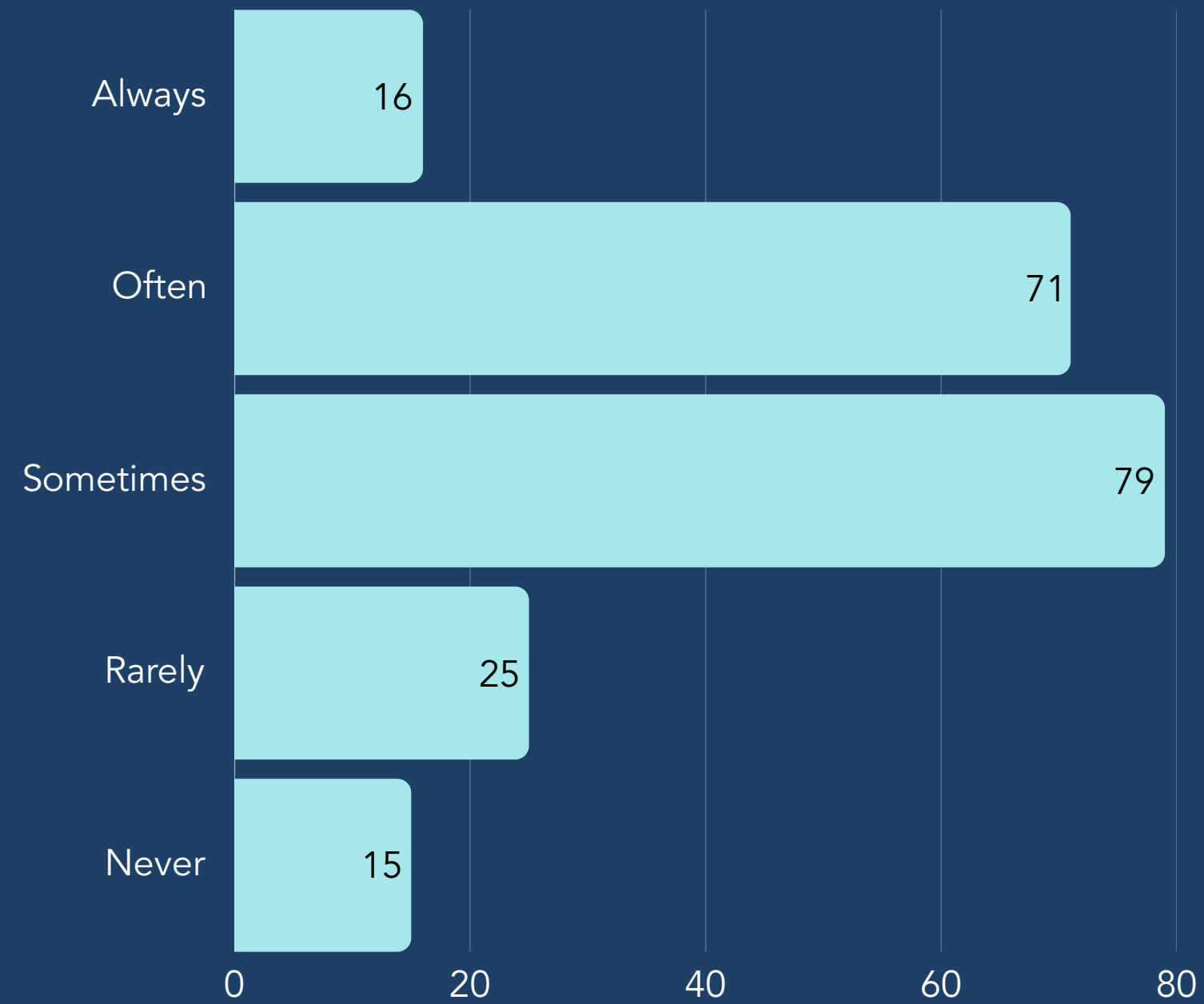


How often do your clients report a belief that adoption means abandoning her baby?



Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

How often do your clients report a fear that the child will not be properly loved and cared for?



Analysis:

Client Attitudes Toward Adoption

Likely Initial Barriers to Adoption

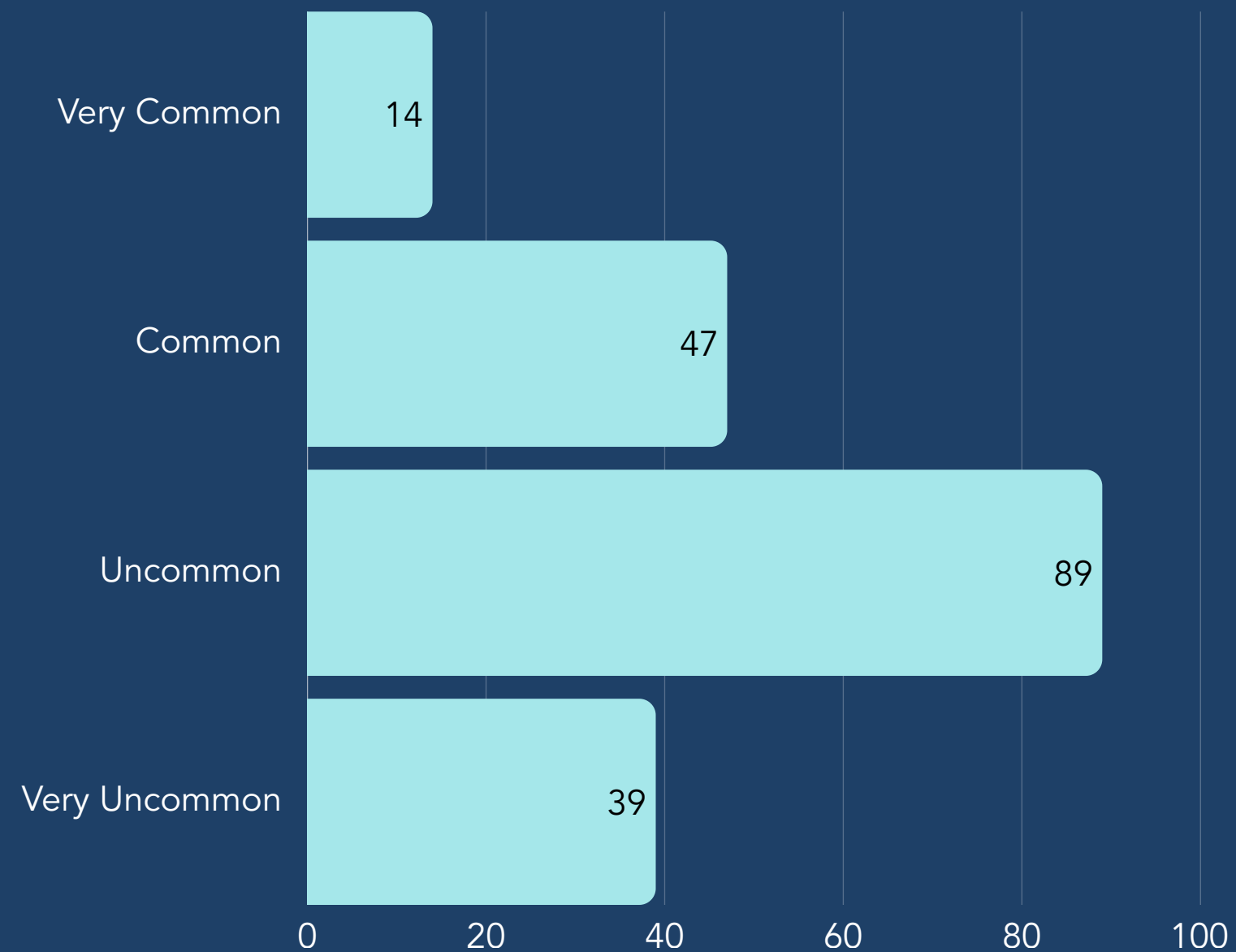
- Fear that giving up her baby after bonding during pregnancy will be too hard.
- Belief that adoption means abandoning her baby.
- External pressure from others that adoption is not a loving choice.
- Fear that the child will not be properly loved and cared for.
- Fear of losing contact with her baby.

Less Likely Initial Barriers to Adoption

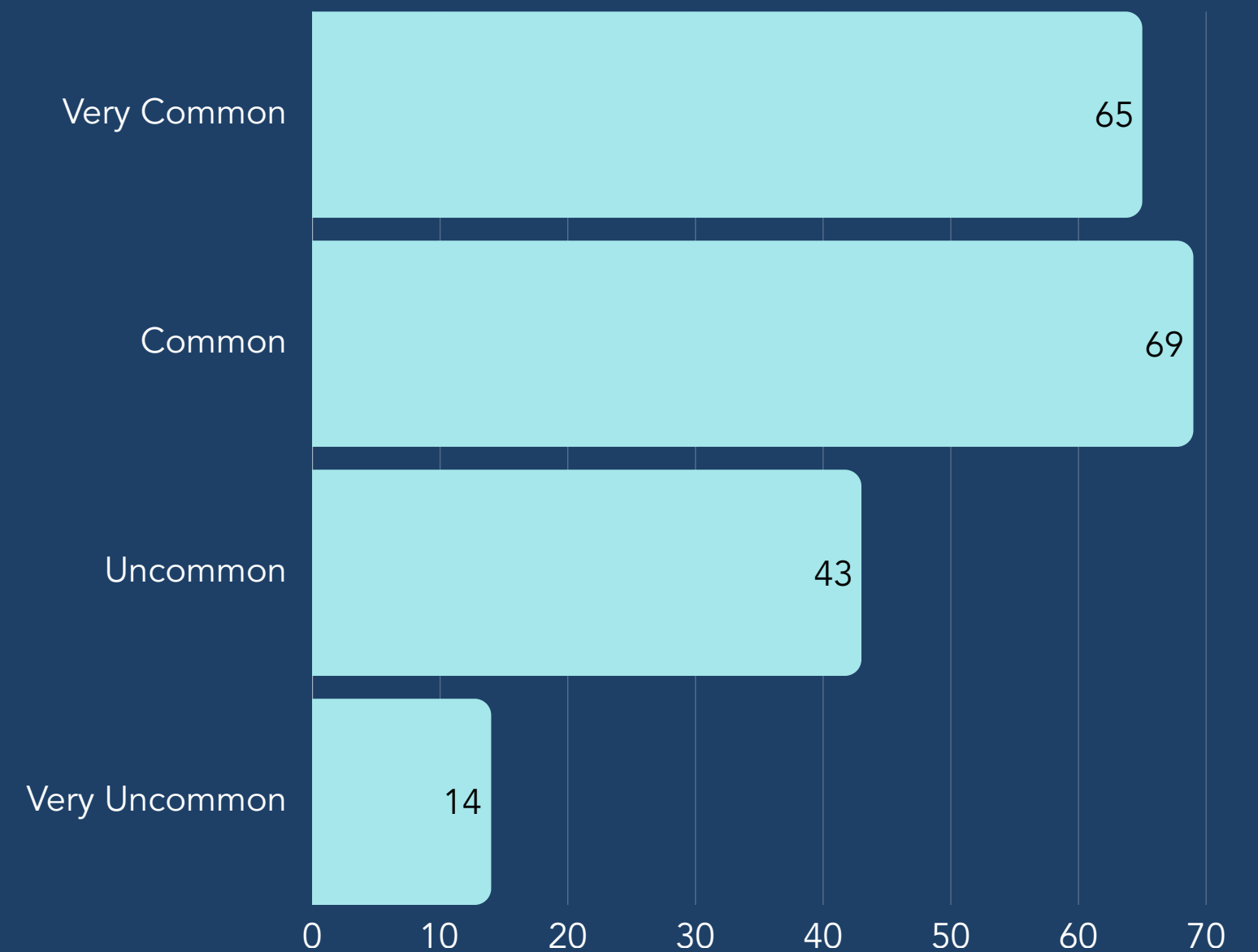
- A bad personal experience with adoption.
- Fear that the child will contact her in the future.
- Concern that the adoption process will be confusing or overwhelming.

Client Misconceptions About Adoption

How common is it for a client to think adoption will cost her money?

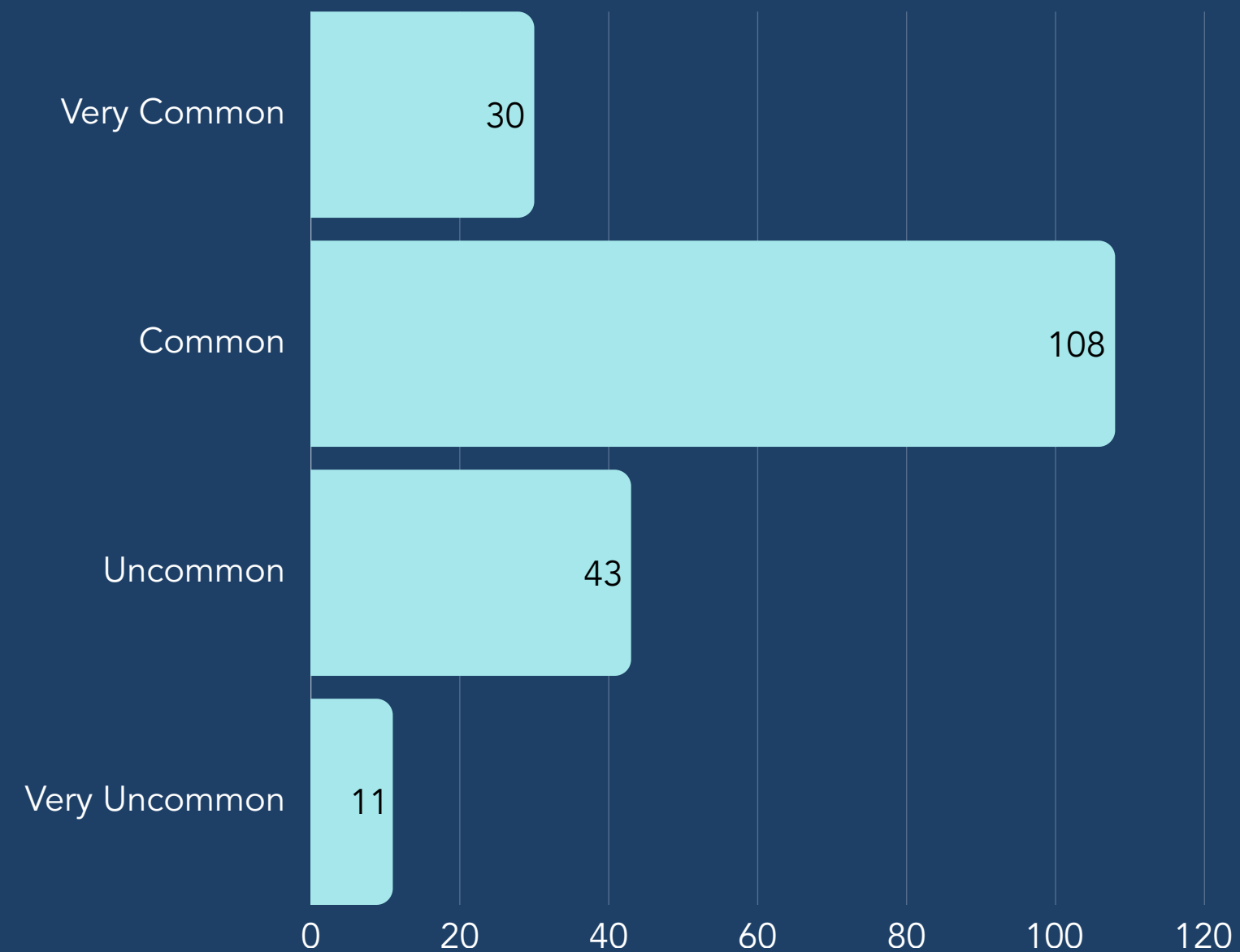


How common is it for a client to confuse private adoption with the foster care system?

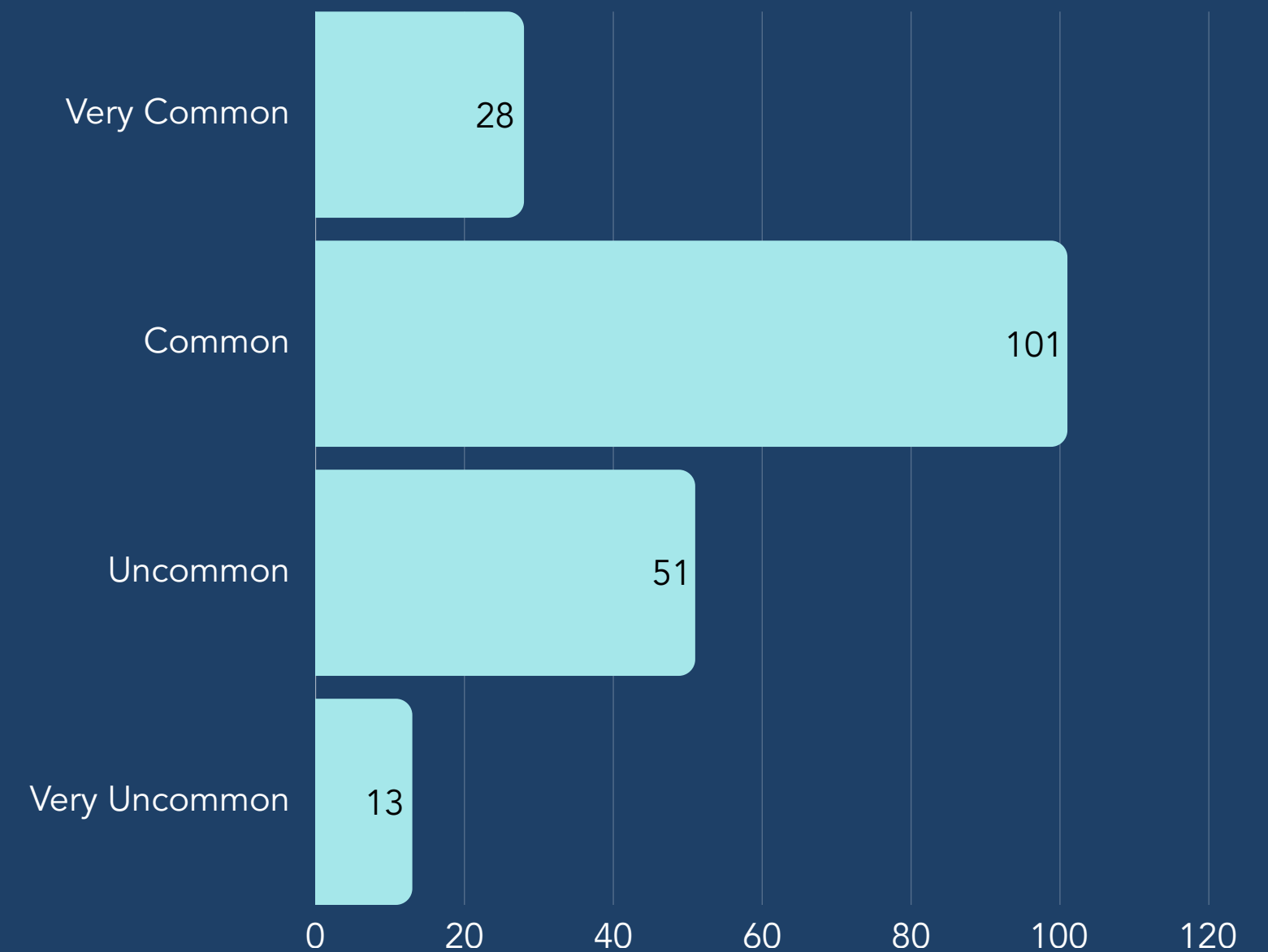


Client Misconceptions About Adoption

How common is it for a client to think she will have no role in selecting an adoptive family?

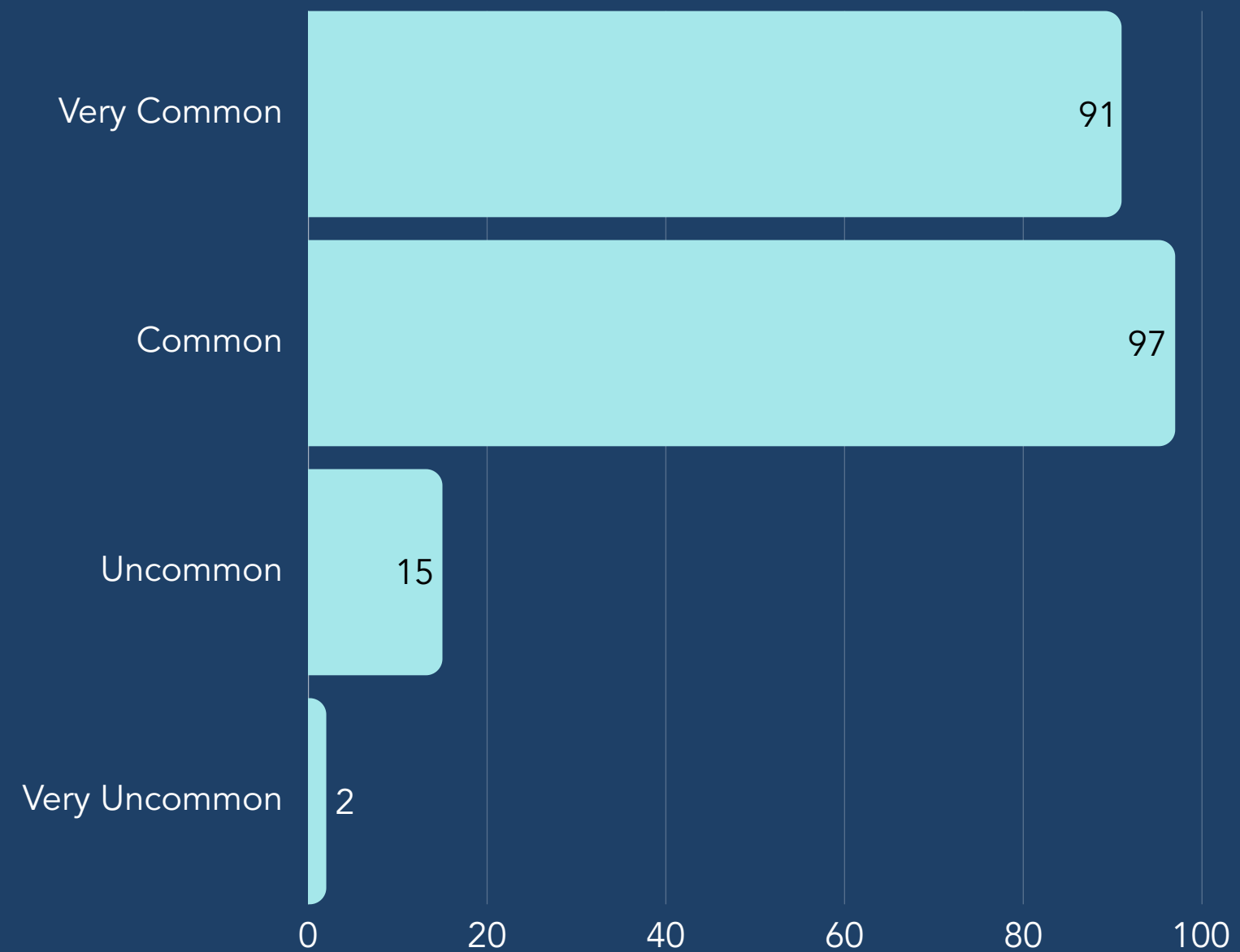


How common is it for a client think she will never have contact with or updates about her child after the adoption?



Client Misconceptions About Adoption

How common is it for a client to believe adoption is abandonment rather than a loving choice?



Analysis:

Client Misconceptions about Adoption

Common Misconceptions on Adoption (most common to least common)

- Belief that adoption is abandonment rather than a loving choice
- Fear she will have no role in selecting an adoptive family
- Confusing private adoption with the foster care system
- Fear she will never have contact with or updates about her child after the adoption

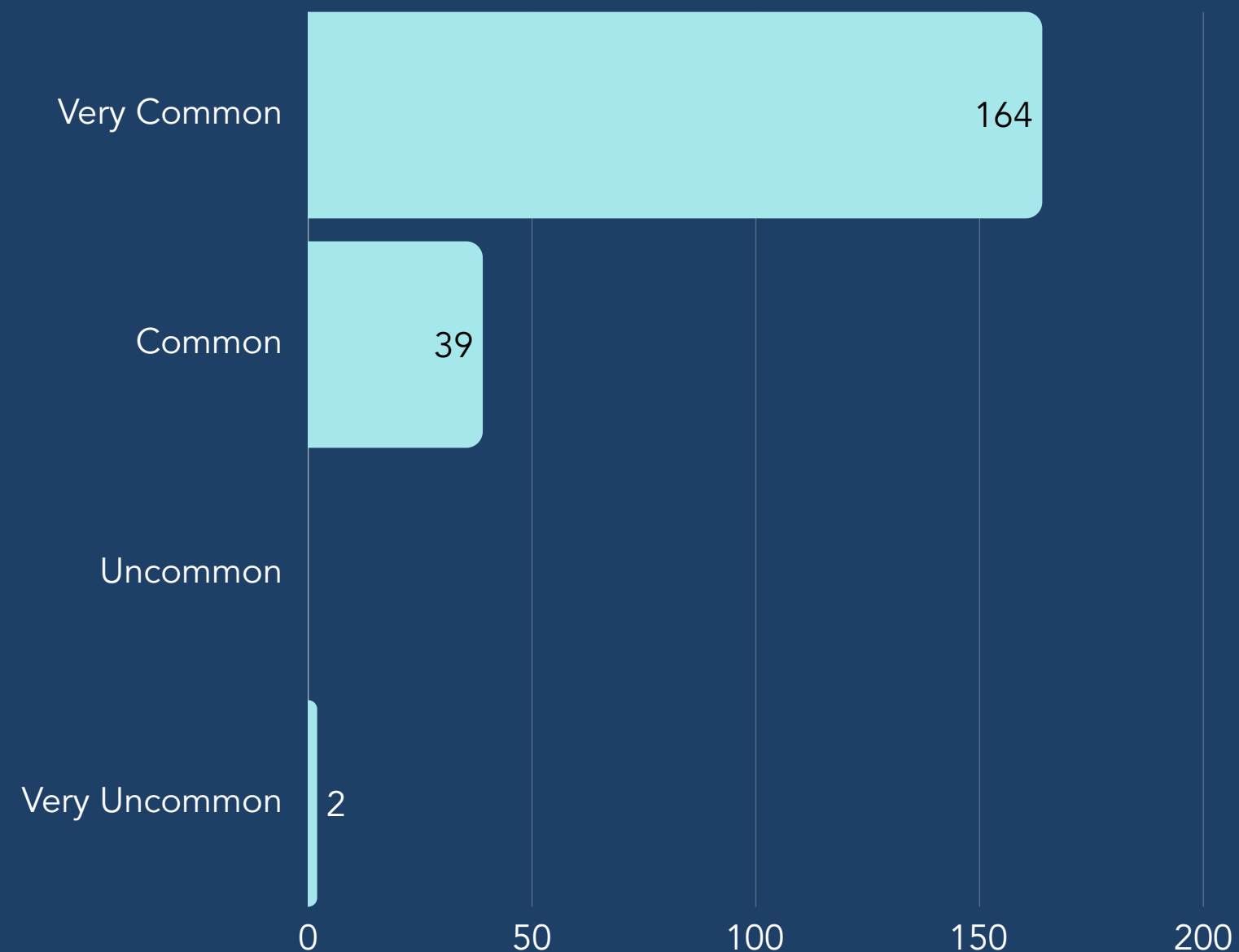
Uncommon Misconceptions on Adoption

- Concern that adoption will cost her money

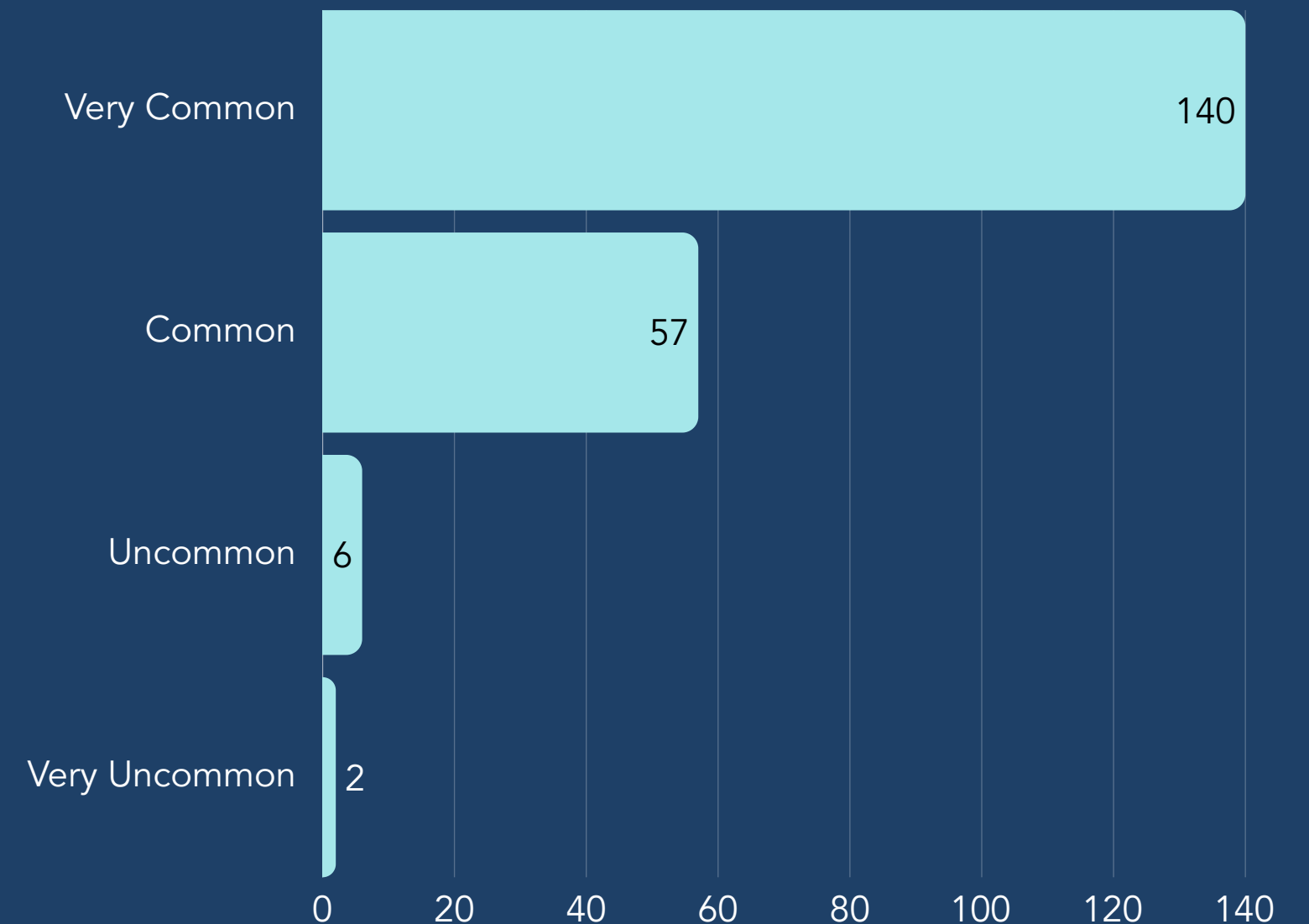
Abortion-Minded Client Attitudes

This section focuses on abortion-minded clients and why they preferred (at least initially) abortion to adoption.

How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to believe that abortion offers an immediate, final resolution to her situation?

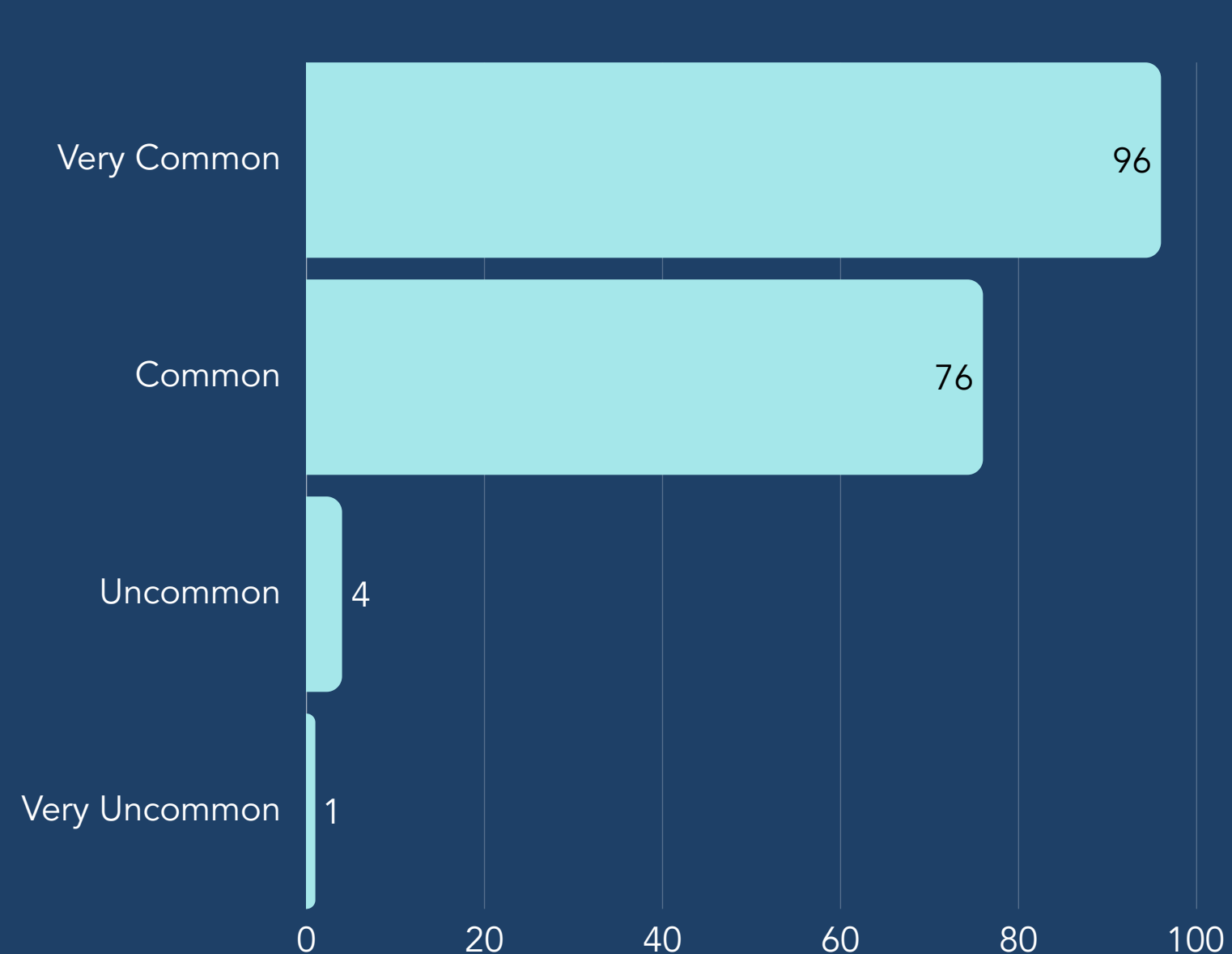


How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to believe that choosing an abortion means she will not have to reveal her pregnancy?

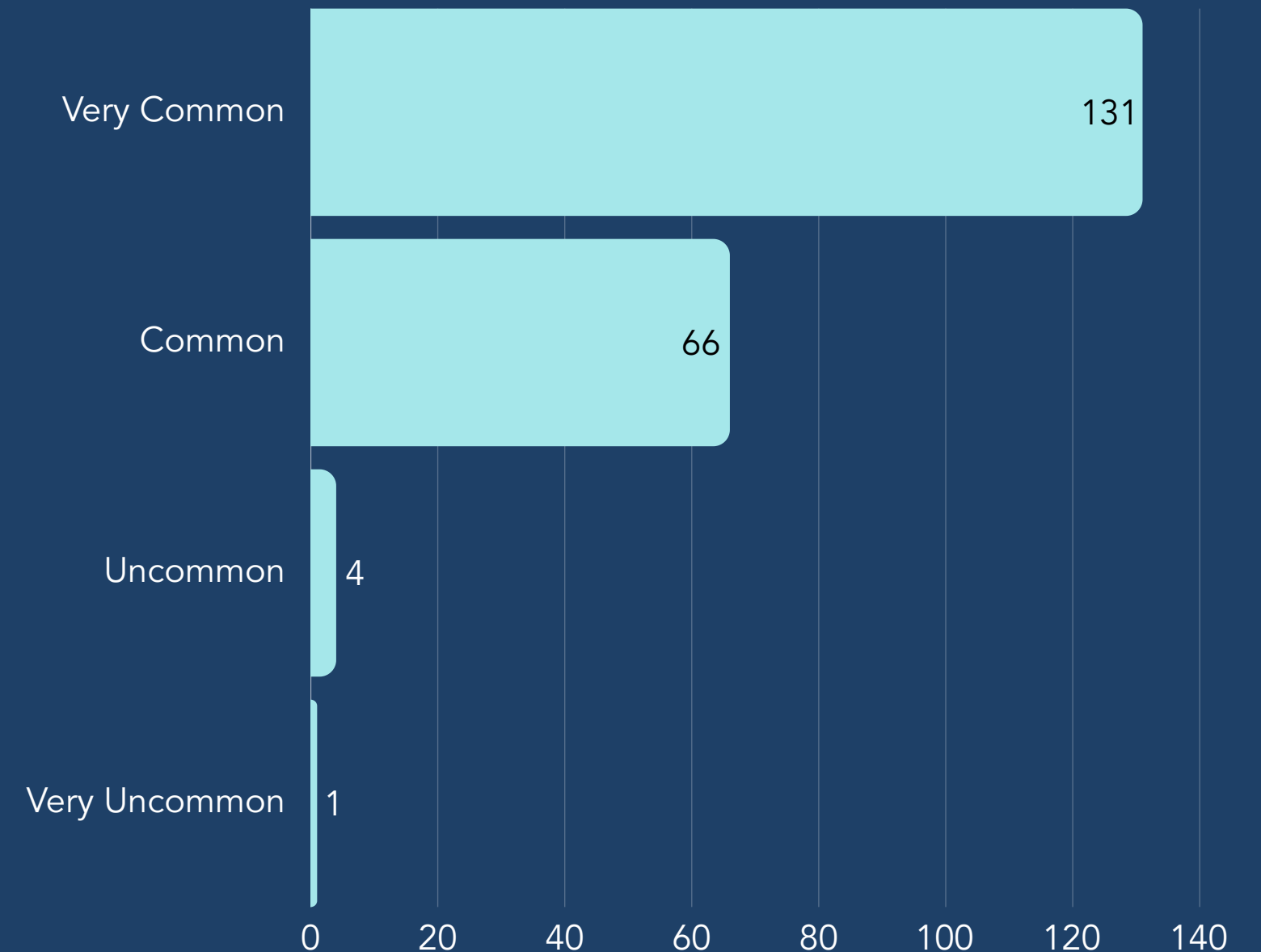


Abortion-Minded Client Attitudes

How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to believe that an abortion will be easier to live with because "good mothers don't give their babies away"?

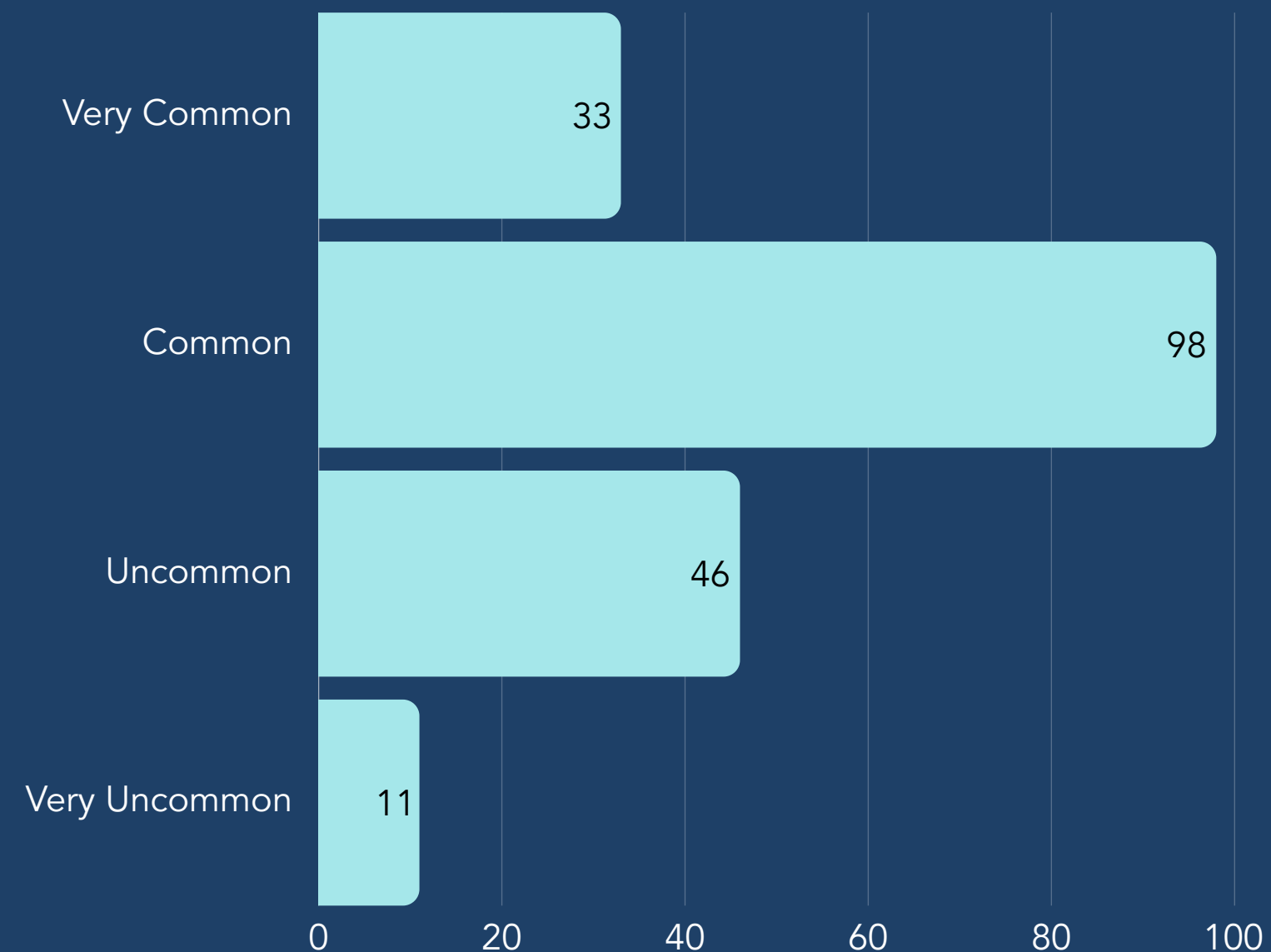


How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to believe that adoption will be more emotionally difficult than abortion?

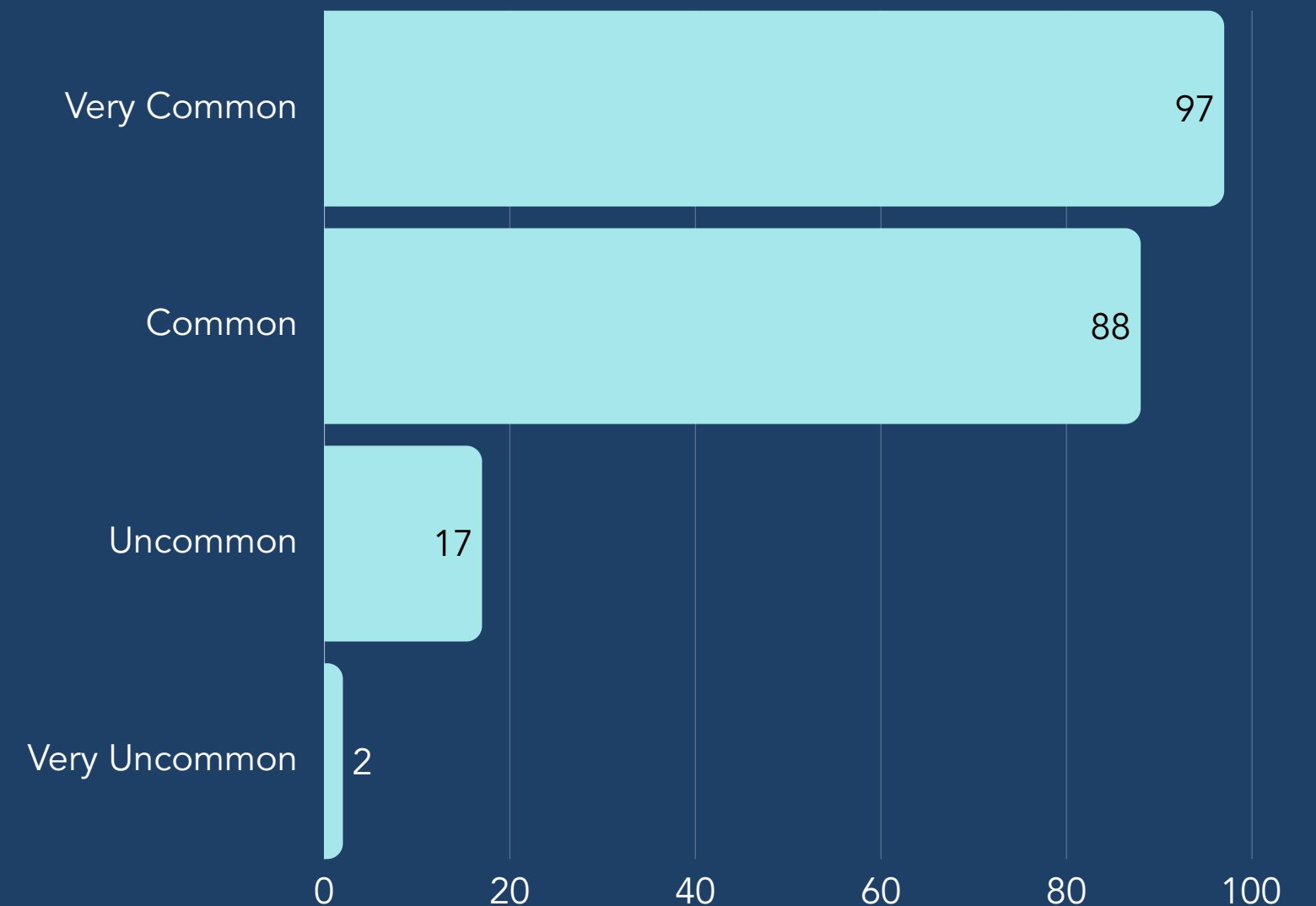


Abortion-Minded Client Attitudes

How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to think that adoption means she will have no role in her child's life?



How common is it for an abortion-minded woman to experience pressure from her family or partner to abort rather than place for adoption?



Analysis:

Abortion-Minded Client Attitudes

The following lists the likely barriers to adoption we identified for the sake of this survey in order of how commonly PHO staff and volunteers encountered them in abortion-minded women. The good news is, the movement has been correctly identifying these barriers to adoption. None of our suggested factors that may contribute to a preference for abortion or adoption were proven false by this survey.

- Belief that abortion offers an immediate, final resolution to her situation
- Belief that adoption will be more emotionally difficult than abortion
- Belief that an abortion will be easier to live with because "good mothers don't give their babies away."
- Belief that choosing an abortion means she will not have to reveal her pregnancy
- Pressure from her family or partner to abort rather than place for adoption
- Belief that adoption means she will have no role in her child's life

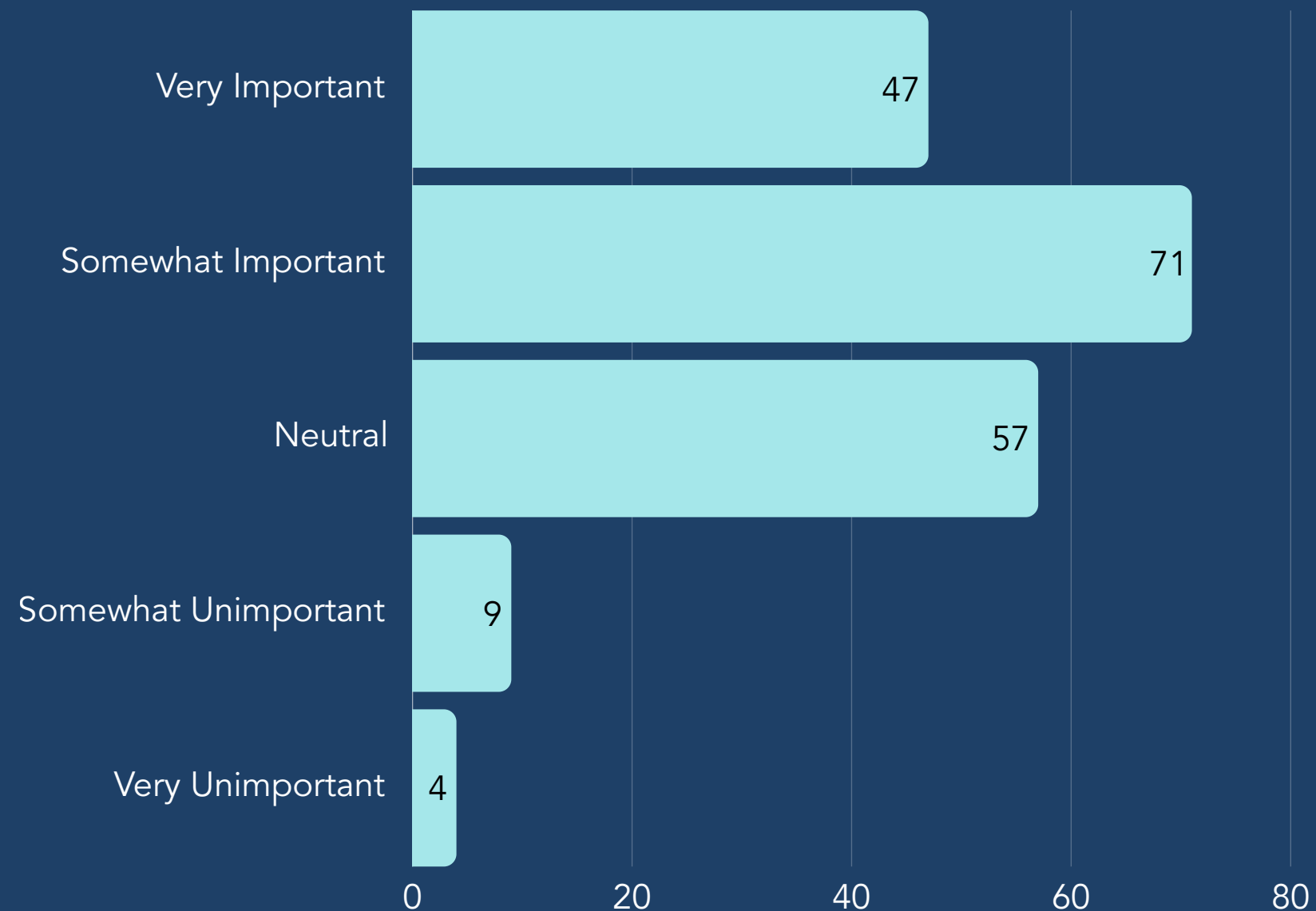
The LOVE Approach Training Manual and Talking About Abortion have a lot of information about the psychological reality of abortion-minded clients. The LOVE Approach in particular dives deep into the myths and facts regarding adoption



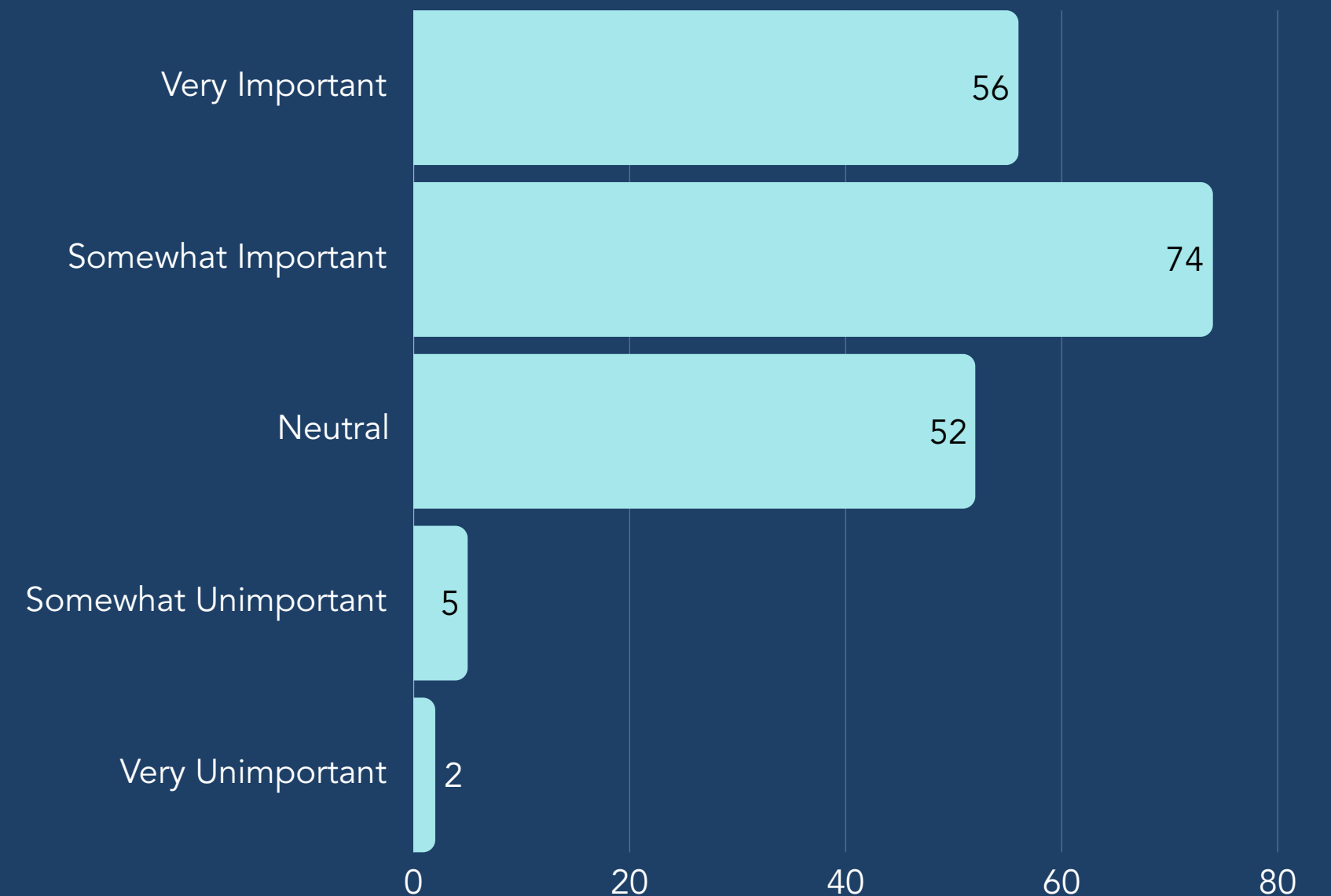
Factors that Influence an Adoption Decision

This section focuses on those clients who did choose adoption and why.

For women who choose adoption, how important is the ability to place with a married mother and father in her decision-making?

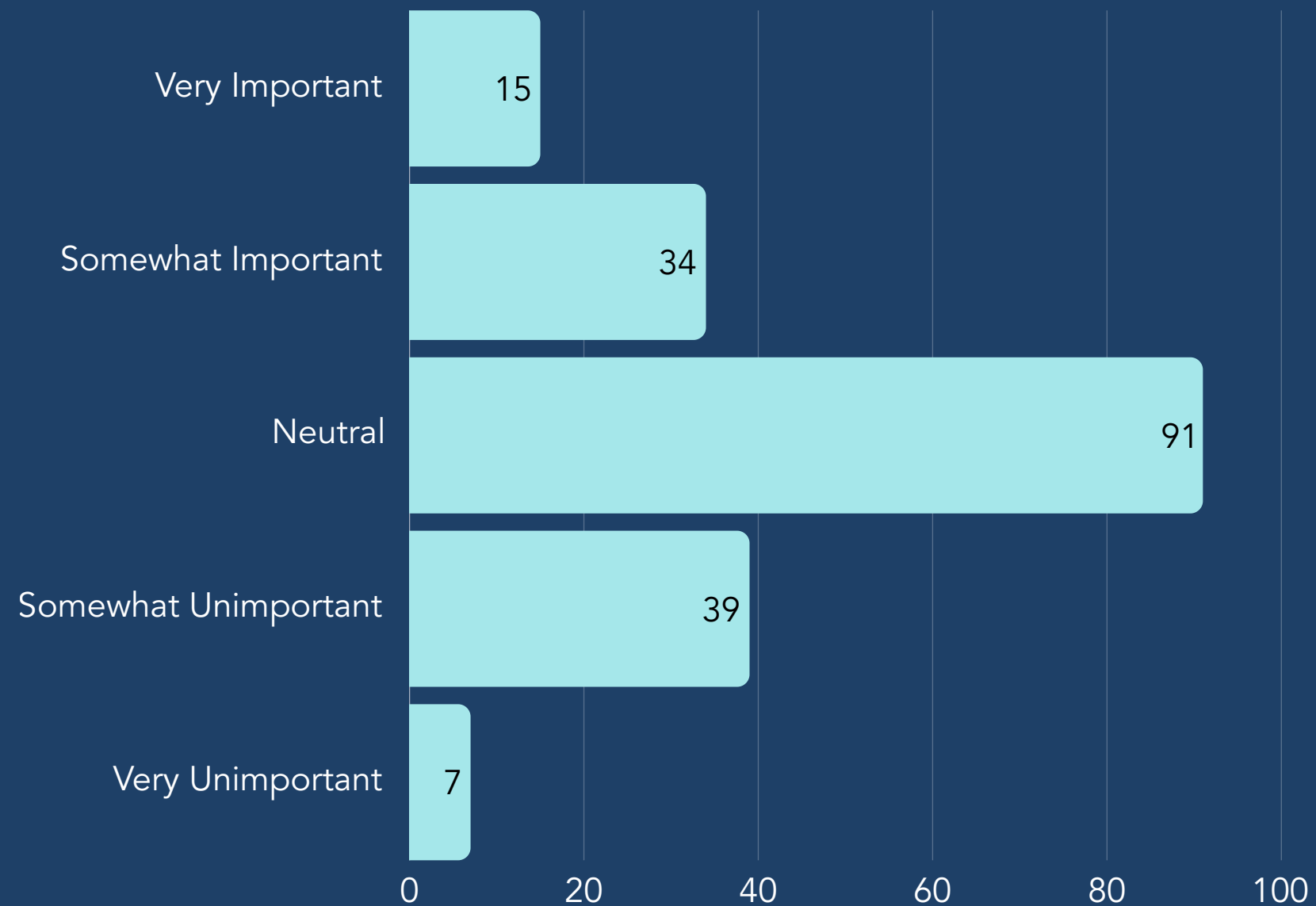


For women who choose adoption, how important is the ability to maintain contact with her baby after adoption in her decision-making?

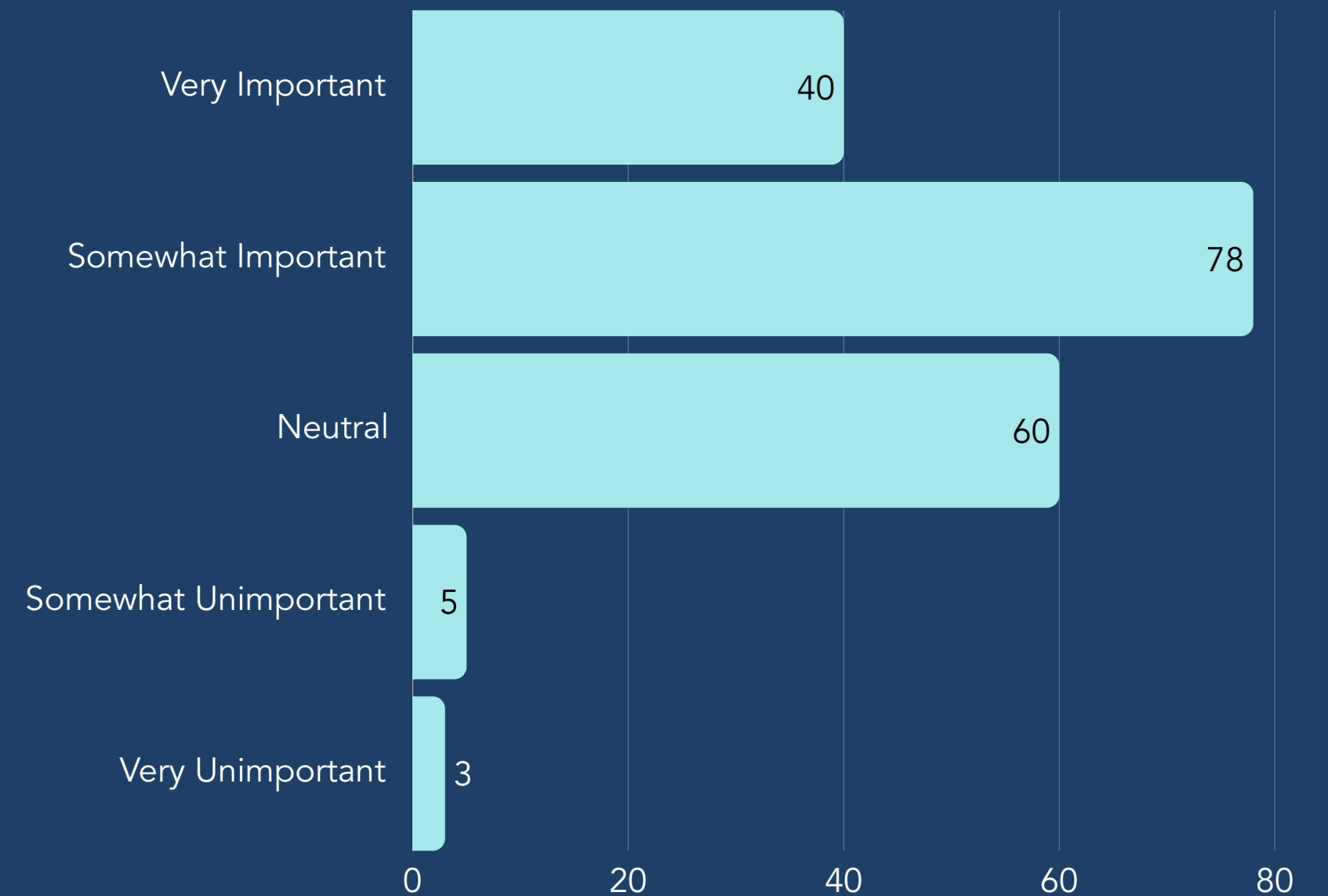


Factors that Influence an Adoption Decision

For women who choose adoption, how important is the ability to have NO contact with her baby after adoption in her decision-making?

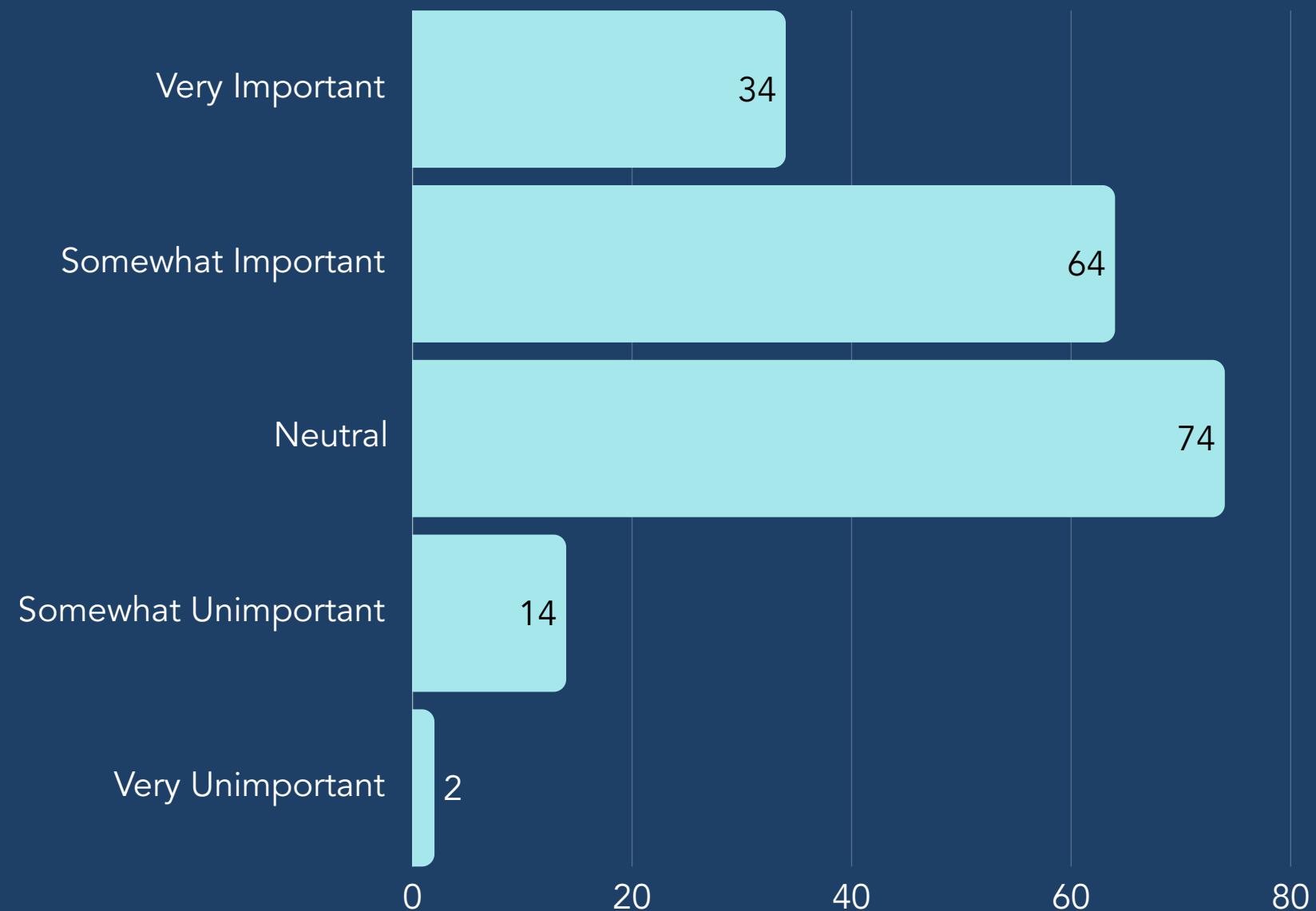


For women who choose adoption, how important is the ability to place her baby with a family that shares her values/faith tradition in her decision-making?

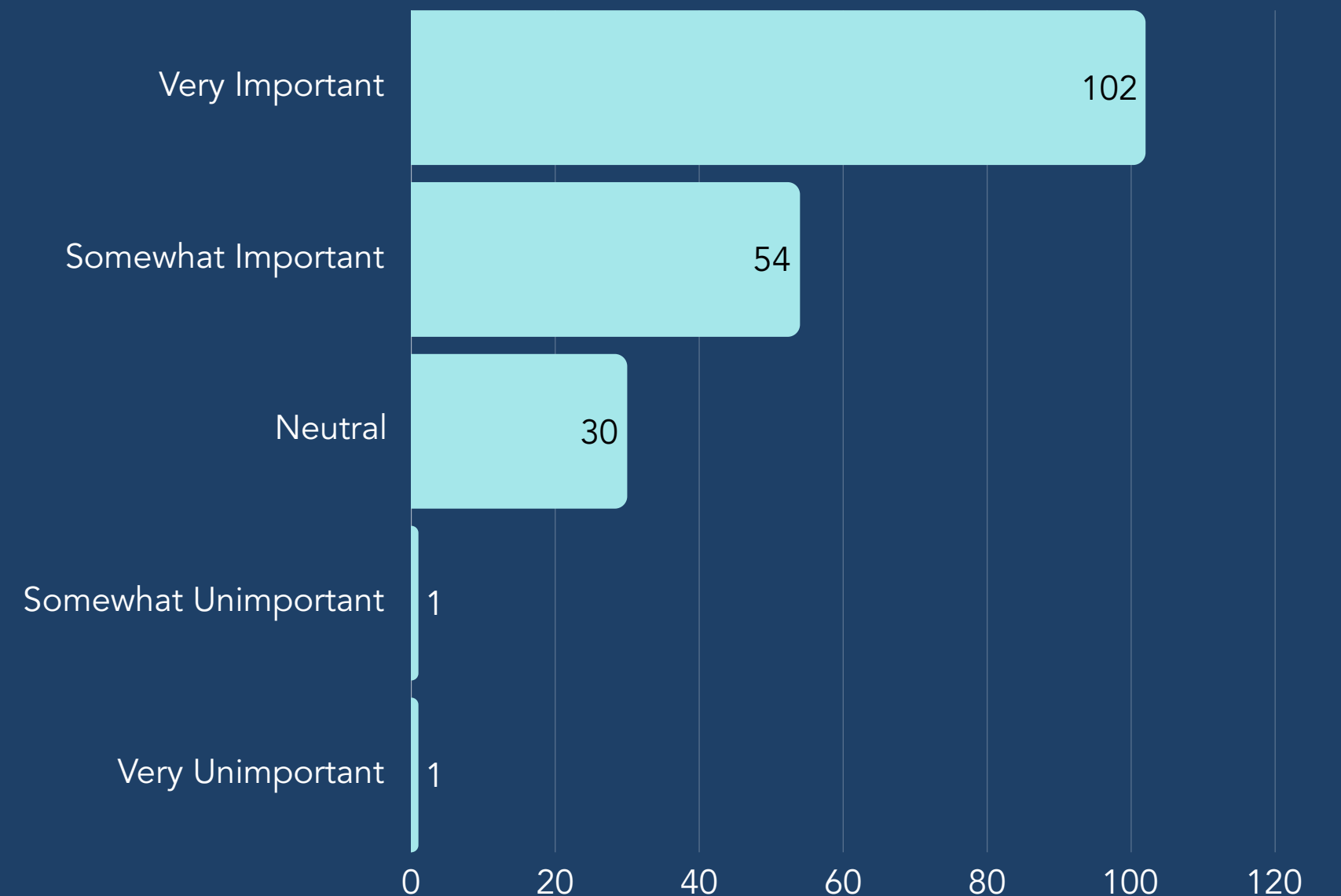


Factors that Influence an Adoption Decision

For women who choose adoption, how important is the availability of post-adoption counseling or other services for birthparents in her decision-making?

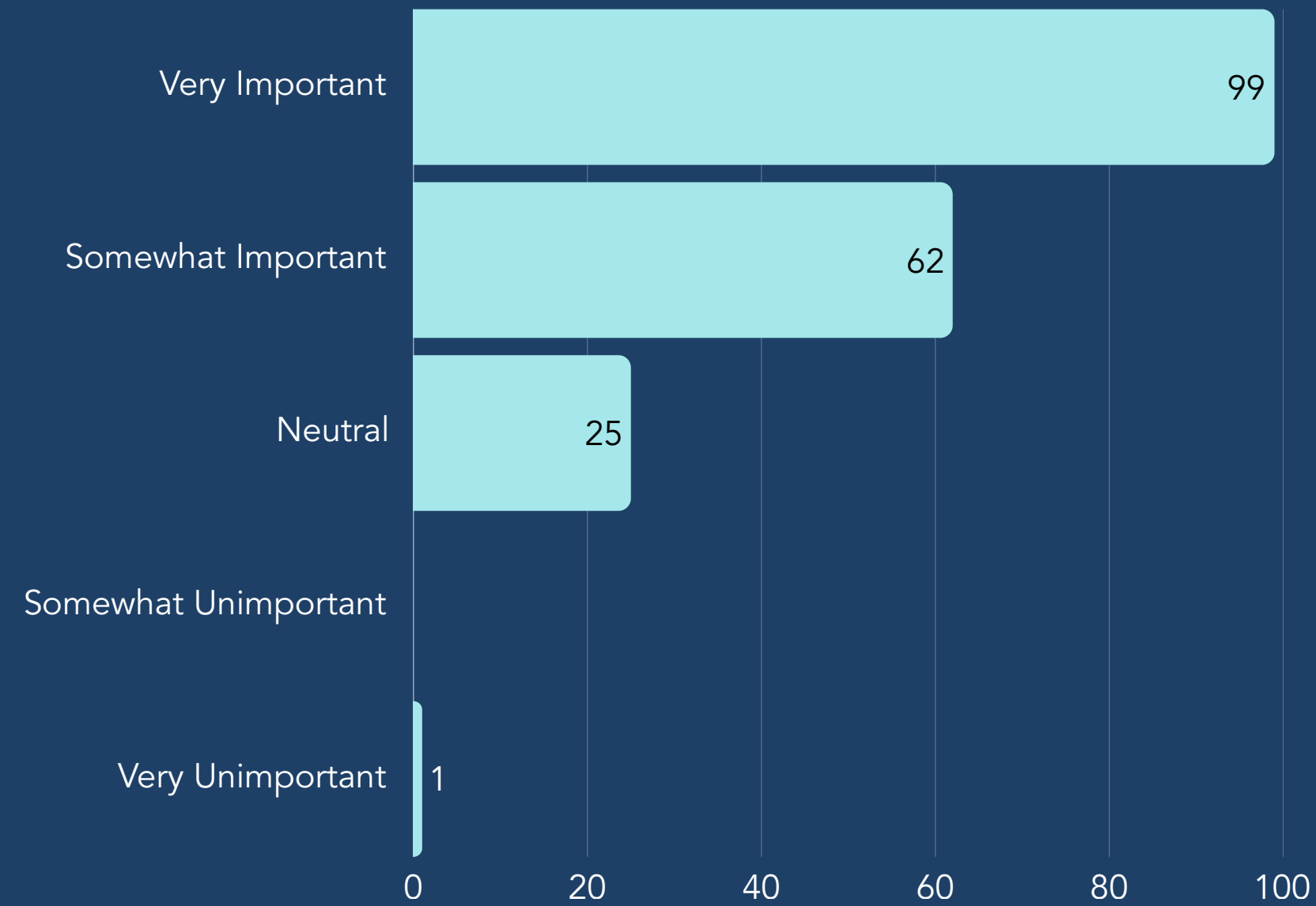


For women who choose adoption, how important is the support of family and friends of adoption as a positive option for both her baby and herself in her decision-making?



Factors that Influence an Adoption Decision

For women who choose adoption, how important is the ability to have an active role in choosing adoptive parents in her decision-making?



Analysis:

Factors that Influence an Adoption Decision

Less Influential Factor in Adoption Decision

- Ability to have no contact with the baby after adoption (75% of respondents reported neutral, somewhat or very unimportant)

Influential Factors in Adoption Decision

- Ability to have an active role in choosing adoptive parents
- Support of family and friends believing adoption to be a positive option for both her baby and herself
- Ability to maintain contact with her baby after adoption
- Ability to place with a married mother and father
- Ability to place her baby with a family that shares her values/faith tradition
- Availability of post-adoption counseling or other services for birthparents

In Their Own Words

The following question was asked with an open-ended response available. Responses were varied, but we gathered commonalities and noteworthy responses below and on the next page. Remember that those responding work regularly with women facing an unexpected pregnancy who may or may not be counseled with the option of adoption. (Refers to how many responses shared this sentiment)

In your experience, what is most likely to lead an abortion-minded woman to choose an adoption plan?

- Client gains clear understanding about open/modern adoption (41)
- Client sees adoption as a loving choice/valuing the child's life/not ready to parent, but wants child to have a loving home (28)
- Careful, loving, nonjudgmental options consulting (23)
- Client's faith/religious beliefs/personal values (21)
- Support from father of the baby/family/friends (19)
- Personal contact with a birth mom and/or child (12)

In Their Own Words

In your experience, what is most likely to lead an abortion-minded woman to choose an adoption plan?

- Personal/early contact with a faith-based adoption representative/agency (10)
- Understanding that there is plenty of time to consider her adoption decision (10)
- Lack of abortion access/being too far along to abort (10)
- Ultrasound (9)
- Programs and counseling for birth moms during and after the adoption process (7)
- Negative personal experience with previous abortion (4)
- Already open to adoption upon first visit (4)
- Maternity housing (3)
- Knowing that there's no obligation/she's allowed to change her mind (3)
- Having a mentor/advocate walk with them through the whole process (2)
- Personal family member/friend wants to adopt the baby (2)
- Positive previous experience related to adoption (1)

In Their Own Words

The following question was asked with an open-ended response available. Responses were varied, but we gathered commonalities and noteworthy responses below and on the next page. Remember that those responding work regularly with women facing an unexpected pregnancy who may or may not be counseled with the option of adoption. (Refers to how many responses shared this sentiment)

In your experience, what is the most important factor that discourages women from considering adoption?

- Client feels it would be too difficult emotionally/considers it "giving baby away"/"abandonment"/fear that child will not be cared for (98)
- Fear of judgement around pregnancy/adoption choice (35)
- Lack of support/pressure to abort from father of the baby/family/friends (34)
- Client does not want to continue pregnancy (20)
- Lack of information about open/modern adoption/understanding of benefits (20)
- Believing adoption is the same as foster care (12)

In Their Own Words

In your experience, what is the most important factor that discourages women from considering adoption?

- Client's community's cultural attitudes towards adoption (8)
- Client fears that adoption will entail a lengthy legal process (4)
- Personal/family member's negative experience with adoption (4)
- Client desires to parent the baby to experience "unconditional love" (2)
- Client does not know who the father of the baby is (1)
- Client is slow to connect w/ adoption referral representative/agency (1)
- Client feels like she has no control over her situation (1)
- Client's family wants to keep the baby in the family (1)

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