

# Stakeholder Engagement to Inform Strategies for Improving Breastfeeding Education in Manitoba Schools: Preliminary Results

Michelle La<sup>1,2,3</sup> and Meghan B. Azad<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Pediatrics and Child Health, <sup>2</sup>Department of Human Nutritional Sciences, University of Manitoba; <sup>3</sup>Developmental Origins of Chronic Diseases in Children Network (DEVOTION), Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba

## INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding has many benefits for maternal and child health, yet **over 75%** of Canadian infants do not achieve the international recommendation of 6 months exclusive breastfeeding<sup>1</sup>.

**Social stigma and lack of public support** contribute significantly to early breastfeeding cessation<sup>2,3</sup>.

Most breastfeeding education targets pregnant women and new mothers, with **few resources directed to society at large**.<sup>4</sup>

Educating school children could help normalize and generate societal support for breastfeeding.

### OBJECTIVE

To engage Educators and Health Care Providers (HCP) and explore ways to integrate breastfeeding education in the Manitoba school curriculum.



## METHODS

A scan of the Manitoba school curriculum and other jurisdictions was conducted to understand if and how breastfeeding is currently being discussed in classrooms<sup>5</sup>.

A series of **focus groups and online surveys** were conducted to explore needs, perceptions and anticipated barriers related to school-based breastfeeding education.

Educators were recruited at Manitoba Teachers Society Professional Development Day and via email distribution lists. HCPs were recruited through email by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the Winnipeg Breastfeeding Network.

**4 Educators and 8 HCPs** participated in separate focus groups, and **95 surveys** were completed.

### REFERENCES

- 1) Gionet. Breastfeeding trends in Canada. 2013. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 82-624-X
- 2) Victora et al. 2016. Breastfeeding in the 21st century... *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 475-490.
- 3) Sriaman & Kelams. 2016. Breastfeeding: What are the Barriers?... *Journal of Women's Health*, 25(7).
- 4) Brown, A. 2016. ...Lessons for Breastfeeding Promotion and Education. *Breastfeeding Medicine* 11(3).
- 5) La et al. 2017. Stakeholder Engagement to Inform Strategies for Improving Breastfeeding Education in Manitoba Schools [Abstract].

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

### Participant Characteristics

Overall	n/N	%
Female	95/97	98
Has children	77/97	79
Breastfed	74/77	96
Educators	35/97	36
Health Care Providers	62/97	67
<b>Educators</b>		
Teacher	26/35	74
Administrator	3/35	9
Other <sup>1</sup>	6/35	17
<b>Subject</b>		
Math	7/35	20
English	8/35	23
Social Studies	12/35	34
Science	10/35	28
Physical Education	3/35	8
Home Economics	8/35	23
Other	12/35	34
N/A	6/35	17
<b>Currently teaches about breastfeeding</b>		
Yes	11/35	31
No	24/35	69
<b>Health Care Providers (HCP)</b>		
Doctor	6/62	10
Dietitian	7/62	11
Nurse	28/62	45
Lactation Consultant	15/62	24
Midwife	3/62	5
Other	3/62	5

<sup>1</sup>curriculum writer, guidance counselor, community coordinator

### Focus Group and Survey Results

Figure 1. Should students learn about breastfeeding in school?

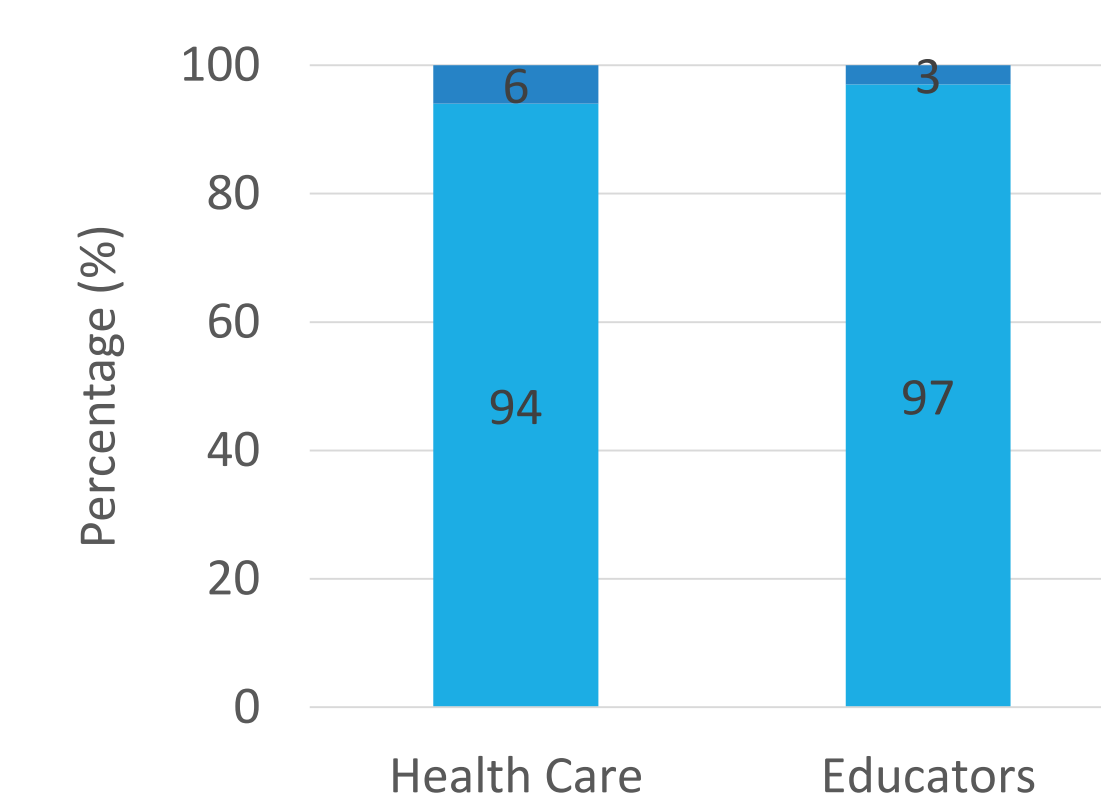


Figure 2. Why should students learn about breastfeeding?

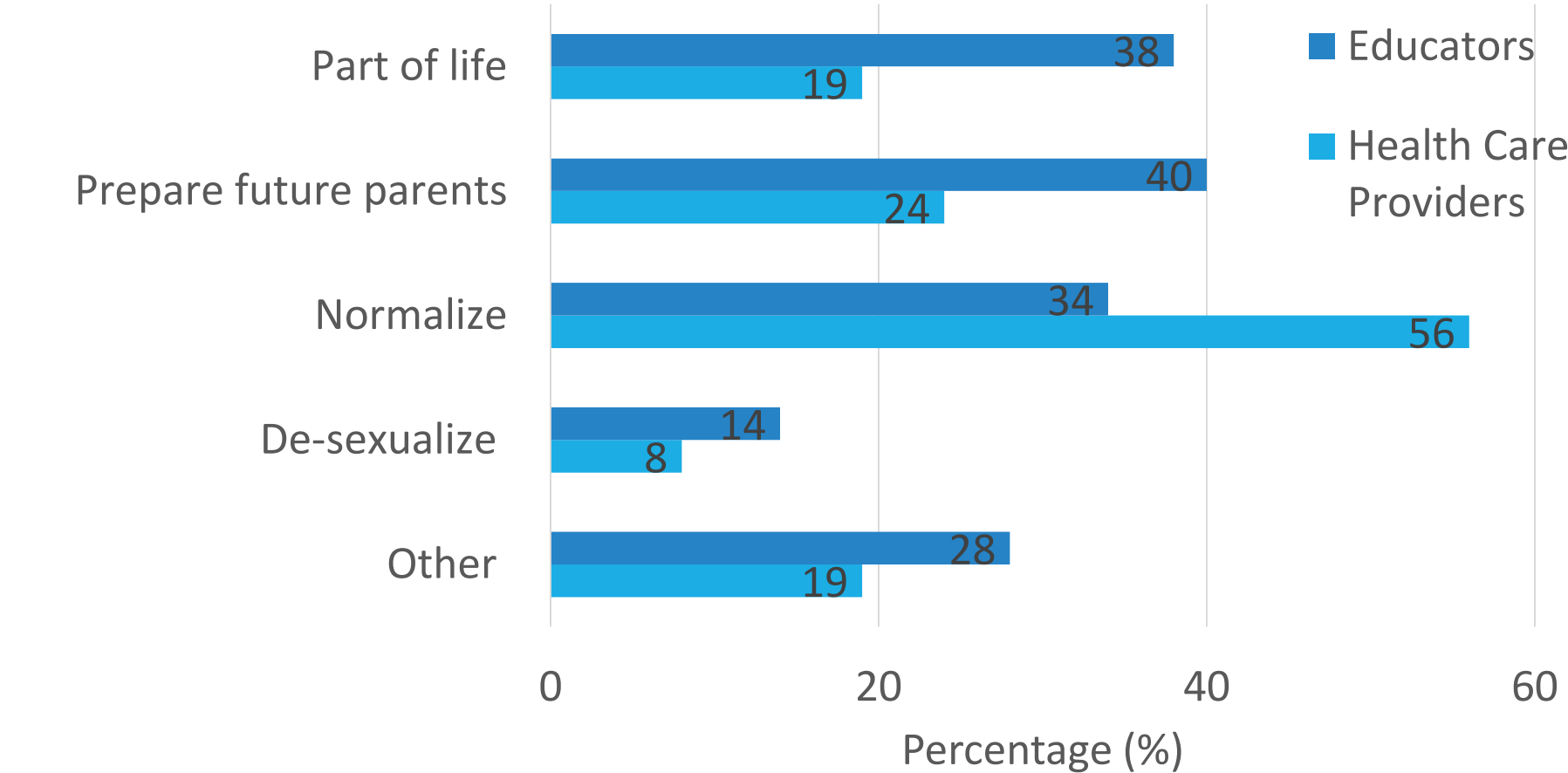


Figure 3. Where teachers obtain breastfeeding information for teaching (N=11)

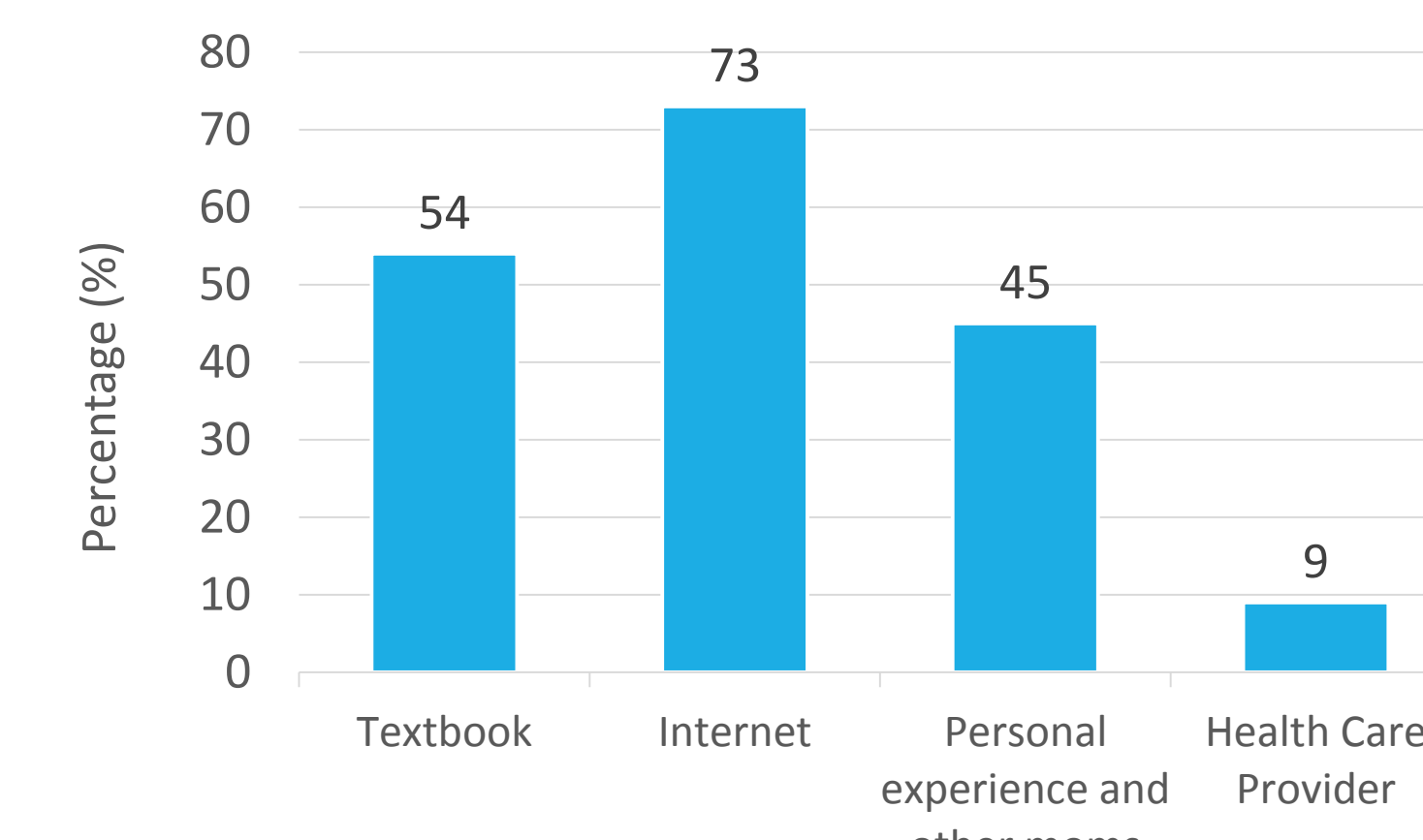


Figure 4. Who should deliver breastfeeding education in schools?

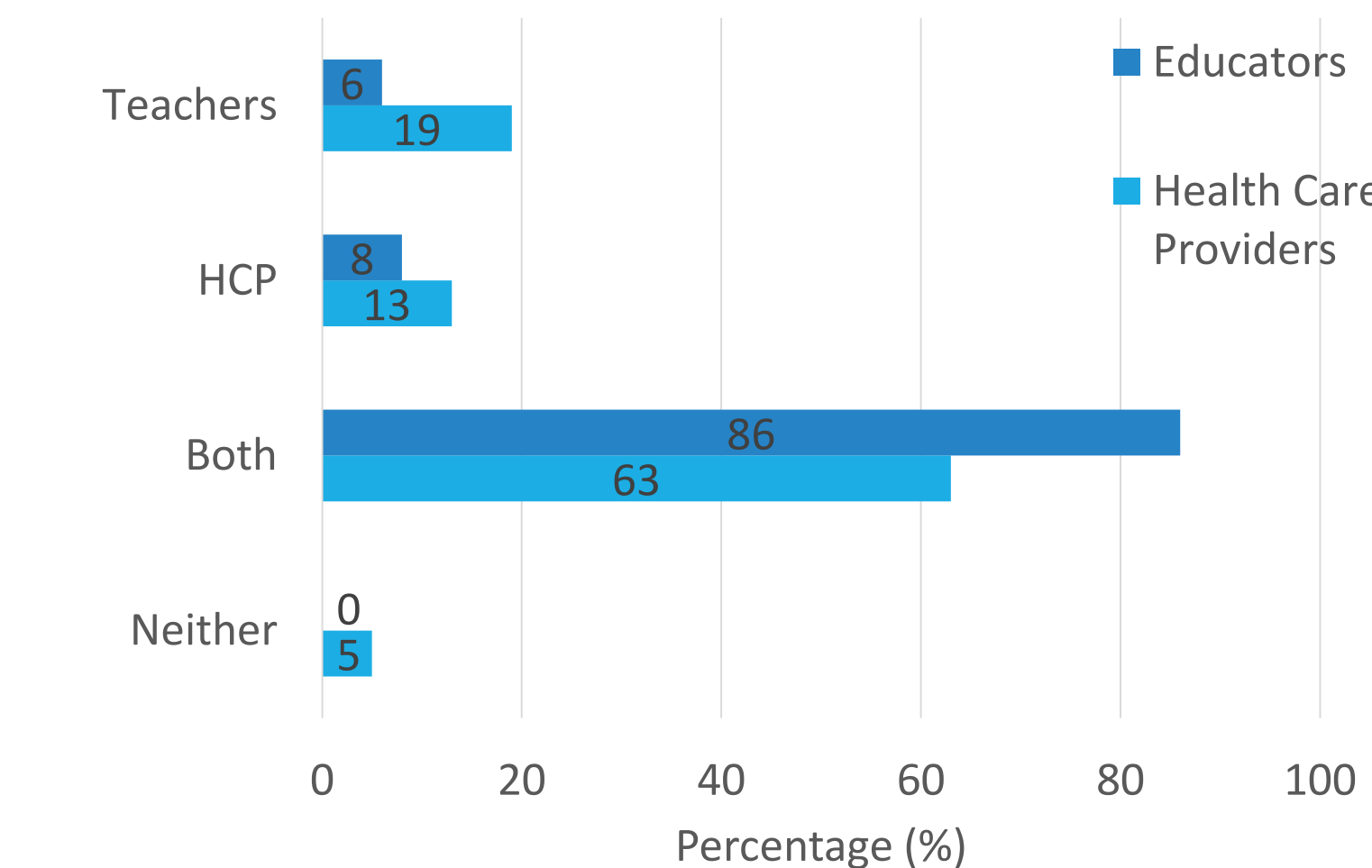


Figure 5. Why teachers do not currently teach about breastfeeding

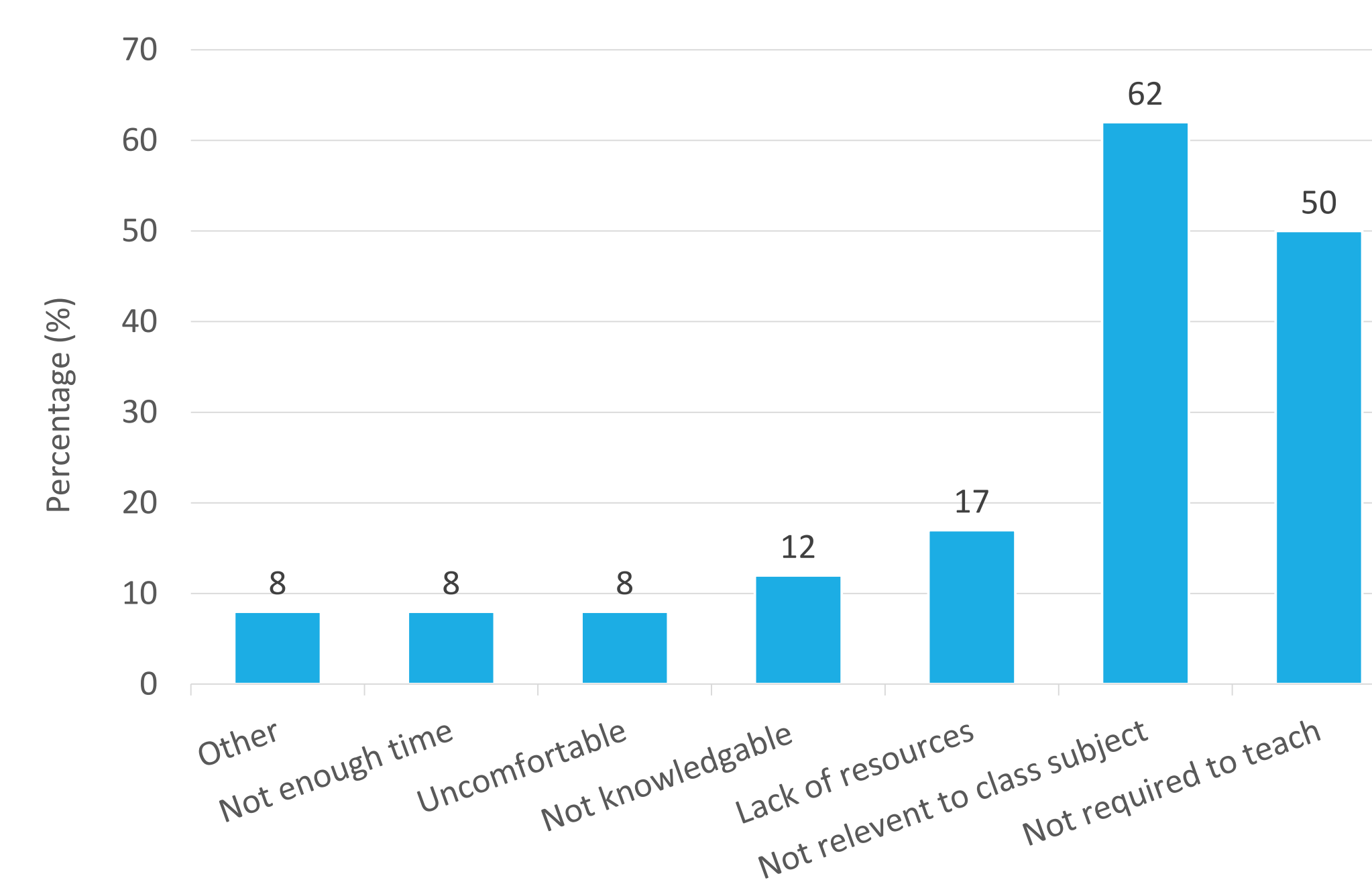
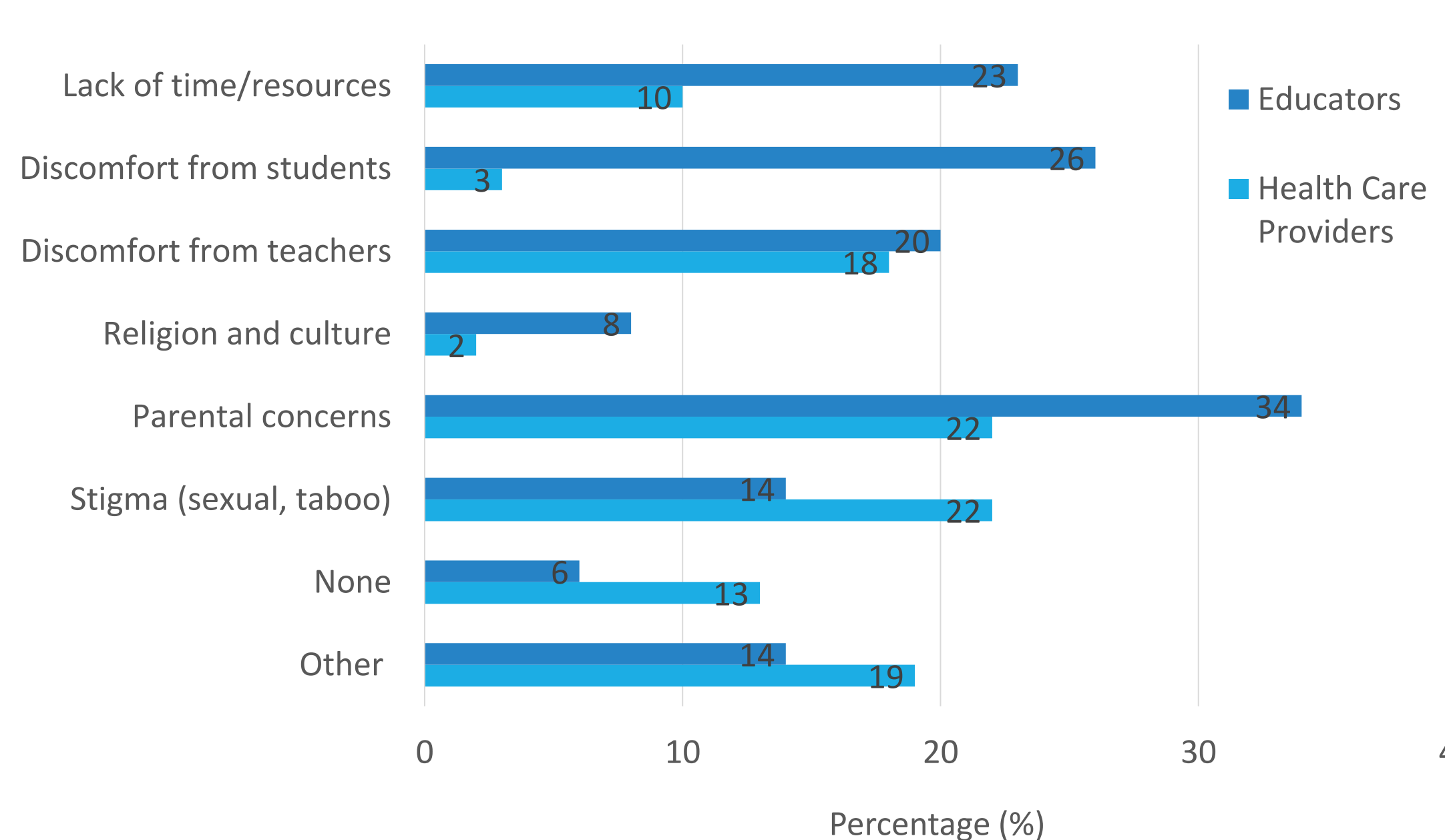


Figure 6. Anticipated barriers to teaching students about breastfeeding



## Quotes From Participants

"The younger we can start this type of education the better. When students learn this young, and hear the same messages repeated year after year, it becomes engrained in them. If students hear that breastfeeding is important for growth and development it will become part of their own thinking."

— Elementary School Teacher

"There are many priorities for students of Manitoba. The burden of poor mental health and limited life skills teaching (e.g. lack of curriculum on food skills, nutrition promotion, mental health first aid) should be prioritized in schools (rather than solely breastfeeding)."

— Health Care Provider

"Whether or not students have children one day - being informed on the topic, will allow them to make decisions and also understand the positives of breastfeeding for both mother and child."

— High School Teacher

## KEY FINDINGS

Nearly all **educators (97%)** and **HCPs (94%)** supported the idea of teaching students about breastfeeding.

There was roughly equal support for having teachers or HCPs provide this education.

**Primary motivations** were:

- normalizing breastfeeding
- preparing students as future parents
- providing accurate information about benefits, challenges and choices associated with breastfeeding

**Perceived barriers and concerns** included:

- lack of teaching time and resources
- inadequate training/discomfort of educators
- cultural and religious sensitivities
- non-breastfed students may feel stigmatized
- competing priorities in the curriculum
- shaming mothers who do not breastfeed

### CONCLUSION

Engaging with educators and HCPs has provided critical information on how to potentially integrate breastfeeding in the school curriculum.

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Nearly all participants were women and most had personal breastfeeding experience. This selection bias could influence generalizability.

**Next steps:**

- Consult with Manitoba Education and Training about curriculum development.
- Assemble a team of health care professionals to help deliver breastfeeding education in schools.
- Educate teachers about breastfeeding and the science of breastmilk.
- Provide teachers with educational materials related to breastfeeding.

Ultimately our goal is to encourage **societal support for breastfeeding**, improve breastfeeding rates and enhance maternal-child health in Manitoba.

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