

The critical role of relationships in building and sustaining resilience among physicians and other healthcare professionals

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Disclosures

The researchers have no disclosures to report associated with this research.

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- *Additional presentations based on other segments of data from this project were shared at the 2021 International Conference on Work, Stress, & Health and the 2023 Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*

Session Objectives

After this presentation, you should be able to:

- 1) Describe the influence of relationships on professional fulfillment and development
- 2) Explain how and why working in healthcare creates meaningful opportunities for developing relationships characterized by connectedness and belonging
- 3) Develop strategies to leverage mentoring and role modeling relationships to improve and sustain resilience-promoting self-care routines

Importance of relational experiences

- Education of physicians and other HCP does not come solely through structured classroom and clinical experiences
 - Much development comes through relationship-based experiences involving coworkers, supervisors, mentors, and patients
 - We become who we are through our relationships with others



Project Objectives

- As part of a larger study of physician and healthcare worker resilience
- We examined the influence and impact of social relationships on physicians' and other healthcare workers' professional fulfillment and resilience
 - Qualitative and primarily inductive research effort, informed by existing theory and research into how positive relationships at work promote connectedness and belonging, and influence motivation and engagement

Resilience is not just internally determined

Resilience = individual difference

- Trait-like adaptability and adjustment, ego-resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996; Epstein, 1989; Friborg et al., 2005; Oshio et al., 2018)
- Ability to bounce back from adversity (e.g., Bonanno, 2004; Richardson, 2002)
- Composite characteristic (e.g., psychological hardiness; Bartone, 2013)

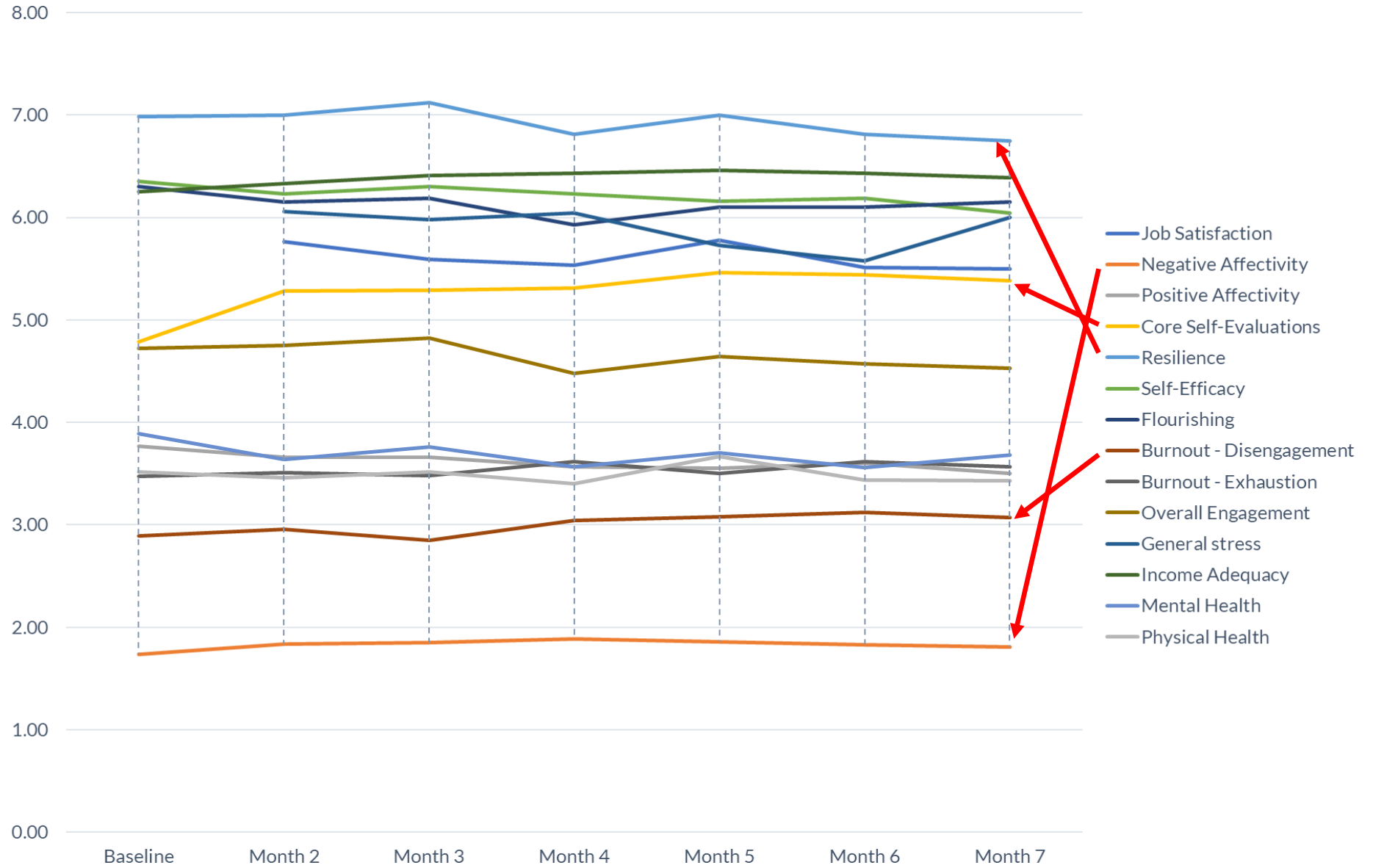
Resilience > individual difference

- Work and social experiences/contexts help or hinder ability to demonstrate resilience (e.g., Näswall et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2019)
- JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), Broaden and Build (Fredrickson, 1998), and other theories illustrate how our ability to respond to demands is influenced by external factors
- Worker resilience can be developed (or damaged), depending on work/social context elements (cf., Näswall et al., 2019)

Study Objective and Methods

- **Objective:** Understand how resilient physicians and HCP manage and sustain their resilience in difficult work environments (i.e., hospital setting during COVID)
- **Method:** Baseline survey + 8 to 10 monthly follow-up surveys + in-depth final interview
 - $N = 57$ physicians and HCP recognized for their resilience at different career stages
 - **$n = 33$ completed an in-depth final interview that is the primary source of data for these analyses**
 - Well-experienced, even M/F split, mostly White and non-Hispanic/Latinx, most married or in committed relationship

Remarkable resilience consistency over time



Present Focus

Responses to the following questions are the focus of this analysis:

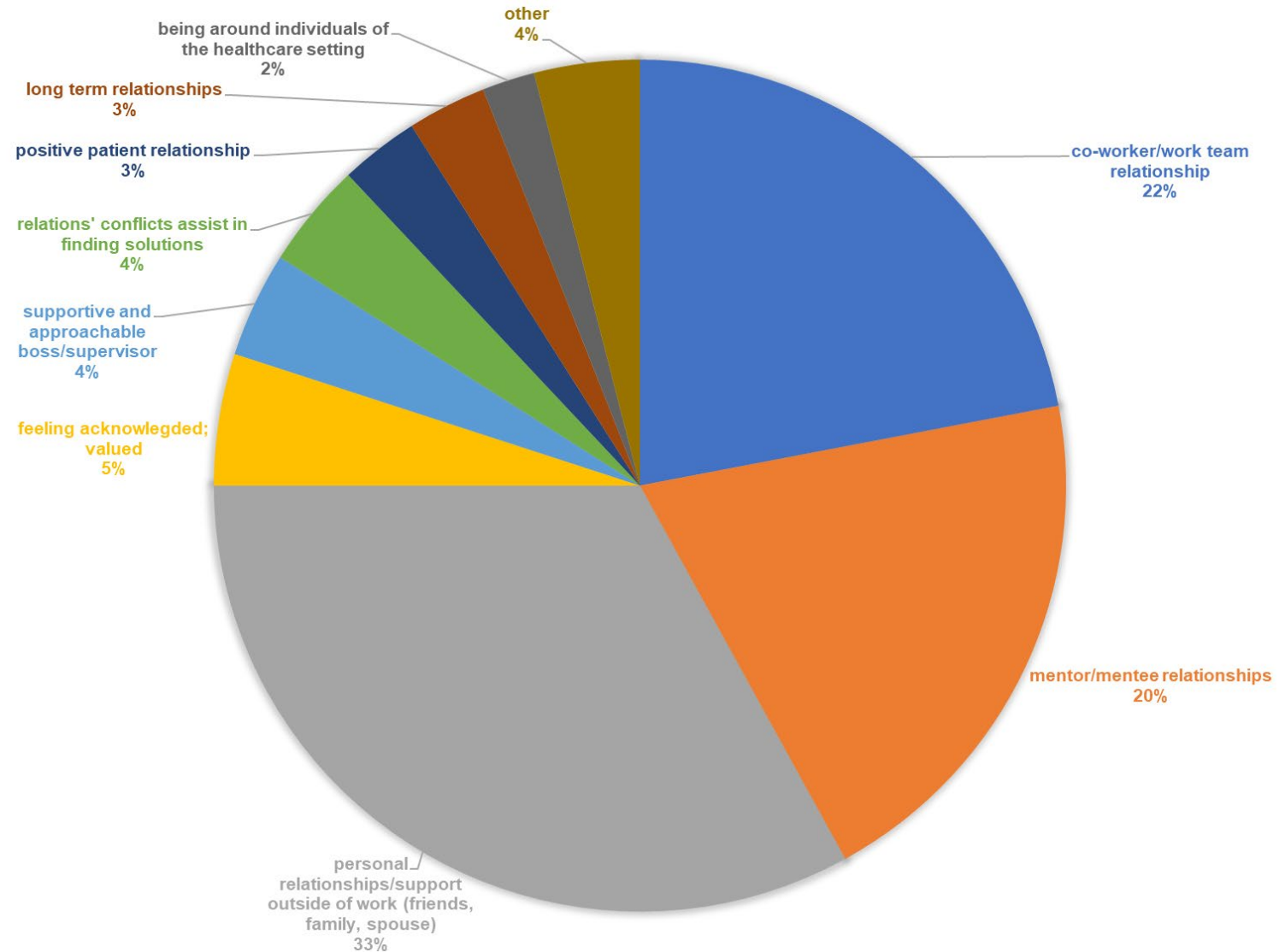
- 1) How have interpersonal connections or relationships been important to you in your career to-date? Please explain.
- 2) How do connections with others (coworkers, patients, etc.) influence how you approach your work?
- 3) What resources (e.g., people, tools/technology, spaces) in your work environment help you maintain your motivation even when work is difficult?

Summary of Analyses

- Rich data gathered from participants' interview responses were analyzed through an iterative content and thematic analysis process
 - After all interviews were transcribed, multiple trained research team members collaborated to identify key themes
 - Themes were summarized within-person and across respondents to provide a more complete understanding of these phenomena

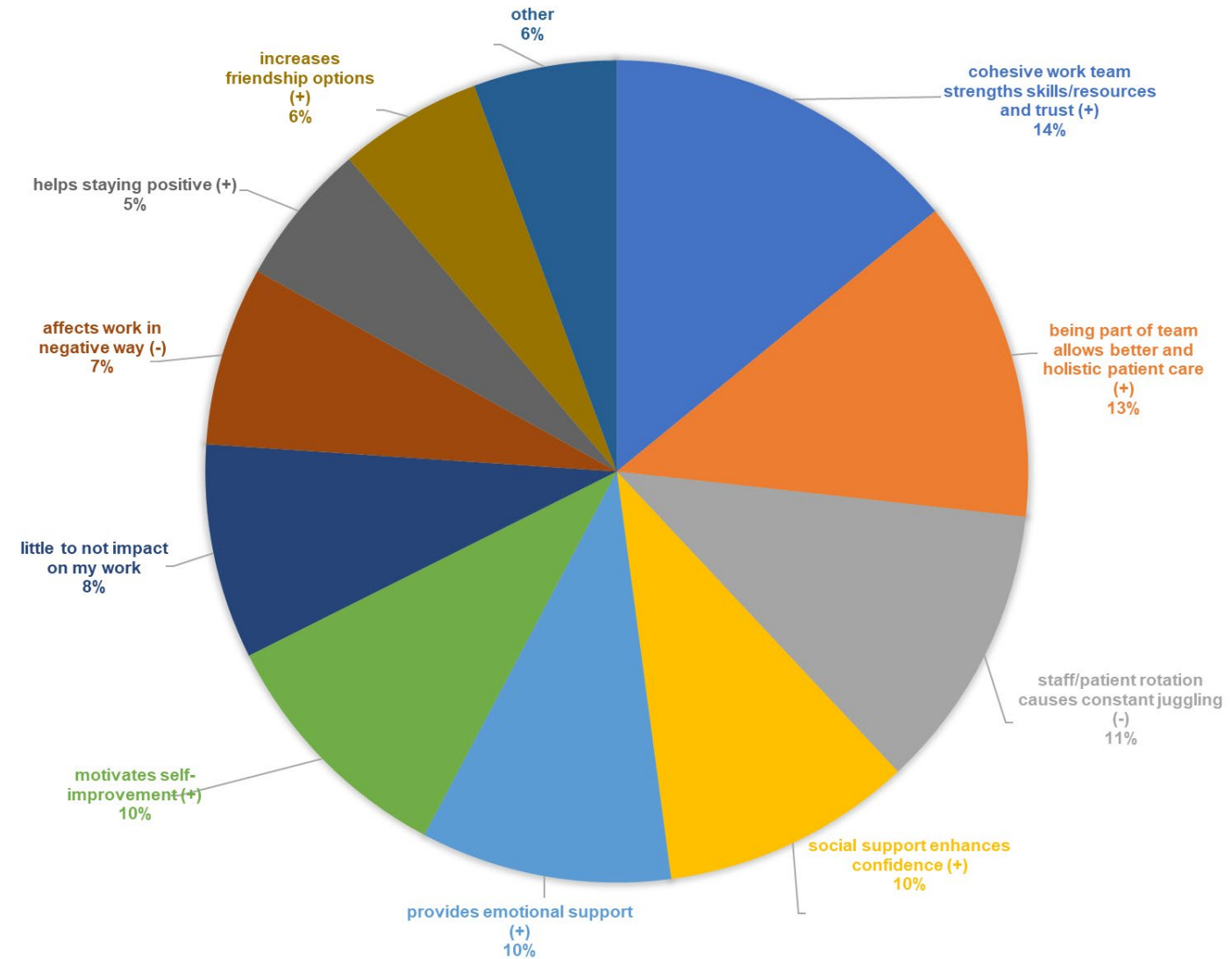
Key Findings: Importance of connections and relationships

- **With coworkers/team:** key element to resilient performance, like a family, source of support
- **As mentor/mentee:** crucial to learning and growth, self-efficacy, coaching
- **With friends, family, spouse:** keeps grounded, fuel sense of meaning, purpose, and motivation, source of values



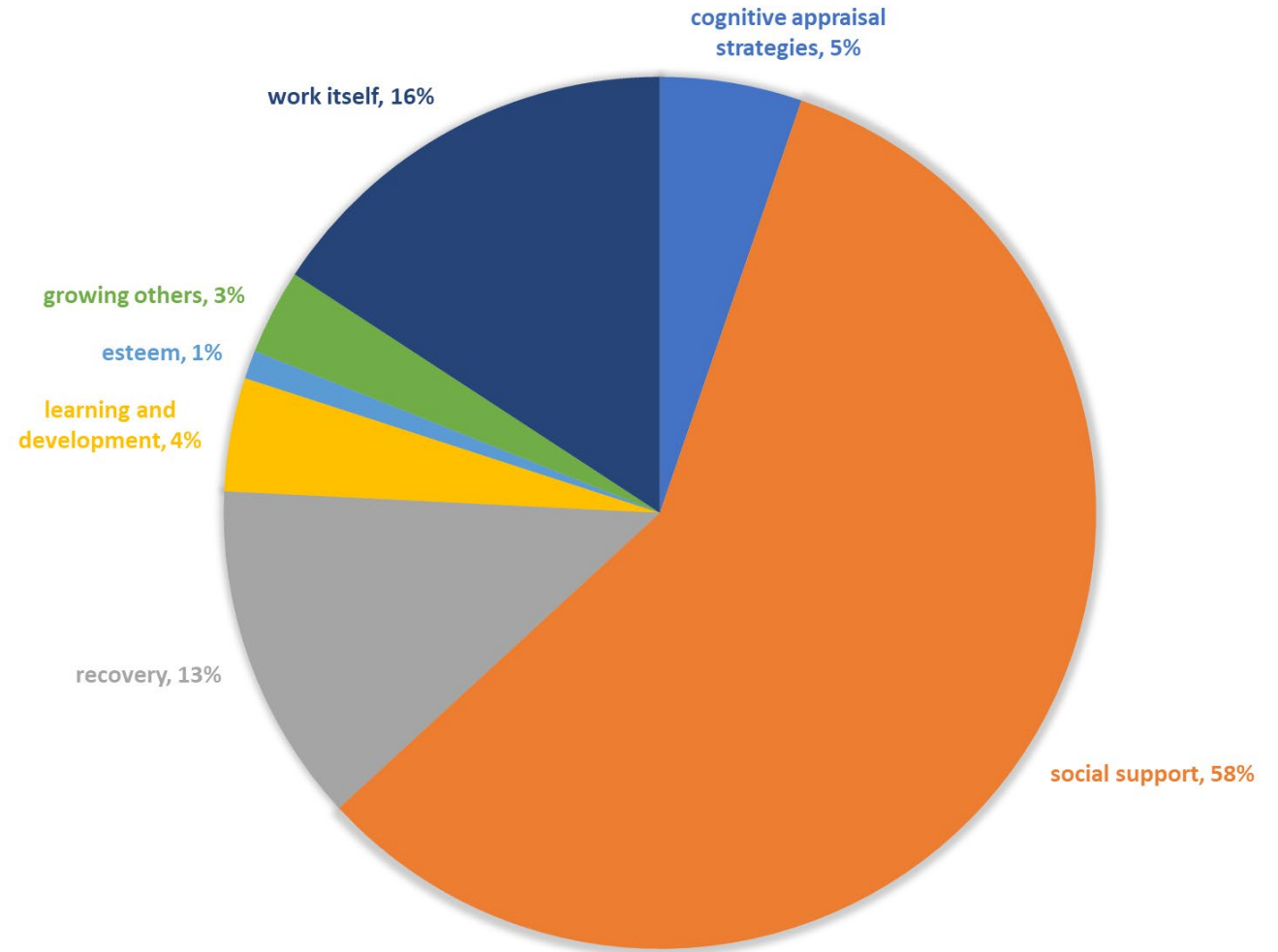
Key Findings: Influence of personal connections on work

- Working together enhances closeness, cohesion, problem solving, trust, holistic care
- Managing connections can add complexity and challenges
- Mix of + and – valence in responses
 - ~65% positive responses



Key Findings: Resources that help maintain motivation

- Note emphasis on social support and growing others
 - > 60% of the emphasis
- Highlights importance of not only training for the “work itself” but for how to work with other people



Summary of Findings

- **Relationships are critical to physician and HCP resilience**
 - Resources that protect motivation to work are largely relationship-based (with coworkers, supervisors, patients, family, friends, etc.)
 - Mentors/supervisors are essential in forming self-care perspectives/strategies and general approaches to teamwork
- **Relationships with patients and families sustain sense of meaning and purpose (key to resilience)**
 - Being present in “times of greatest need” was a common sentiment linked to building meaningful relationships that sustained professional efforts, functioning as a protective resource even when working in very difficult conditions (e.g., peak times during the COVID-19 pandemic)
- **Efficacy and resilience are enhanced by connectedness, belonging, and healthy relationships**
 - Such relationships are characterized by good communication, “knowing” each other, and availability of consistent and positive social support
 - General connectedness and belonging contribute to well-being (e.g., through sharing of positive and negative experiences, showing of support and emotional engagement).

Conclusions and Next Steps

- Relationships with mentors, coworkers, and patients are essential elements to resilience for physicians and other HCP
- Many implications, including a need to:
 - Create safe spaces to share experiences and build communities of trust and support
 - Ensure that physician and HCP education addresses how to function as mentees and mentors
 - Train established physicians and HCP to manage their function as role models who can shape and support a resilient healthcare workforce in the future



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THANK
YOU!

Questions?

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