

INTRODUCTION

My project is about what factors psychologists consider when diagnosing a patient, outside of symptoms. This project is something that had personal interest to me, being put into psychiatric hospitalization twice in 6 months. I wanted to address the real world issue of what might be holding back making certain decisions when it comes to a patient's treatment, and to get a deeper understanding onto what mental process a psychologist goes through when faced with diagnosing their patients.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

My research was conducted through an online survey that asks psychologists what factors, other than symptoms, play into how they diagnose their patients. My mentor sent this survey out to her group of trauma therapists, and the Orange County Psychology Association. My data is qualitative and observational because it will be based on what we are observing about the common factors provided among psychologists part of a trauma therapy group. In my survey, psychologists will be asked how long they've been in the field and other questions related to ages of patients, whether they do marriage or family counseling, and what diagnoses or disorders they typically treat, or even specialize in. This will separate them into groups that will be easier to draw a connection.

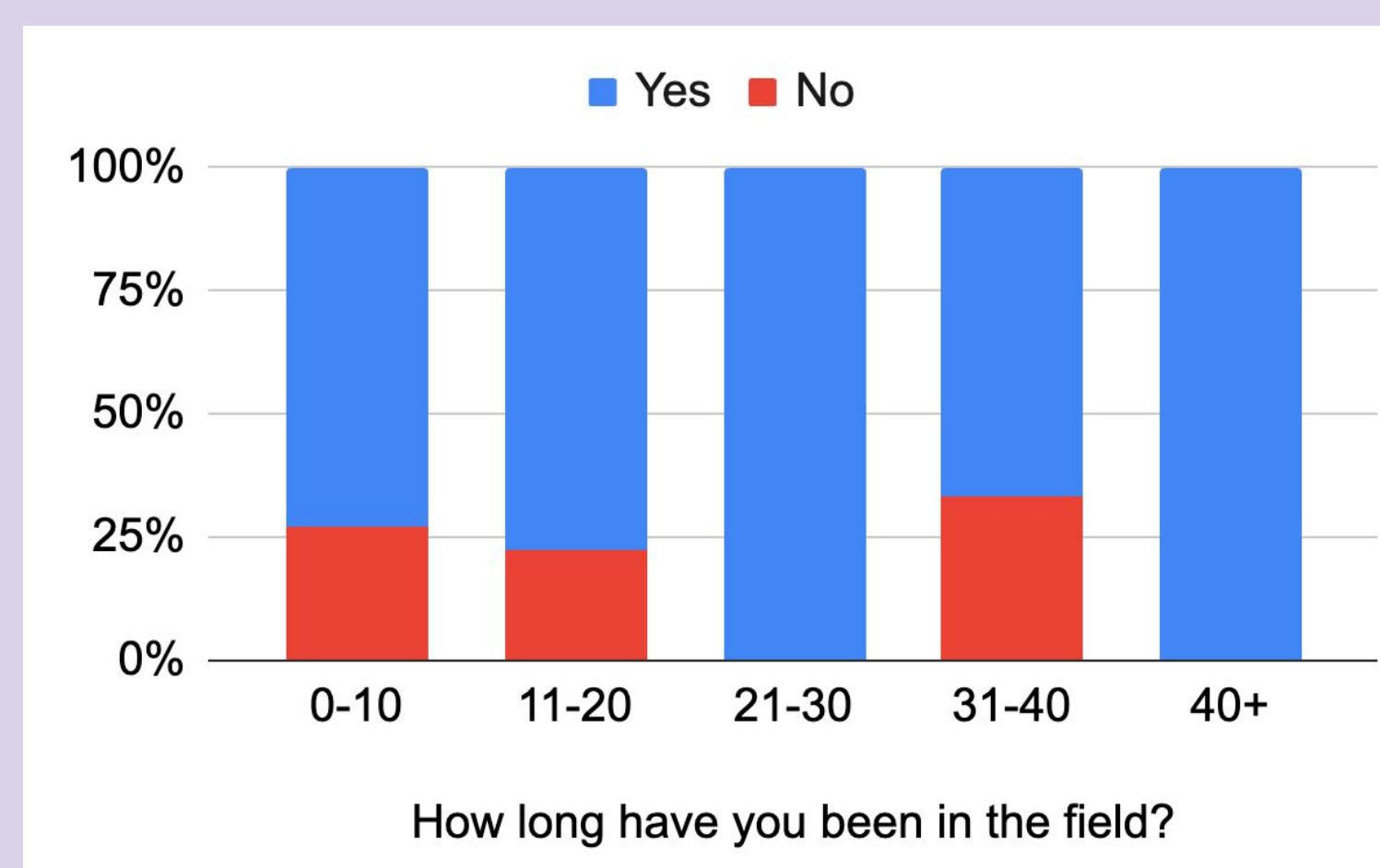
DATA AND FINDINGS

35 psychologists were surveyed, all with varying specialties, certifications, and years of work experience in the field. From the raw data the following is observable:

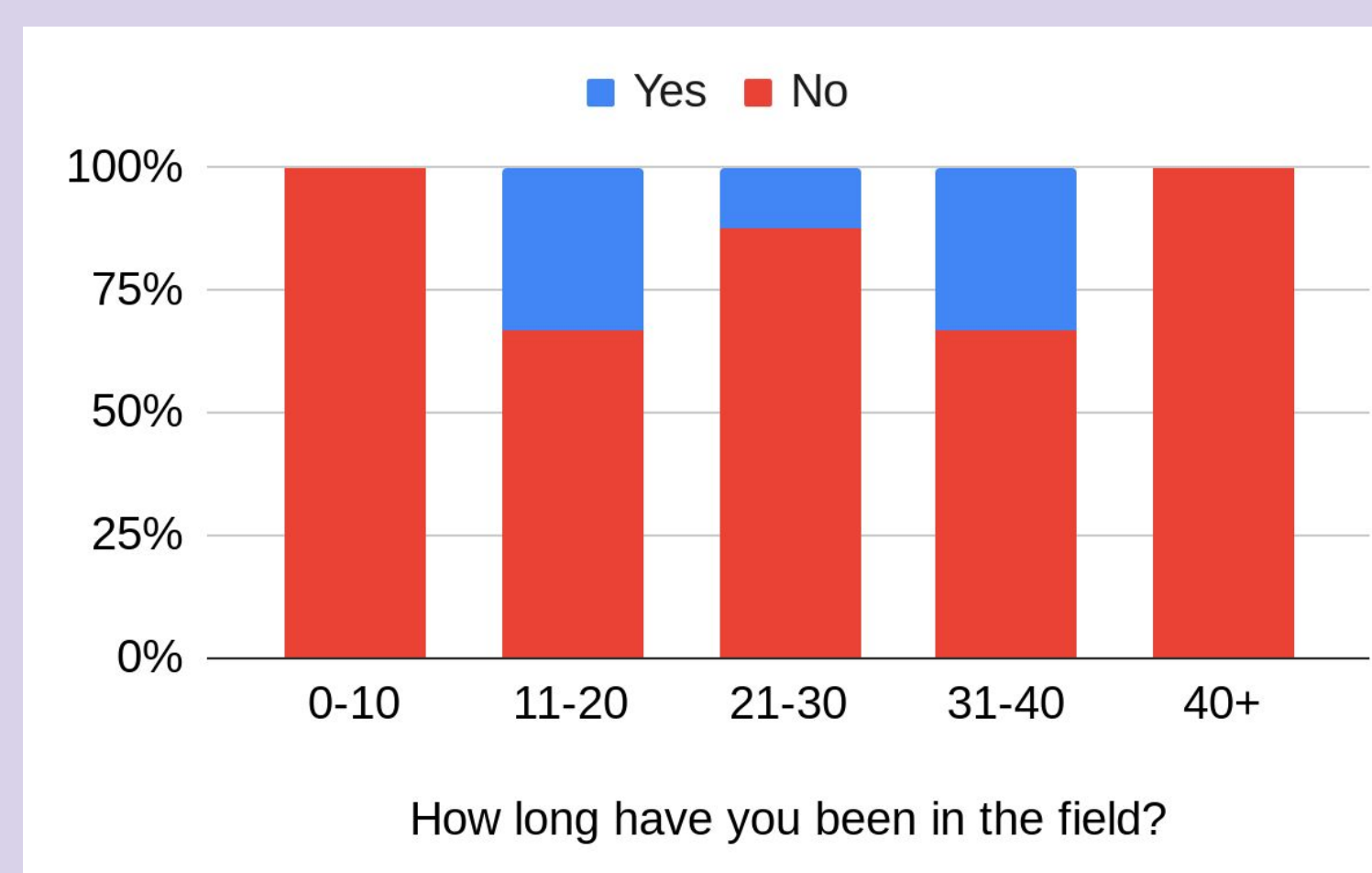
- Stigma (In this context, how a diagnosis with this disorder might negatively impact the person being diagnosed) was more considered than not. 80% considered stigma before diagnosing, 20% did not.
- Over/Under-emphasizing a disorder or disability for accommodations in school/work was not considered more than it was, with 82.9% not considering it, 17.1% did.
- Health and Safety Code sections 123100 to 123149.5 state that patients may make a written request to review or obtain a copy of their medical charts. 34.3% of psychologists surveyed said they left information about a diagnosis or traits off of charts to avoid offending patients after the creation of this law.
- 17.1% of psychologists surveyed also said that before diagnosing a patient they consider the past and future of law changes regarding the care of mental health and what it might look like for their patients.

When years of experience in the field in individual responses were compared to the different external factor possibilities, there were certain trends noticeable of psychologists with less years of experience and more years of experience.

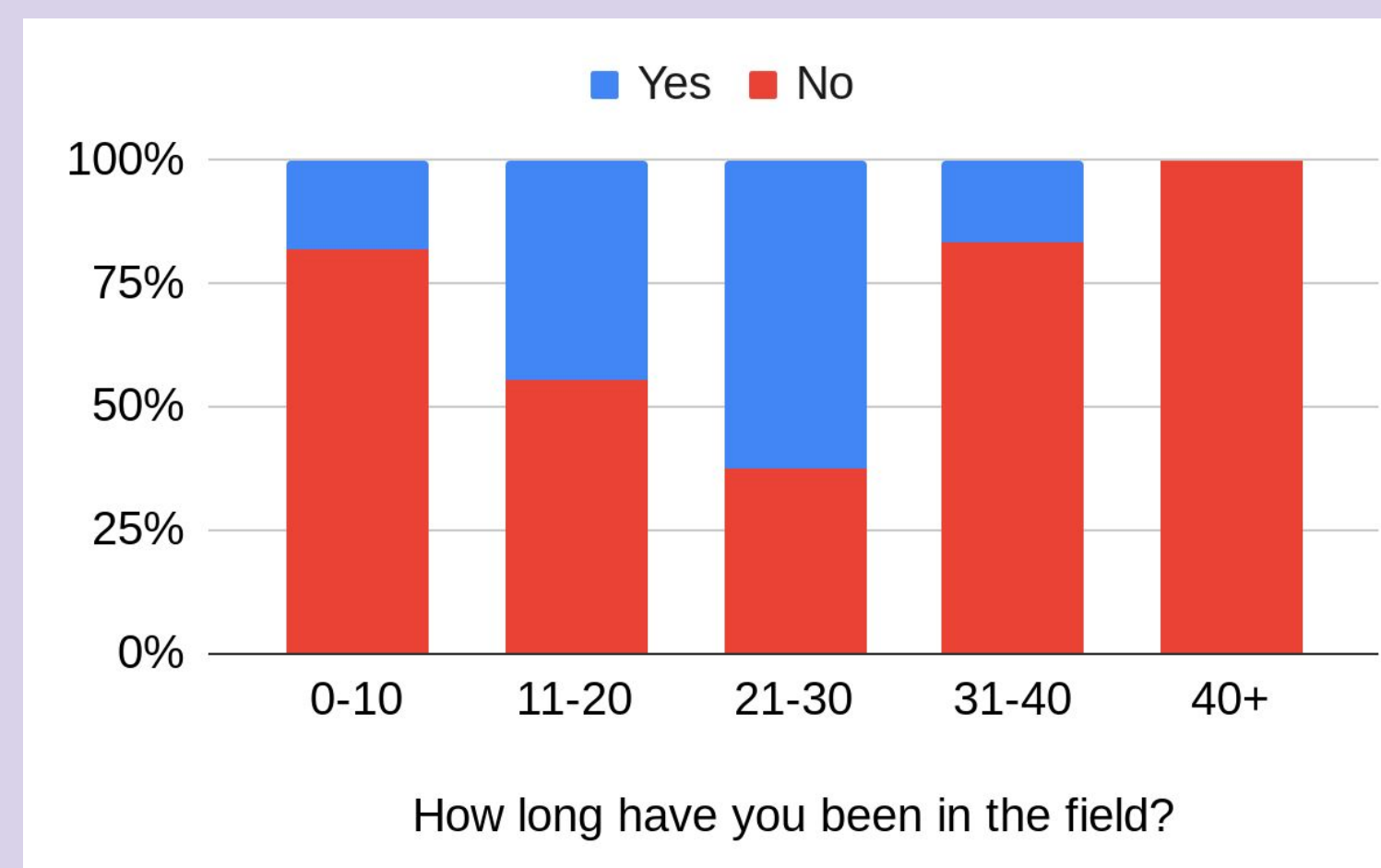
DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION



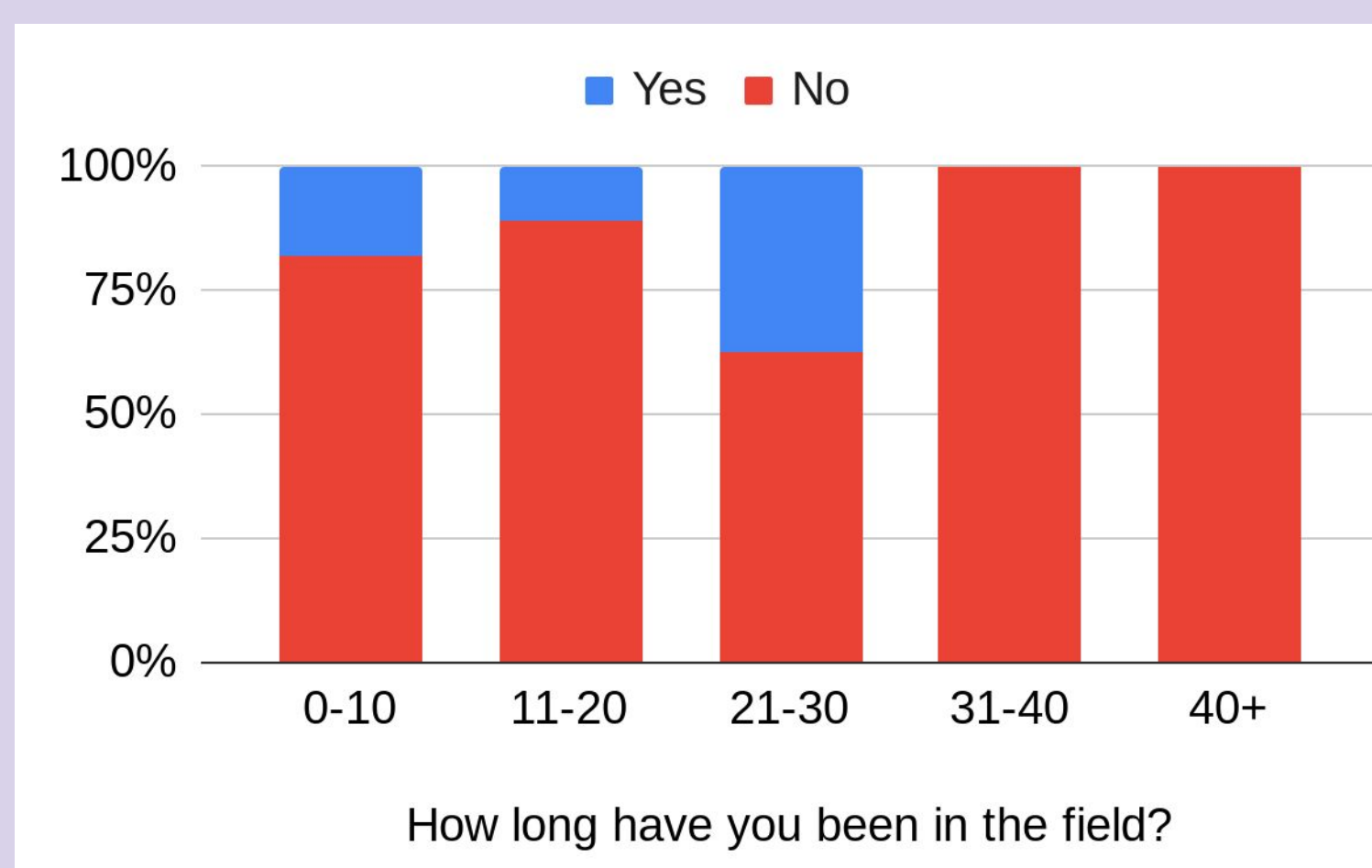
“Do you consider the stigma behind a disorder before putting it on their chart?”



“Have you ever under or over emphasized a disorder to help get accommodations at work/school?”



“Have you ever left information about a diagnosis or traits of a disorder off of charts to avoid offending patients?”



“Have you avoided diagnosing a patient with something in the case of possible laws created or changed in the future?”

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

With the data presented, we can conclude that most psychologists will primarily use symptoms to diagnose, but this does not mean that outside factors are not considered. Out of all things listed, psychologists surveyed reported considering stigma behind disorders and how a diagnosis with these disorders could negatively impact people's views of the patient, and the patient's future, the most considered factor outside of actual symptoms.

When compared with years of experience;

- Not a noticeable trend, most psychologists surveyed considered stigma behind a disorder before diagnosing.
- The psychologists who over/under emphasized a disorder to help clients receive accommodations tended to be more in the middle of the range of years of experience collected.
- When it came to considering the patient's offense if they were able to read their charts, psychologists with more years of experience tended to consider this factor less.
- Psychologists with the less years of experience also tended to consider the possibility of law changes in the future.

Two additional questions that were left off of the poster: “Have you ever used a diagnosis to make a client appear in a more favorable light in a court case?” and alternatively, “Have you ever avoided a diagnosis that would make a client appear in a less favorable light in a court case?” These questions were left off the final poster because many people surveyed responded by saying they avoid court cases, or refuse to work with them, so their answers were a mix of trying to answer as if they were called to, or just answering no because of their refusal to involve themselves. The poor wording of the question with limited yes/no answers led to very mixed results. Another shortcoming would be the question about accommodations, as most surveyed psychologists stated in the notes that regarding this question, if someone is seeking accommodations, they typically already meet the qualifications to receive them, and no over/under emphasizing is needed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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