



Dentistry

**A review of dentistry
services in Oldham**

March 2021

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Background

Healthwatch Oldham completes a bi-monthly survey called the Healthwatch Oldham 100. This survey is designed to obtain views from local people on a range of subjects. The findings from these surveys can help us to identify trends within service delivery and provide information to guide us on areas to investigate further.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were receiving regular contact from Oldham residents who were expressing concern that they were unable to register with an NHS dentist. However, since the pandemic has begun, these have become more frequent. In the past 9 months, over 100 residents have contacted Healthwatch Oldham to obtain assistance in finding an NHS dentist that is taking on patients and we are currently being contacted numerous times a day about these concerns.

Initially, capacity concerns were explained by COVID-19 restrictions. However, since dentists have re-opened following the first lockdown, patients have told us that they have been told that they can receive treatment as a private patient but not as an NHS registered patient.

Therefore, between November and December 2020, we released our Dentistry survey to better understand the experiences of people who have been able to access dental care during COVID-19 and/or the struggles people have had in accessing an NHS dentist. 67 people took the time to complete this survey and we would like to thank everyone for their contributions to this review.

Disclaimer: about our research

Please note that the statements within the report are subjective accounts by individuals given on the day they submitted the survey and do not represent the views of Healthwatch Oldham. Healthwatch Oldham research in line with accredited guidelines set out in Healthwatch England's Research Framework. We aim to identify what matters most to people and use our findings to ensure that people's voices influence and improve the quality of local services.

If anyone has any queries relating to the content of this report, please contact a member of the Healthwatch Oldham team via info@healthwatcholdham.co.uk.

What we did

We created a survey that was released in November 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this survey was completed online but people were invited to complete paper versions of the survey as well as staff offering to complete the survey online over the telephone.

We asked people to tell us about the following areas:

- Whether they had access to an NHS dentist and if so, who provides this service.
- Experiences of any appointments/treatment they may have had during COVID-19.
- How far people must travel to access a dental service.
- Whether dentists communicated effectively with their patients about precautions to take before any scheduled appointment/treatment.
- Understand peoples experiences of being unregistered from dental practices without their prior knowledge.
- Identify whether people have required any emergency dental treatment during COVID-19 and their experience.

Key Findings

In the free-text part of the survey, people highlighted the following concerns about dentistry services.

Access	People stated that they were unable to access an NHS dentist. This still seems to be an issue as dentists started to re-open after the first lockdown.
Private Treatment is the only option	People expressed their concern that they were in some instances able to receive treatment as a private patient but not as an NHS patient.
Affordability	For those who only have an option to pay for dental treatment as a private patient, the cost for some people is too high.
Lack of Waiting List	The most common reason people have been unable to join a waiting list is that their practice does not do them. Lesser examples have been that waiting lists are used but are full or they are not given any guidance on waiting lists at all by the practice. This inconsistency has caused concern for people.

Main Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the experiences and feedback of people who completed this survey. We are committed to ensuring that the voices of all Oldham residents can reach those who commission, design and deliver local services. The findings from this report will be shared with Healthwatch England, NHS England, and the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership to help ensure that those voices are heard and that patients can access any required dental treatment promptly and at an affordable cost.

1. National Shortage of Dental Provision

All the issues raised in our local survey are themes in the recent Healthwatch England report on dentistry, which points to a shortage of dental provision. Healthwatch England asked for feedback from all local Healthwatch organisations on any ongoing dental issues being faced by local regions. Healthwatch England has produced their report based on those national findings and urged the Government to recognise and address the concerns raised. We recommend that local commissioners and dentistry service providers review this report in conjunction with this local survey. <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2021-02-08/warnings-dentistry-crisis-public-concerns-continue>

2. Private Treatment Vs NHS Treatment

People raised the issue of being able to access treatment privately rather than on the NHS. During the first lockdown, people expressed that they understood the impact that closing services would have on accessing health and care. However, once dentists reopened, people stated that they were only able to access services at certain dental practices if they were willing to have their treatment done privately. From the responses, it demonstrates that people are frustrated and confused by only being given an option that does not match the issues about capacity previously stated by practices. We recommend that NHS patient registration quotas within the current system are reviewed to ensure that people have fair access to an NHS dental provision rather than only being offered private treatment.

3. Affordability to be Reviewed

Many people in Oldham are facing financial hardship, and for some people, COVID-19 has exacerbated this. We would recommend that the Government and the NHS review the pricing structure of NHS treatment to ensure that it is fair and open to all.

4. Waiting Lists

Where NHS patient lists are full, patients want to be able to have their name put on a waiting list. This is reassuring for the patient to know that they do not have to ring all dentists on a near-daily basis to try and register as an NHS patient and that they will eventually be able to see an NHS dentist. We recommend that dentistry providers are encouraged to allow people to add their name to a waiting list.

5. Communication and Transparency

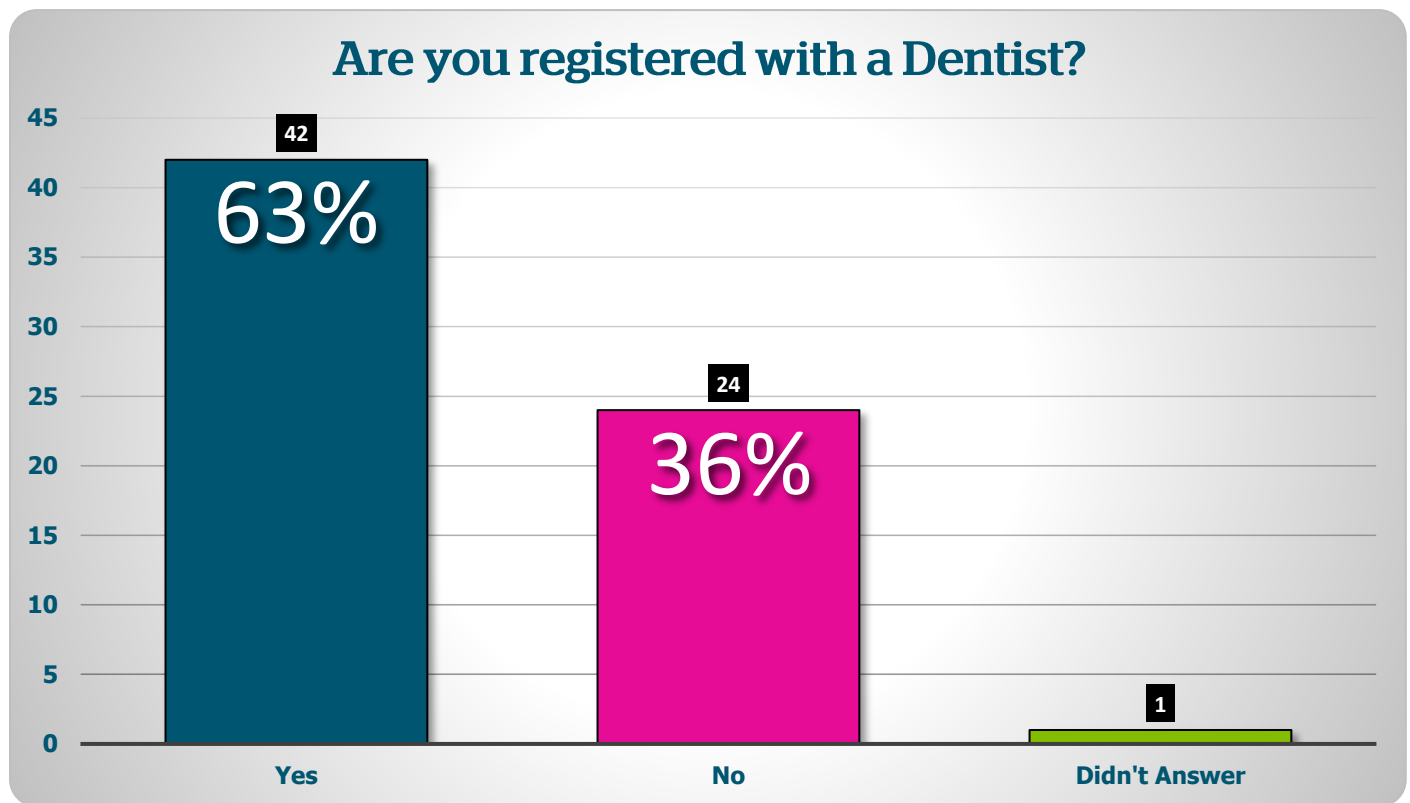
Patients would like to understand and be told the reason why their dentist cannot offer the service as an NHS patient and where feasible, provide information about the likely timescales if they want to wait to access treatment as an NHS patient. People would like to have more information about the charges they will incur. In a couple of instances, patients mentioned being charged for PPE on top of the cost for the appointment. Dental practices should be able to access their COVID-19 PPE free of charge through the DHSC portal. We recommend that dentists share information about their policy about NHS patient lists and information about timescales and charges. Clarity on all charges should be explained before any treatment begins.

6. Address backlog and return to services

Some people have expressed a concern that prolonged limited access to services will lead to conditions being undetected until they become more acute and other serious conditions not being identified earlier. With continued limited access to services, and the current backlog we recommend that work is done across the system to ensure access is available for those that need it and that inconsistencies of practice do not widen health inequalities.

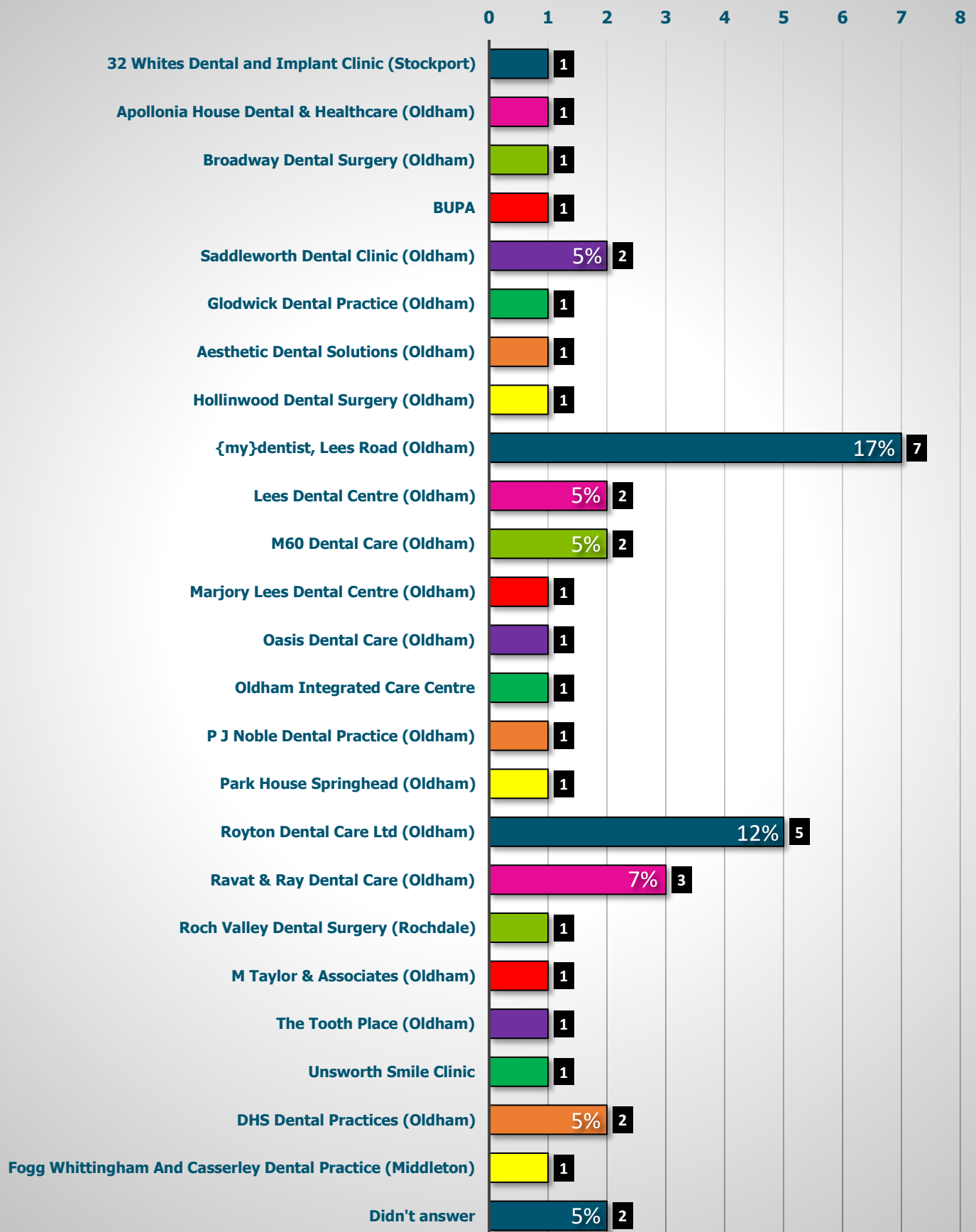
Detailed Findings

Below are the detailed findings of the 67 surveys which were completed.



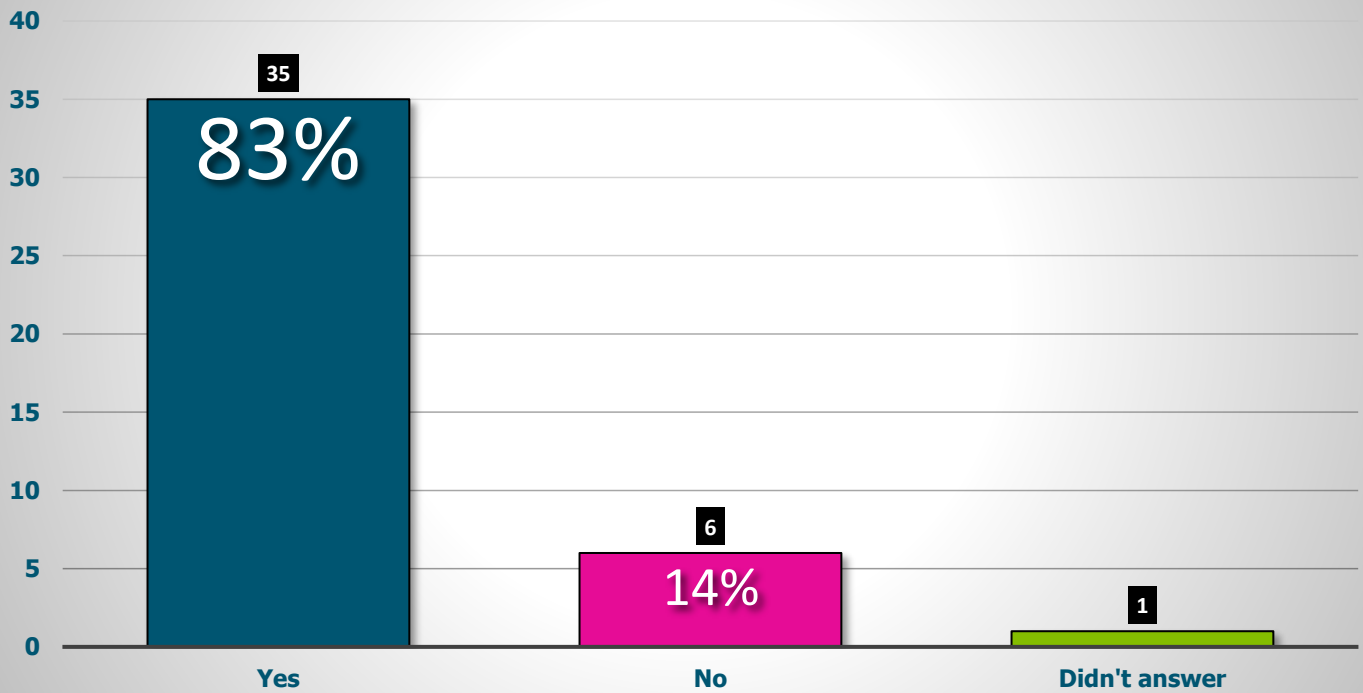
The first question we asked in the survey is whether people were registered with a dentist. 63% (42 people) stated that they were compared to 36% (24 people) who stated that they were not.

Which dental practice are you registered with?



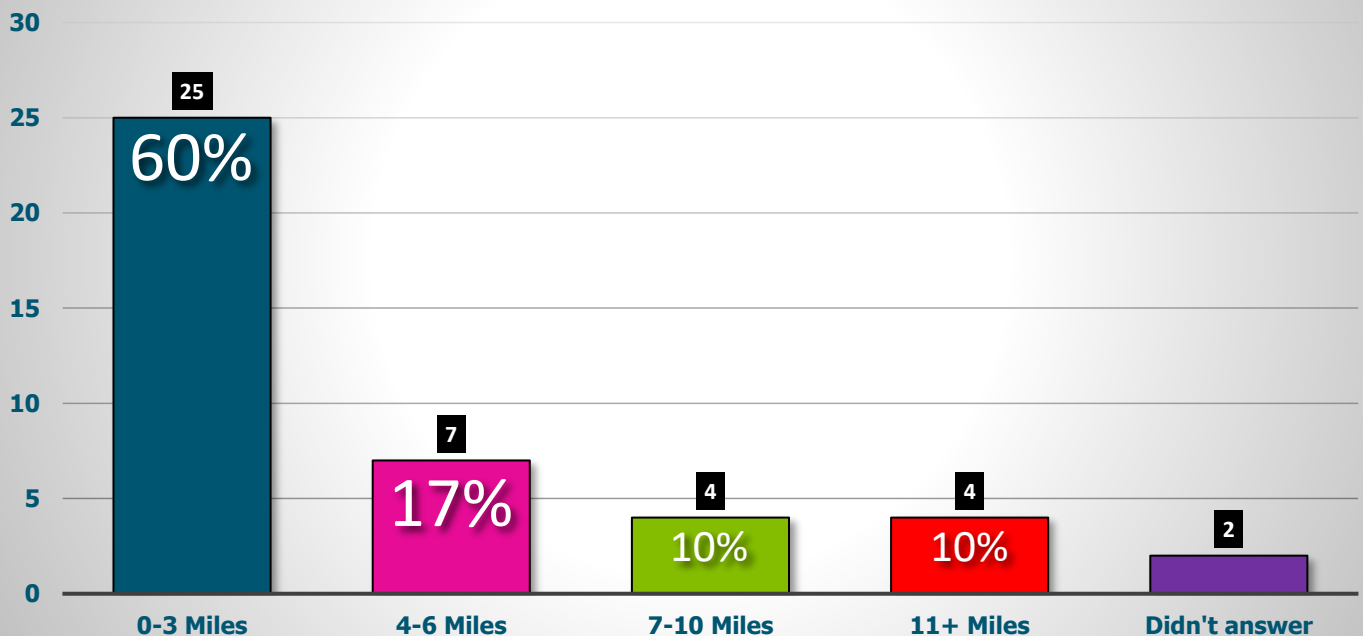
We asked the 42 people who stated that they have a dental practice, which one they are registered with. 24 different dental practices were represented in this survey. 17% (7 people) were registered with {my}dentist in Oldham and 12% (5 people) were registered with Royton Dental Care Ltd in Oldham.

Is this dental practice based within Oldham?



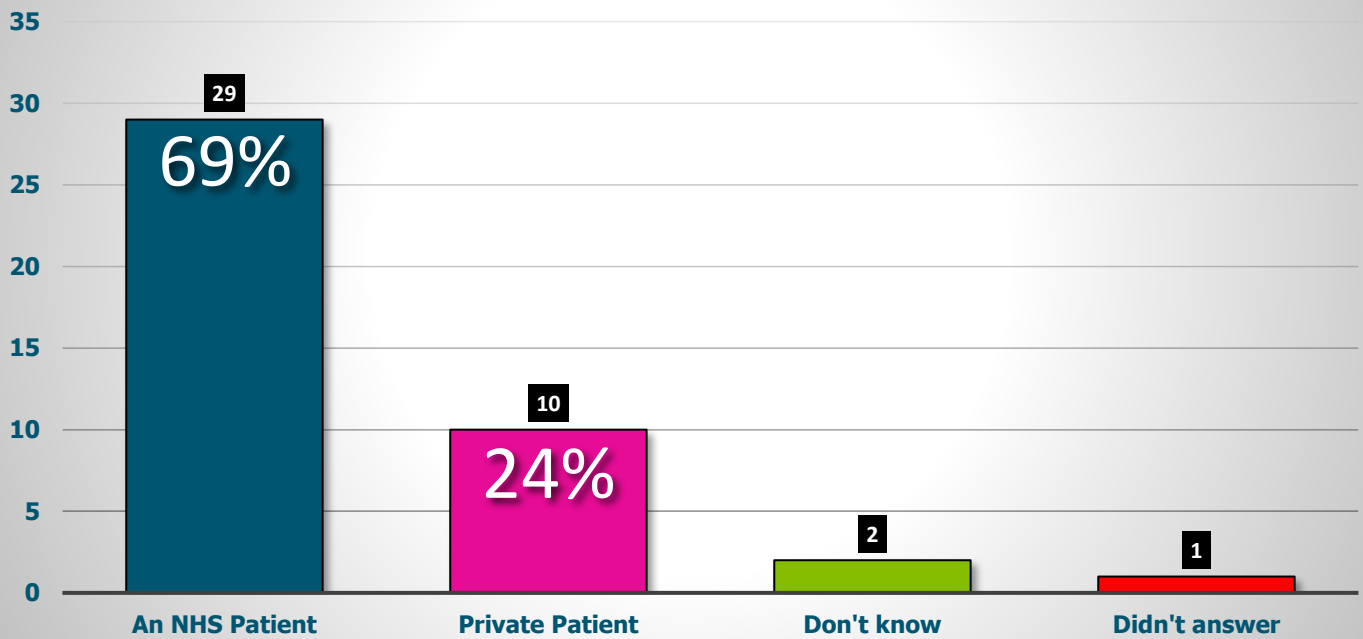
Of the 42 people who stated that they had a dentist, we asked them whether it was based within Oldham. 83% (35 people) stated that the practice was based within Oldham compared to 14% (6 people) who stated that it was not.

How far are you having to travel to access a dental practice?



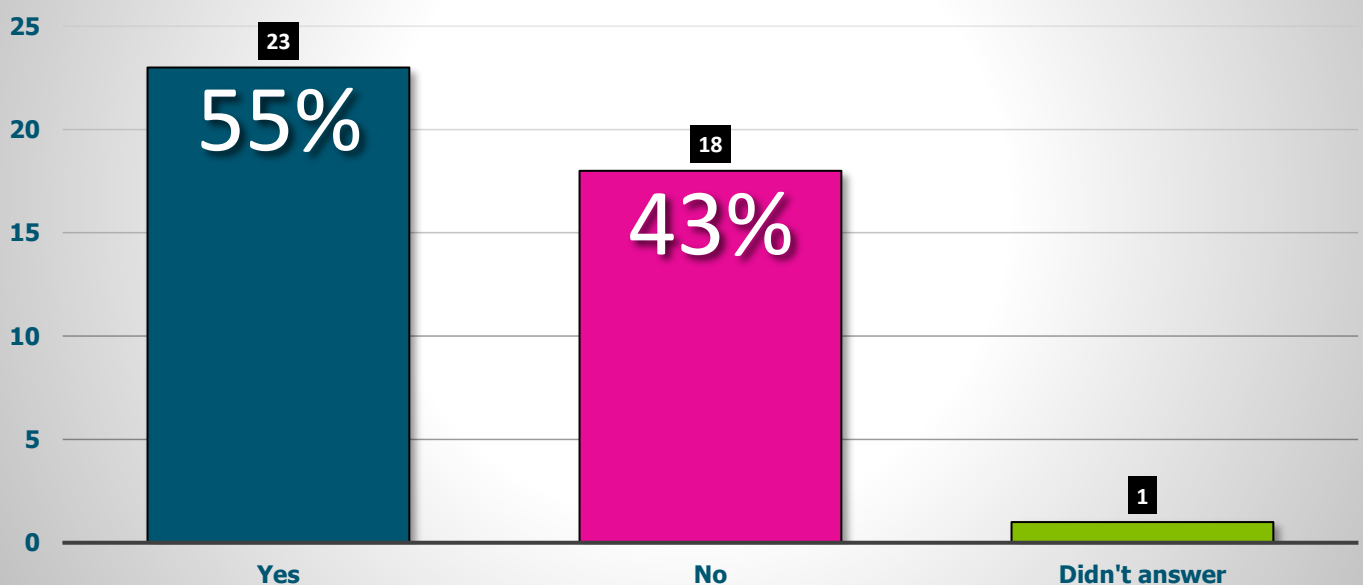
Of the 42 people who stated that they had a dental practice, we asked how far they must travel to access their service. 60% (25 people) stated that they had to travel up to 3 miles to access their dentist with 17% (7 people) stating that they had to travel between 4-6 miles. 20% (8 people) stated that they must travel over 7 miles, and, in some cases, these were large distances with examples of 12 and 20 miles given by individuals.

How are you registered with your dental practice?



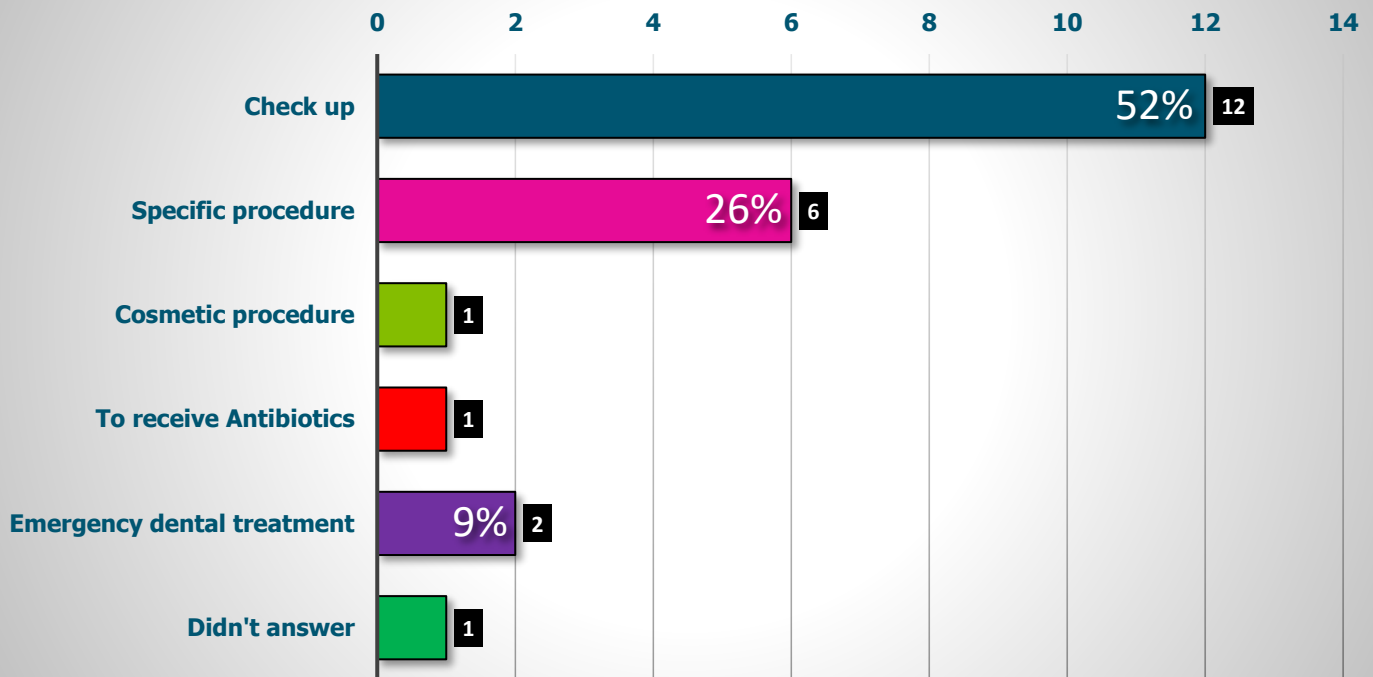
Of the 42 people who stated they had a dentist, we asked how they were registered as a patient. 69% (29 people) stated that they were registered as an NHS patient compared to 24% (10 people) who stated that they are a private patient. 2 people were not sure how they were registered.

Since your dental practice has reopened, have you been able to schedule and attend your dental practice for any treatment?



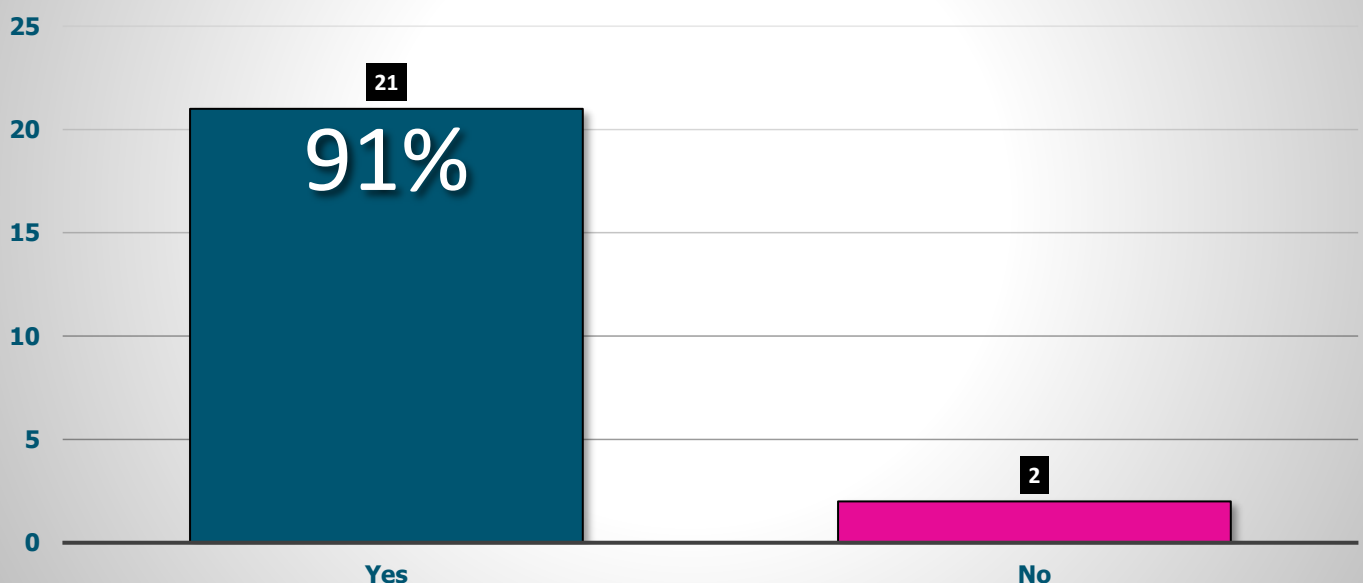
Of the 42 people who had a dentist, we asked whether they had been able to schedule and attend their dentist for any form of treatment. 55% (23 people) stated that they had compared to 43% (18 people) who said that they had not.

What was your appointment for?



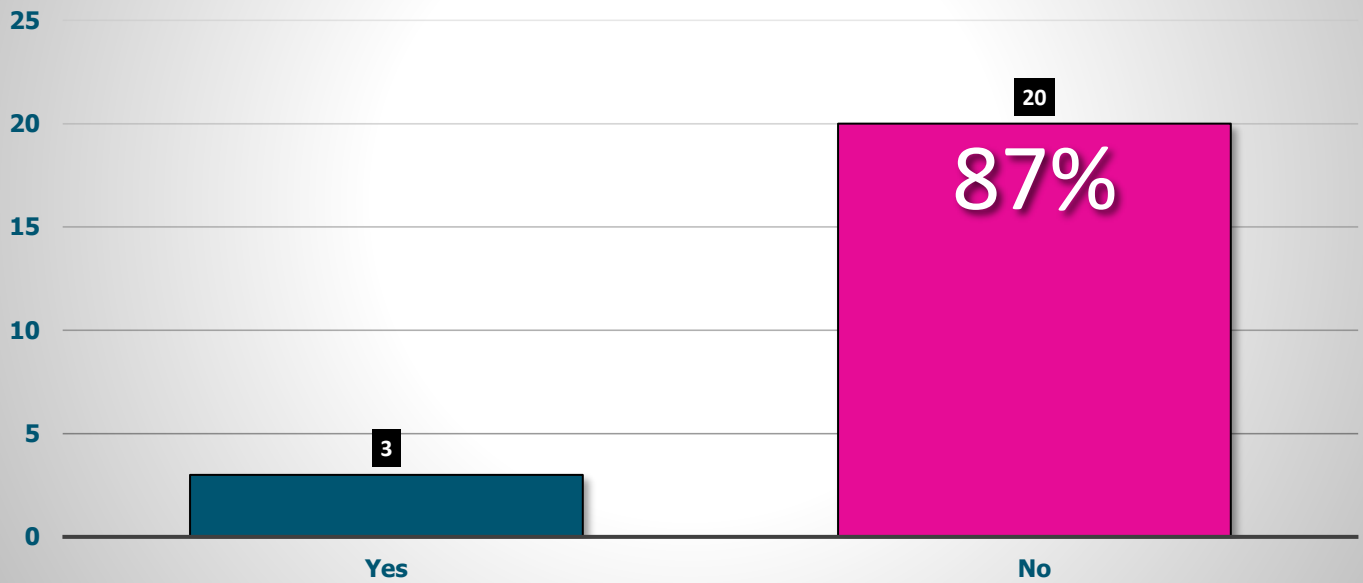
Of the 23 people who stated that they had an appointment, we asked them what their appointment was for. 52% (12 people) stated that it was for a check-up, 26% (6 people) stated it was for a specific procedure and 9% (2 people) stated it was for emergency dental treatment.

Have you received any information or guidance about COVID-19 infection control procedures for when you attend your appointment?



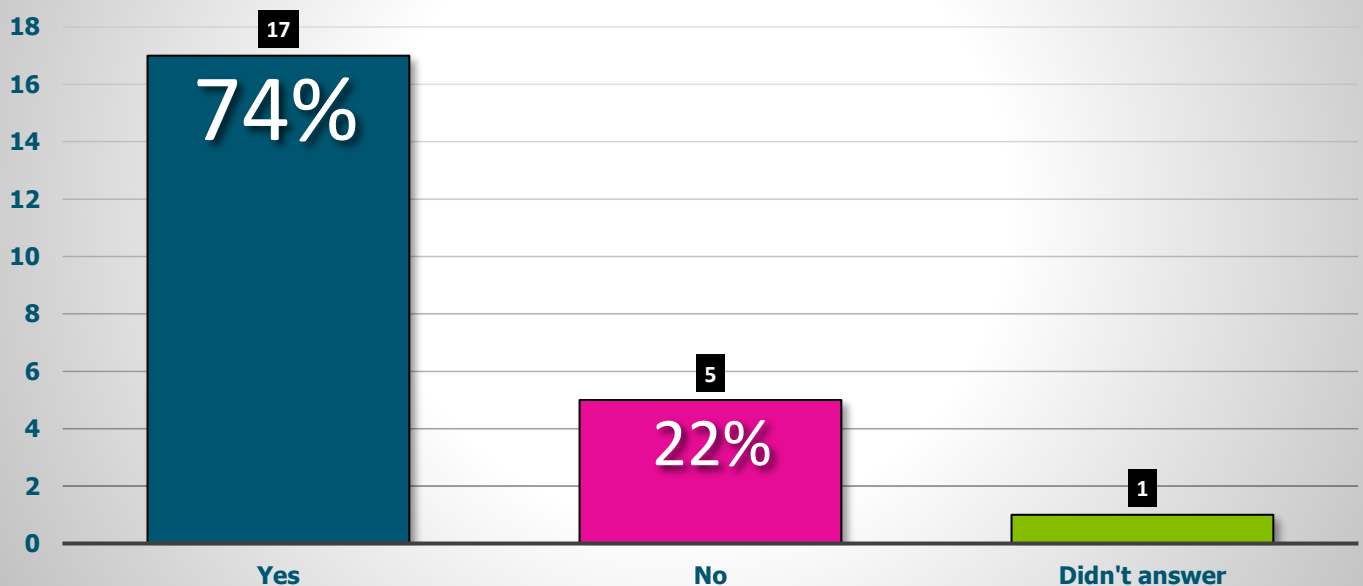
Of the 23 people who went for an appointment, we asked whether they received any information or guidance about COVID-19 infection control procedures before their attendance. 91% (21 people) stated that they did in comparison to 9% (2 people) who stated that they did not.

Have you been informed of any additional charges or increased costs for due to the use of PPE or other factors during your appointment?



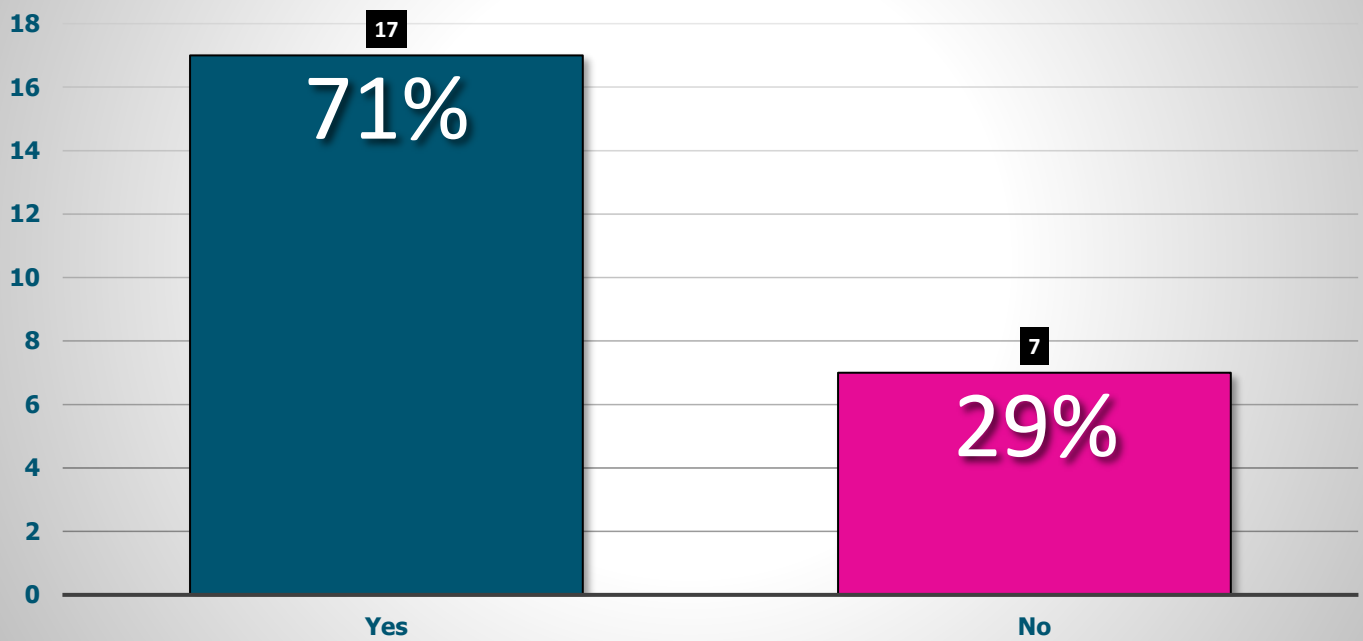
Of the 23 people who attended an appointment, we asked whether they were informed of any potential additional charges, such as PPE for their appointment. 87% (20 people) stated that they were not informed compared to 13% (3 people) who were. It is unclear whether people were not informed as they did not receive any additional charges.

Does your dental practice identify what to do or who to contact for advice or to access other services if they cannot help you?



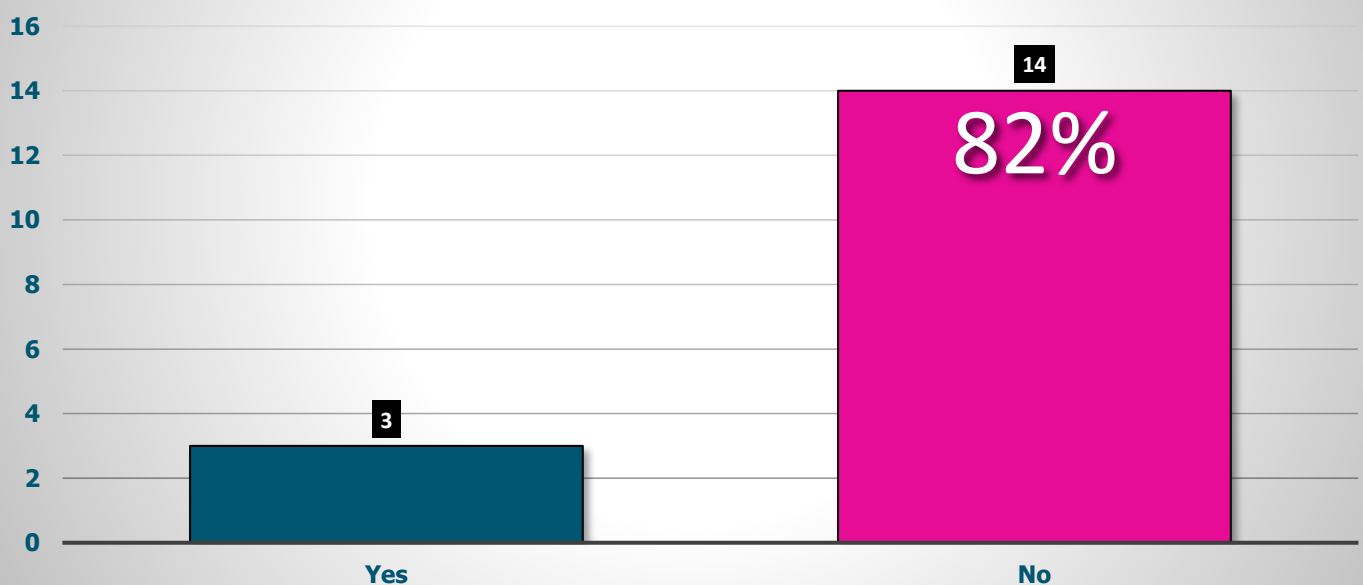
Of the 23 people who attended an appointment, we asked whether their practice identified who to contact if they were unable to help them. 74% (17 people) stated that they did in comparison to 22% (5 people) who stated that they did not. It's unclear whether the need for additional support was required for the people that answered this question.

Have you recently tried to register with a dental practice?



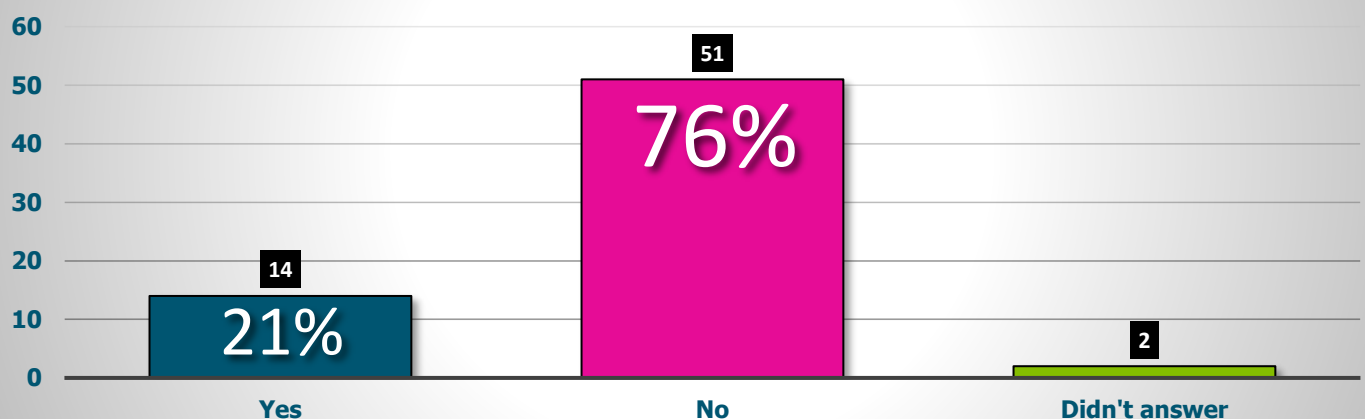
Of the 24 people who stated that they did not have a dentist, we asked them whether they had recently tried to register with a practice. 71% (17 people) stated that they had compared to 29% (7 people) who had not.

Were you given any advice or information to help you access another dental practice or emergency treatment?



Of the 17 people who had tried to register with a dentist, we asked them whether they were given any advice or information to help them access another practice or emergency treatment. 82% (14 people) stated that they had not compared to 18% (3 people) who stated they had.

Have you ever been unregistered by a dental practice previously without being made aware?



We asked all respondents (67 people) whether they had ever been unregistered by a dental practice without being made aware. 76% (51 people) stated that they had not compared to 21% (14 people) who stated that they had.

Of the 14 people who stated that they had been unregistered without being made aware, we asked them...

What was the reason given for being unregistered?

Couldn't afford treatment
Dentist changed to private only patients
Lack of usage
Dentist ceased operation
Too late for an appointment

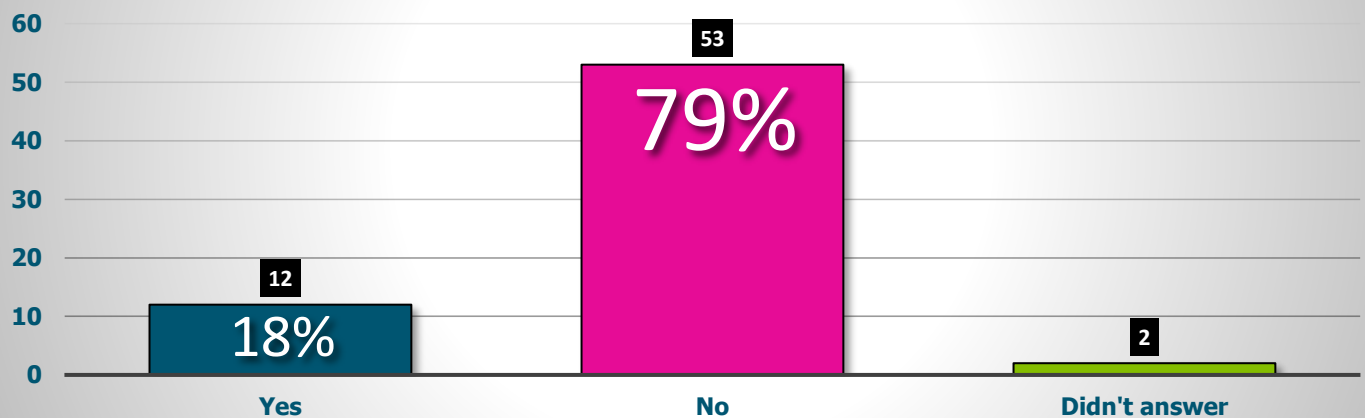
"Had a long course of treatment, then I didn't go for a check-up within 12 months which was actually only 5 months after my last appointment."

"Closed premises and moved without any notification."

"My dentist stated they were no longer treating NHS patients."

The most common reason provided for unregistering a patient was a lack of usage of their service. 57% (8 people) stated that this was the case. However, there were other reasons included such as a change of provision and allegedly closing their premises without notifying the patient.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, have you needed to use the emergency dental service?



We asked all respondents (67 people) whether they have needed to use the emergency dental service during the COVID-19 pandemic. 79% (53 people) stated that they had not compared to 18% (12 people) who stated that they had.

Of the 12 people who answered yes to this, we asked...

What was your experience with this service?

Helpful
Limited service
Poor service
Lack of responsibility (vicious circle)
Poor communication
Given clear COVID-19 Instructions
Charged excessively
Quick and efficient
Great service

"Awful - I sat on hold for 2 hours and the call cut off. I then had to sit for a further two hours before I finally reached someone, who explained I could only wait for another call back from a clinician as they had no appointments for me.

This clinician told me what I already knew and said that I needed to call again the following day to try and get seen. Whilst I was able to get an appointment and the dentist was helpful, they said that the care I actually needed could only be provided by a dentist I was registered with, so I am expected to sit in pain for up to 12 months until a local dentist is willing to register me and my young son."

"Was booked in at Ravat & Ray Dental Care, Tanhill Lane, Oldham. They contacted me before the appointment with clear instructions. The dentist and dental nurse were both extremely professional, helpful, and made me feel at ease. Had a tooth extracted.

A week later I had to use the emergency dental service again as the tooth next to the one that I had extracted was loose (this was the wisdom tooth). Rang the emergency number, again a very long wait of an hour whilst on hold.

Was offered an appointment the next day at Ravat & Ray Dental Care again. Had the same dentist and dental nurse. Wisdom tooth was extracted and I have had no further problems. As a nervous patient I can genuinely say that this dentist made me feel at ease and were excellent, cannot praise them enough."

"I was due for injection for osteoporosis. Nurse told me I couldn't have it because I had a tooth infection. Contacted dentist and was told they could not see me. Told there was a backlog at dental hospital.

Tried to contact emergency at dental hospital who told me they could not see me and to contact an emergency nurse dentist, thereby creating a vicious circle getting nowhere. I need the osteoporosis injection but cannot have it due to requiring a tooth extraction. No one wants to deal with this."

The comments made in this area have both positive and negative elements. Several responses expressed that they received poor service. Some people stated that they were in a vicious circle where nobody would take responsibility for their care and they didn't have any clear solutions to obtain that care.

At the end of the survey, we asked everyone...

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

"It does seem that dentists want to stop NHS work. They cancel appointments and do not remake them if you are under the NHS. I expect that if you are private, they will find a way to see you."

"I started root canal treatment In January. I attended a private dentist for the first part of treatment. This was delayed due to lockdown but was completed in the summer. I am in the middle of having follow up treatment with the crown being fitted on the NHS.

I have had four appointments cancelled. It's now nearly the end of November. The crown is made but had not been fitted. Other dentists in the practice are refusing to fit it but my dentist is off work. It's ridiculous."

"They should be taking normal appointments. This is where you catch things early, like mouth cancers or impacted teeth. Not catching things early leads to emergency appointments and unnecessary pain and suffering for patients.

My last check-up was September 2019! And the extortionate PPE cost for hygienist appointments is ridiculous."

"I have a front facing public role and it is affecting my confidence having front teeth missing and being unable to find a dentist to do the work I need."

"I feel dentists during COVID-19 are willing to treat patients on a private basis so they can cash in on the vulnerable. It is shocking the situation many find themselves in having to try and receive treatment with a huge price tag."

"Feel neglected, as since the COVID-19 pandemic, I have lost 4 fillings and have rung for appointments and told if not painful, I could not be seen."

"On my routine check-up, I was extremely impressed with all the precautions and felt very safe"

"The practices seem to spend too much time focusing on what they can't do rather than getting on with they can do."

"The practice I attended was fantastic, but it is private and expensive. I still cannot find a local NHS dentist taking on patients."

"My routine check-up was cancelled due to the first lockdown, but I was able to re-book it when the lockdown was lifted. My son's routine check-up was cancelled during the second lockdown. He tried to re-book, but they told him they are not doing any routine check-ups now until the new year. They would not allow him to book that in advance but told him to contact them again next year."

"I've been trying for over a month to get an emergency dentist appointment, which is absolutely ridiculous. Even ringing at 8am, they ring you back about 2 hours later with the reply there is no appointments."

"I've rang 111 to no avail, I've even rang The Dental Hospital in Manchester to be told you have to be referred by your dentist or doctor. Nobody one wants to know, it's beyond a joke."

"Families should not be being forced into joining a private dentist that they cannot afford."

"I didn't know my dentist had re-opened. I phoned them in June about a cracked tooth, they told me to fill it myself with temporary filling."

"The disparity between being able to pay for a dentist (privately) and trying to find treatment with an NHS dentist is apparent."

"A particular surgery stated (on 6/11/20) – 'sorry, we cannot see you until 10/12/20 as we have no emergency appts left until this date. If you pay an additional £90, we are able to see you tomorrow.'"

"Dentists should get waiting lists so I can at least be in a queue for a space at their clinic."

"I tried to access assistance in May and was told to get a dental repair kit from Boots.

One front tooth had snapped off and I lost two fillings. Additionally, I had what I thought was an abscess. I was then told to contact the emergency practice if I was in pain! I treated the abscess myself by inserting a needle and got some antibiotics.

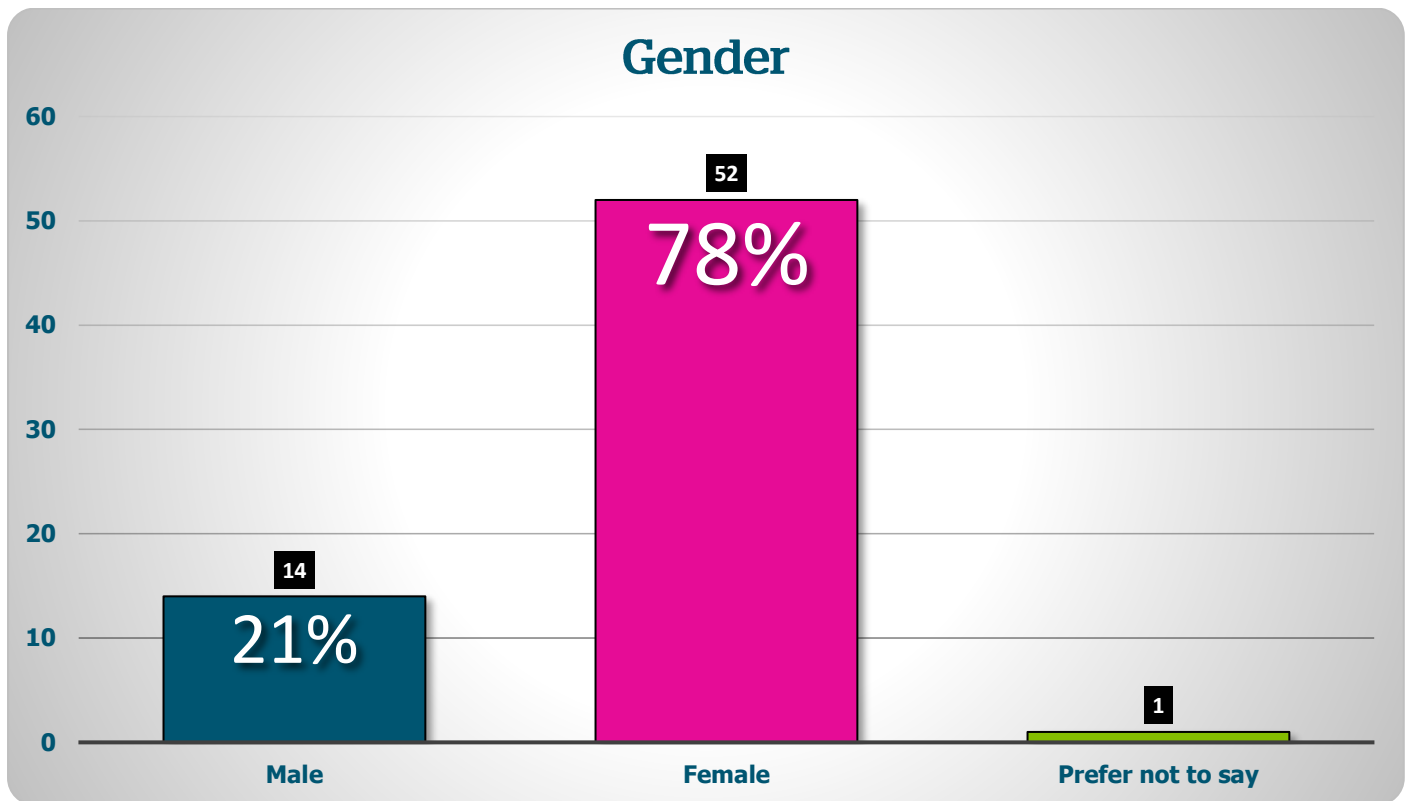
It was October before I got to see my dentist and they confirmed by x-ray that there was a cavity where abscess had been and they removed the tooth and did the fillings."

Case Study

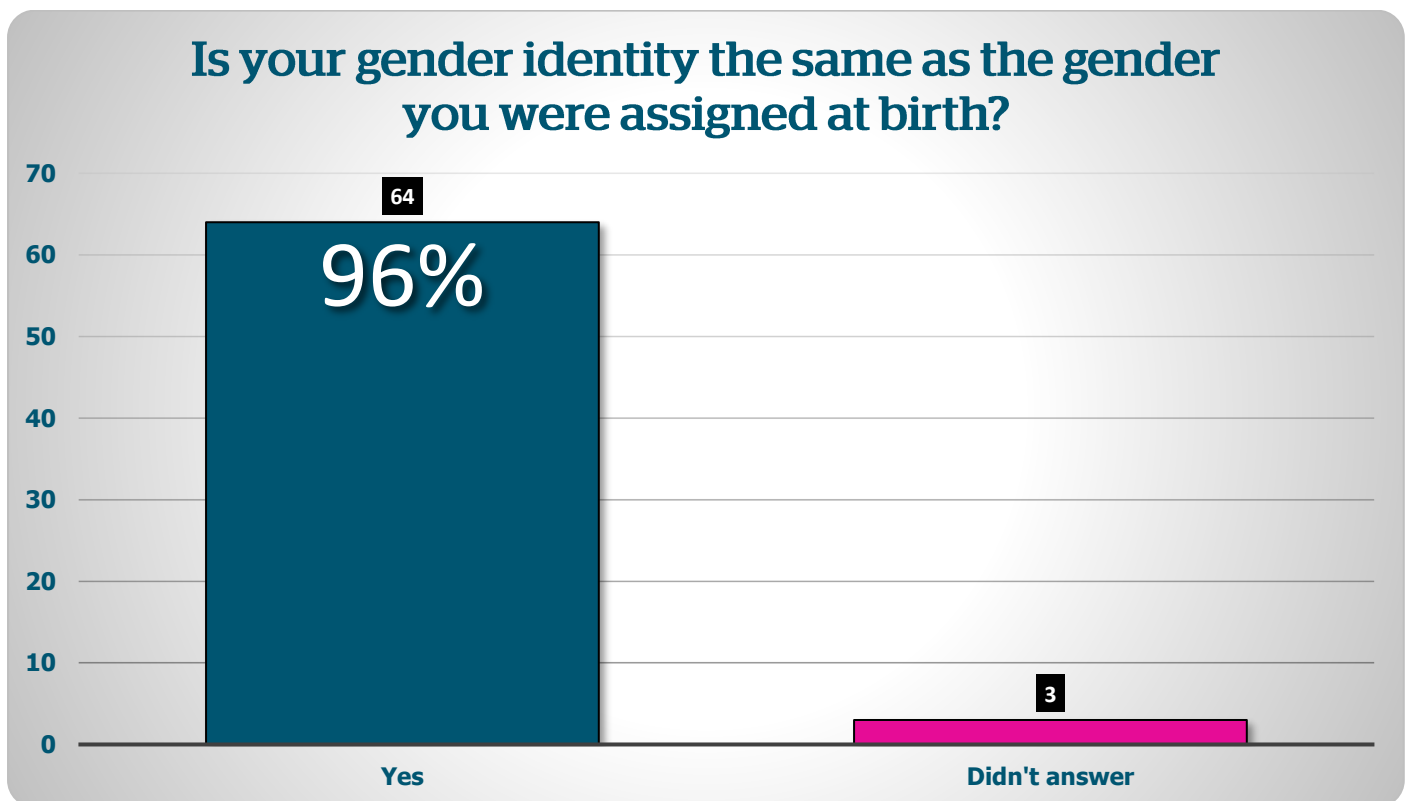
A male whose first language is not English and had been in the Country 12 months, had dental pain and could not register with a Dentist as no one was taking on new patients. He contacted the Emergency Dental Service and due to the language barrier could not arrange an appointment. The pain got worse, so he removed the tooth (back molar) himself using pliers, he advised a lady who voluntarily supports him, and she was worried about infection. She rang the Emergency Dental Service who advised that as the problem was self-inflicted, they could not see him and advised to visit A&E, she took him there and after waiting 4 hours they could not help and that he needed to see a Dentist.

It was then becoming apparent that the continuing discomfort and pain was due to a second tooth that needed extracting. The Lady made an appointment with the Emergency Dental Service and the second tooth was removed. The Gentleman requires further dental work, however, is still unable to register with an NHS Dentist or even get onto a waiting list.

Profile of Respondents

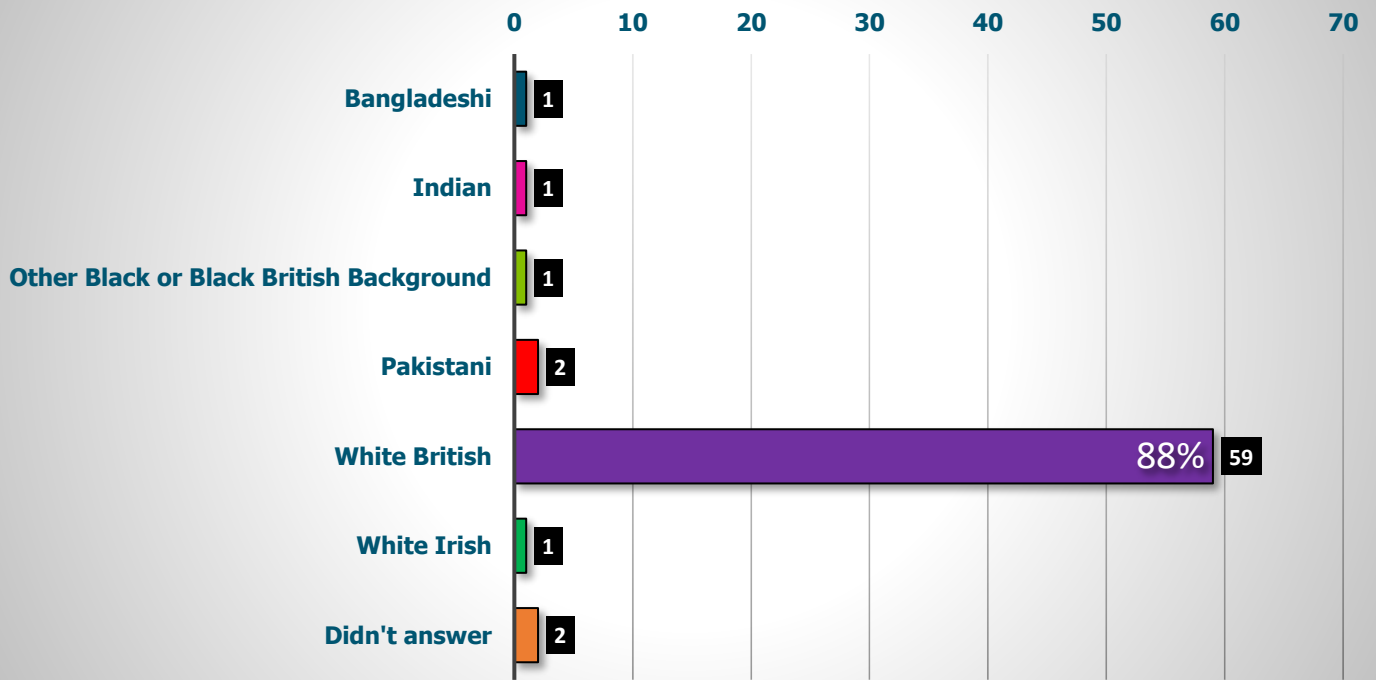


78% (52 people) who completed the survey are female compared to 21% (14 people) who are male. 1 person preferred not to answer this question.



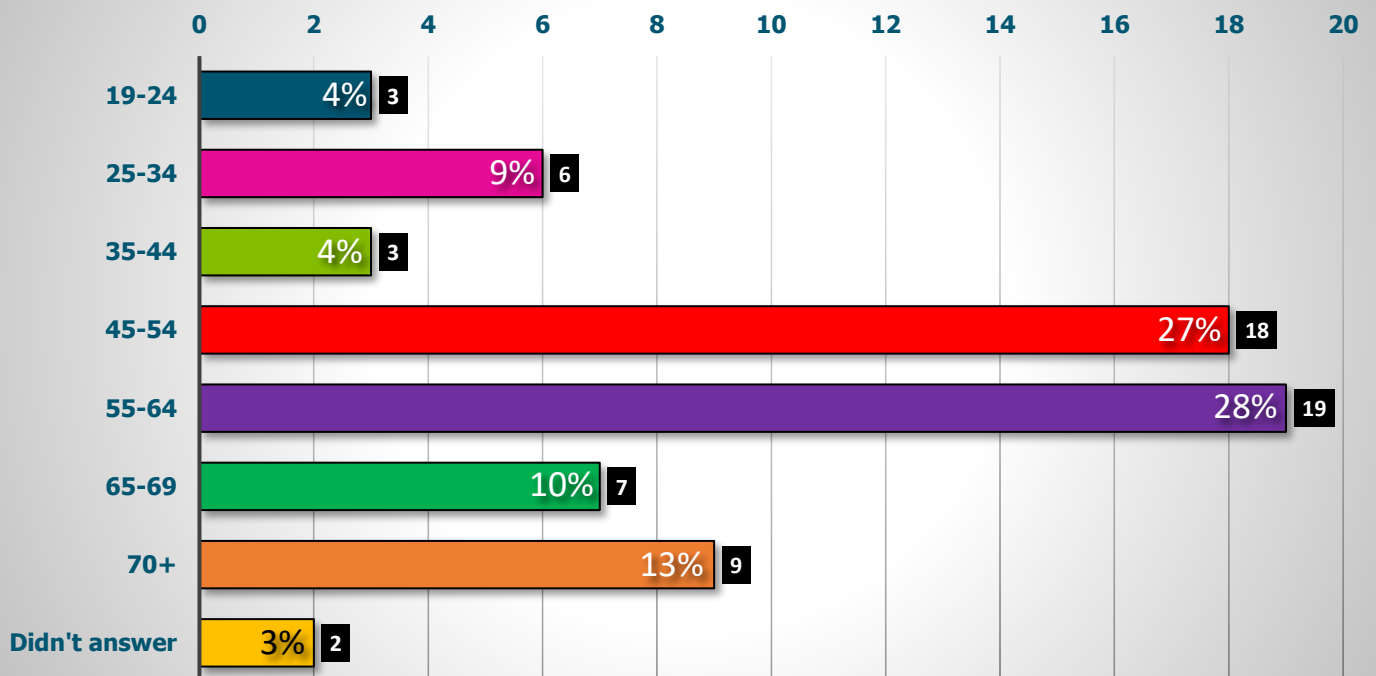
96% (64 people) who completed this survey stated that their gender identity was the same as the one assigned at birth. 3 people did not answer this question.

Ethnicity



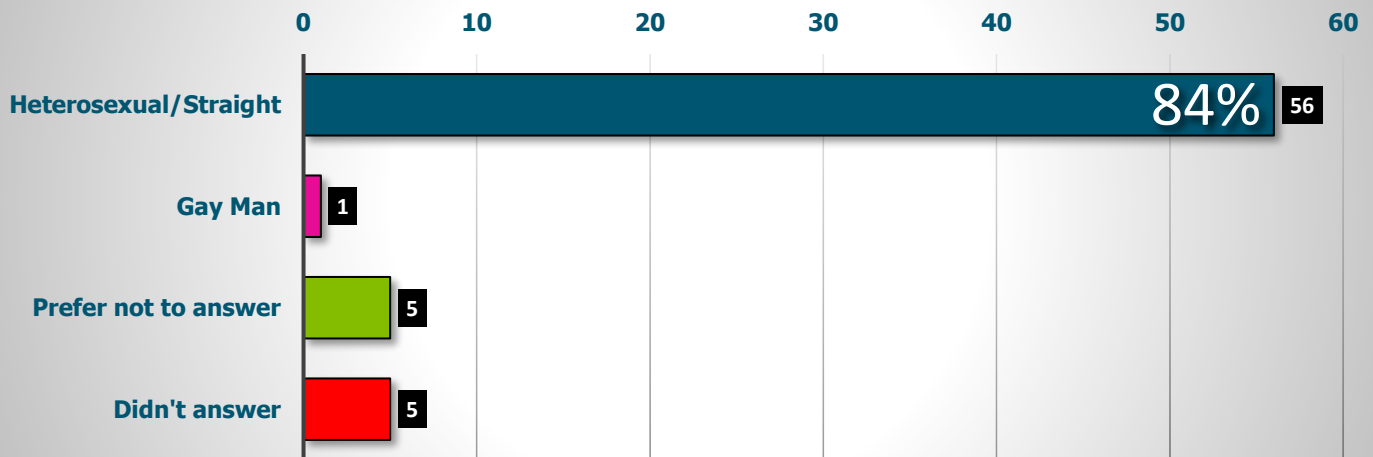
88% (59 people) who completed this survey stated that their ethnicity is White British. Other ethnicities were represented in lower numbers.

Age Group



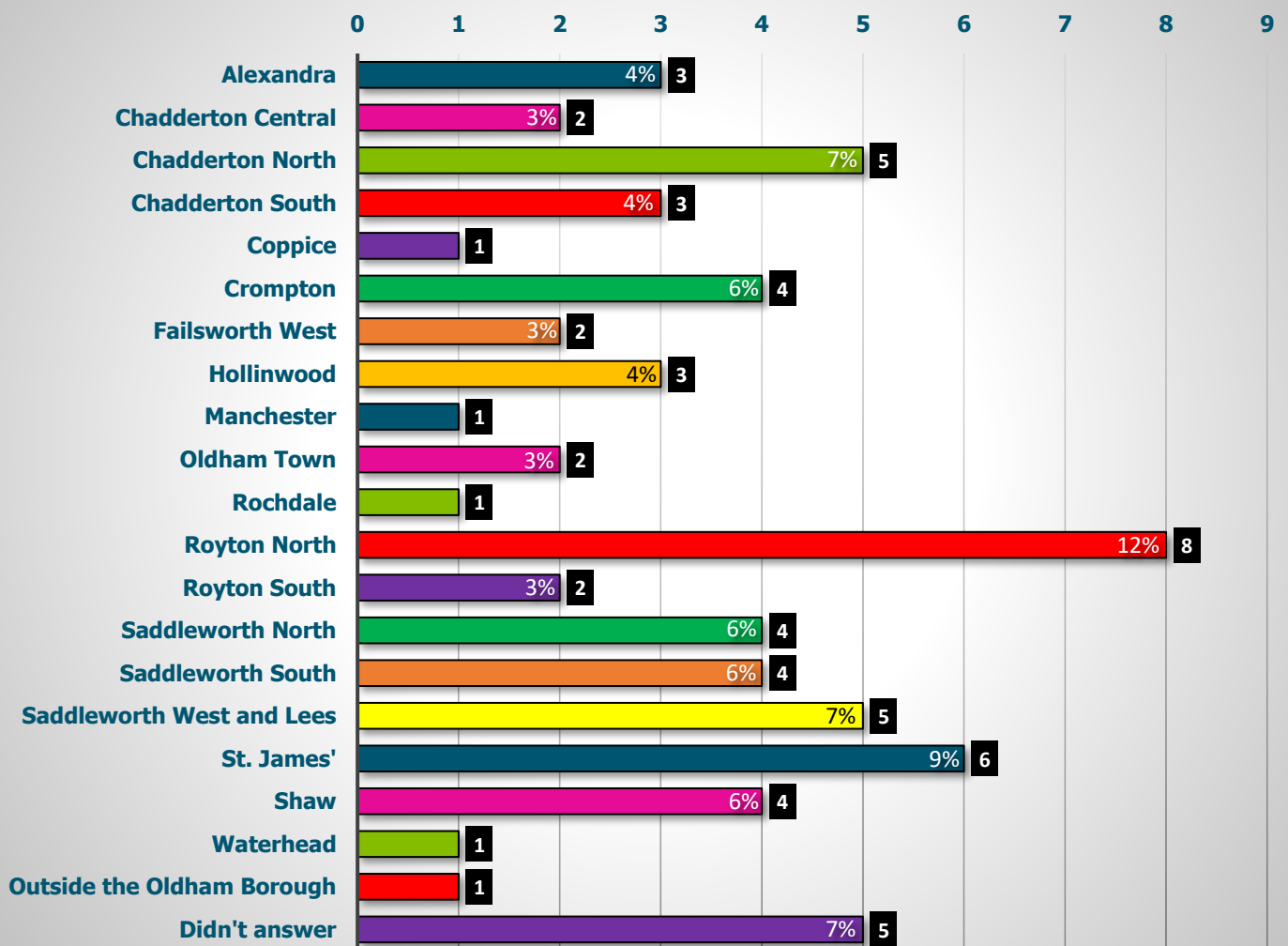
We asked all respondents which age group they fell into. 28% (19 people) were aged between 55-64 and the next highest response is 27% (18 people) who are in the age group 45-54.

Sexual Orientation



84% (56 people) who completed this survey stated that they are heterosexual/straight. 5 people chose not to answer this question.

Town or area you live in



We asked respondents where they lived. 12% (8 people) stated that they lived in Royton North and 9% (6 people) stated that they lived in St. James'. Most areas of Oldham were represented within this survey.