

# Survey of Carer Satisfaction with Telephone and Video Consultations in Intellectual Disability Psychiatry during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Introduction

Although telephone consultations are becoming acceptable practice in many fields of medicine, progress in community learning disability services has been slow. The Covid-19 crisis accelerated the use of digital technologies as a means for conducting patient reviews. In the community learning disability team where this study is based, psychiatric reviews switched from face-to-face to majority telephone or video call reviews.

This survey was done 3 months into the national "lockdown". The aim of this work was to evaluate whether telephone and video consultations are a satisfactory way to do psychiatric reviews for people with intellectual disabilities according to their carers and whether they wanted clinicians to continue this method of working after the pandemic.

A literature review reveals a sparsity of evidence regarding remote psychiatric consultations in intellectual disability.

Gentile 2018 showed that telepsychiatry in intellectual disability in rural Ohio improved outcomes (including reduced emergency department visits and hospitalizations) and saved costs in the form of reduced travel expenses, reduced medical expense and long term services and support costs.

Szeftel 2012 evaluated adult and children of which 84% had an intellectual disability. Using telepsychiatry, severity and number of symptoms were noted to decrease, with fewer visits as treatment progressed and fewer medication changes. However, this study was also based in the USA (California) and focused on developmental disabilities rather than looking at intellectual disabilities specifically.

The only study which focused on the satisfaction of carers with telephone and video reviews for clients with intellectual disabilities in UK to date was a Lincolnshire-based study in 2010. Bains 2010 reported a high level of satisfaction with efficiency, suitability and effectiveness of telephone consultation, based on a sample of 11 questionnaires.

People with ID are more vulnerable to mental illness. The assessment and treatment of their mental health problems can present challenges for psychiatrists.

A focus group with members of the community intellectual disability service highlighted a number of factors that play a role in patients and carers having difficulties in attending psychiatric clinic appointments:

- Transport difficulties
- Clashing with other preferred activities like day centre
- Fear of infection, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Associations of doctor's appointments to distressing experiences in the past
- Not understanding the need for the review
- Not having adequate time of information to prepare for doing something different that day
- Service unaware of appointment details (not receiving letter etc.)

It might be possible to overcome some of these barriers whilst meeting the needs of this patient group by increasing the use of consultations carried out via digital technology (telephone or video calls).

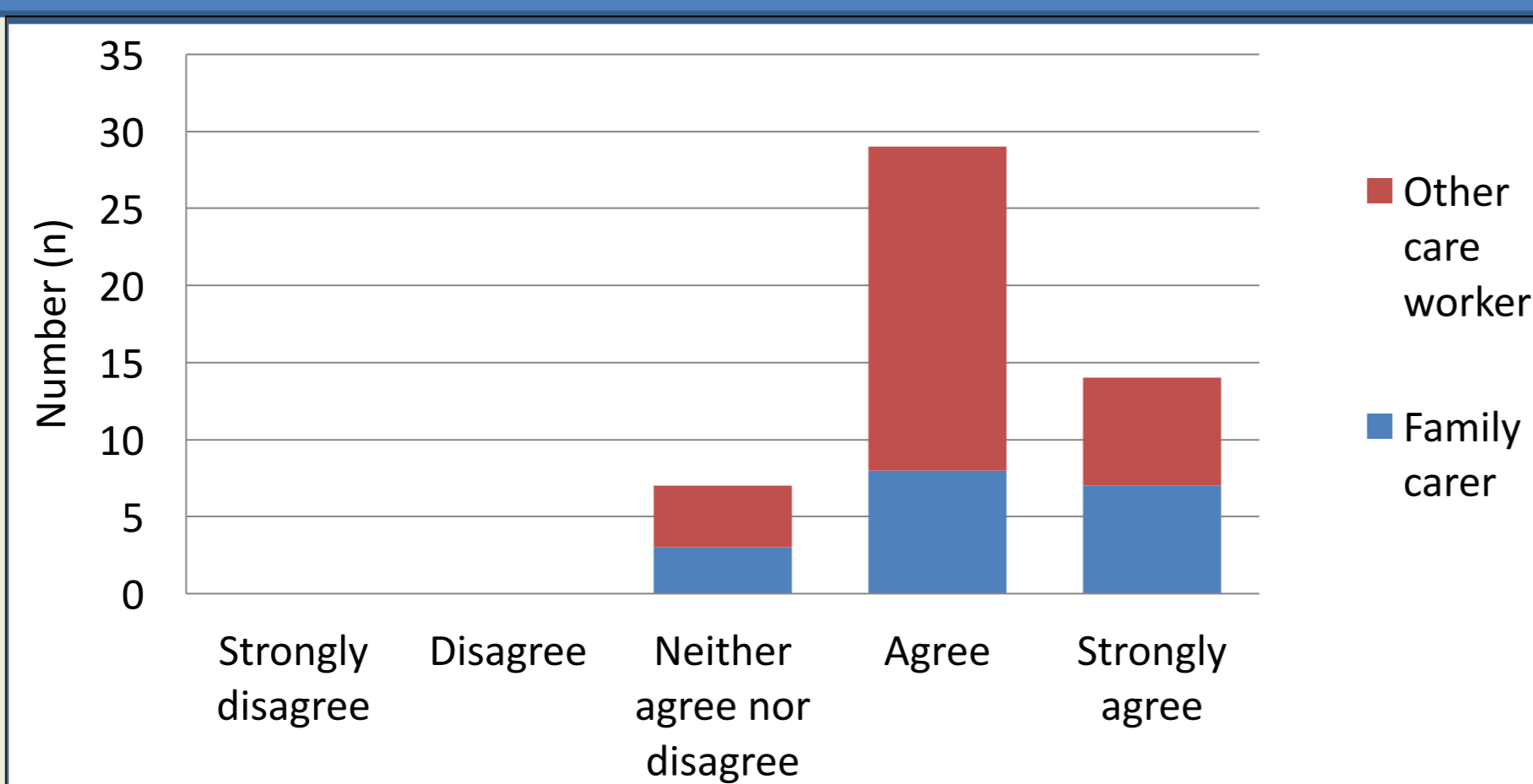
## Method

50 carers for patients under the intellectual disability community team were contacted by telephone between May – June 2020 by members of the community team. The carers were selected randomly. They had all had a telephone or video consultation with a clinician during the Covid-19 pandemic.

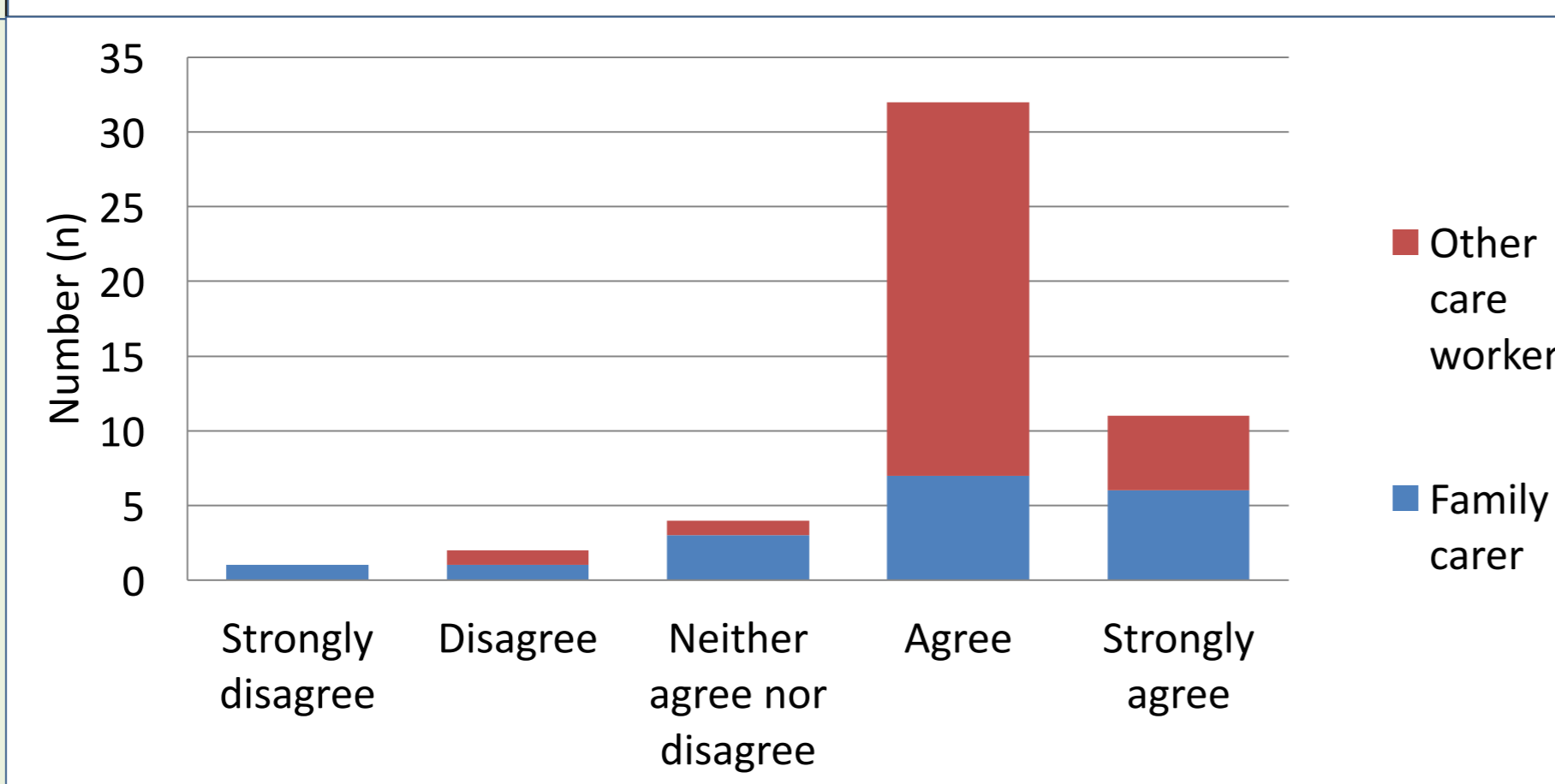
A survey consisting of 5 statements with multiple choice answers was asked to the carers. Carers were also given an opportunity to give any qualitative feedback about their numerical answers. Anonymity was stressed and carers were asked to complete the questions from their own perspective as a carer.

## Survey Results

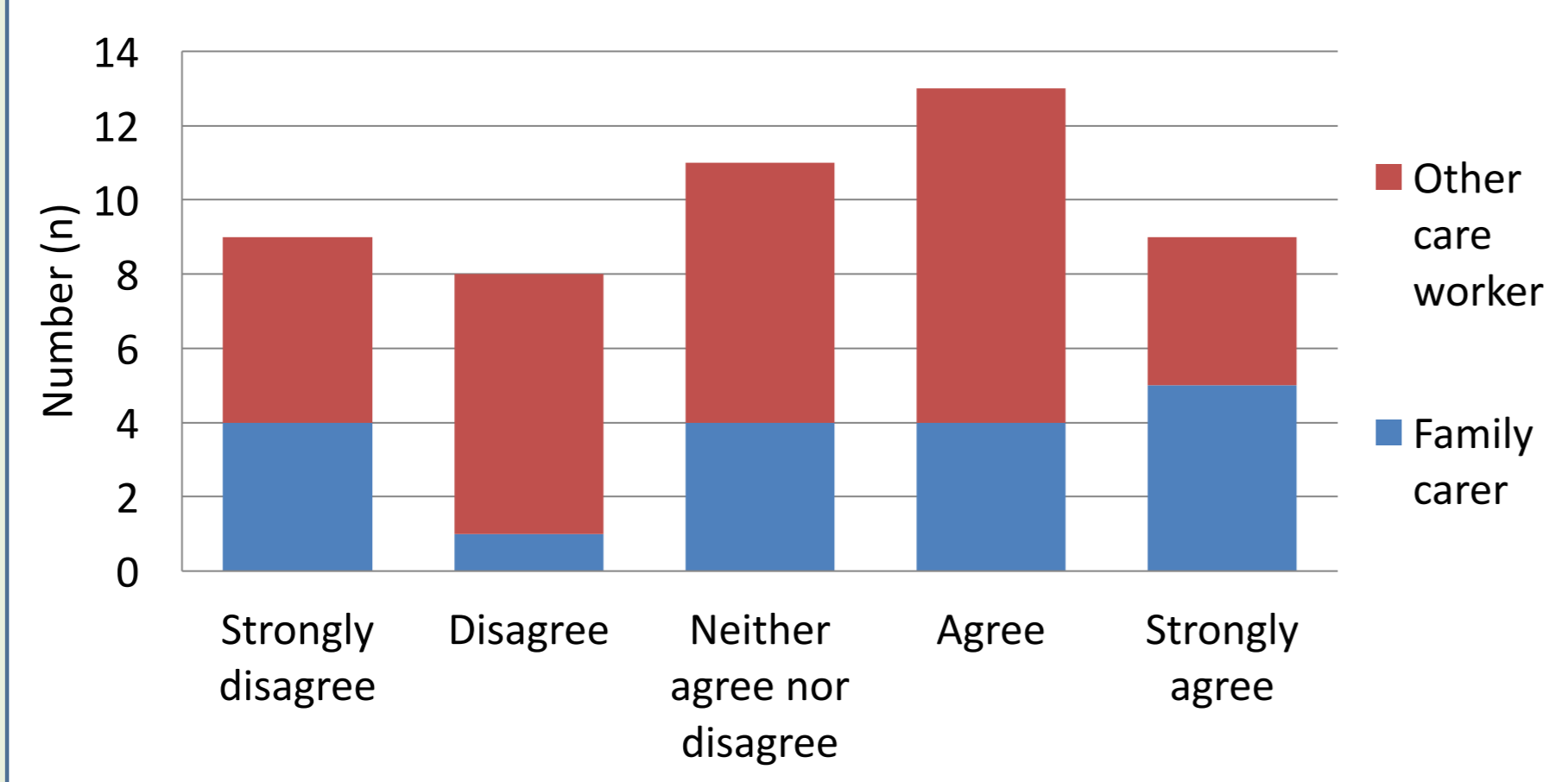
**Statement 1:**  
Telephone Calls are a satisfactory way to do a review.



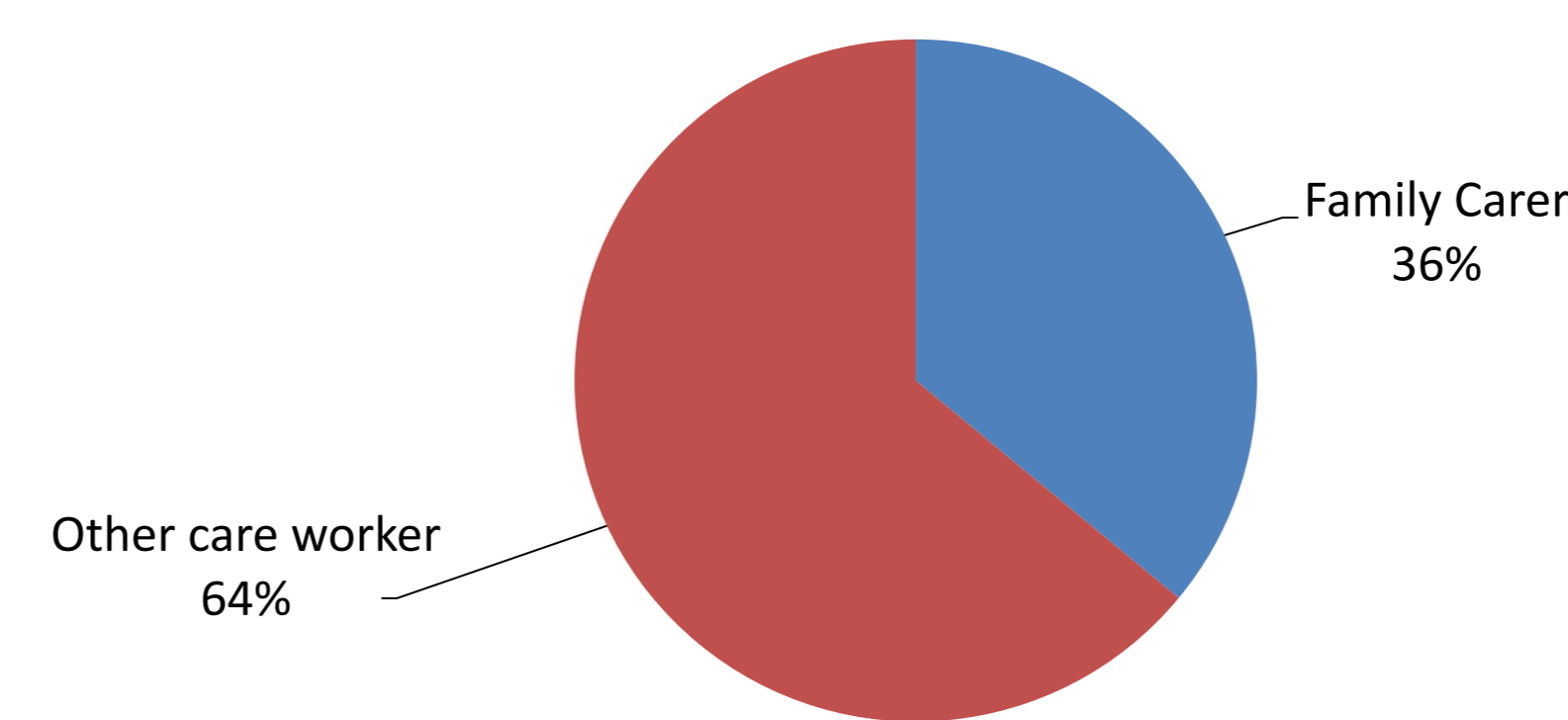
**Statement 2:**  
Video Calls are a satisfactory way to do a review.



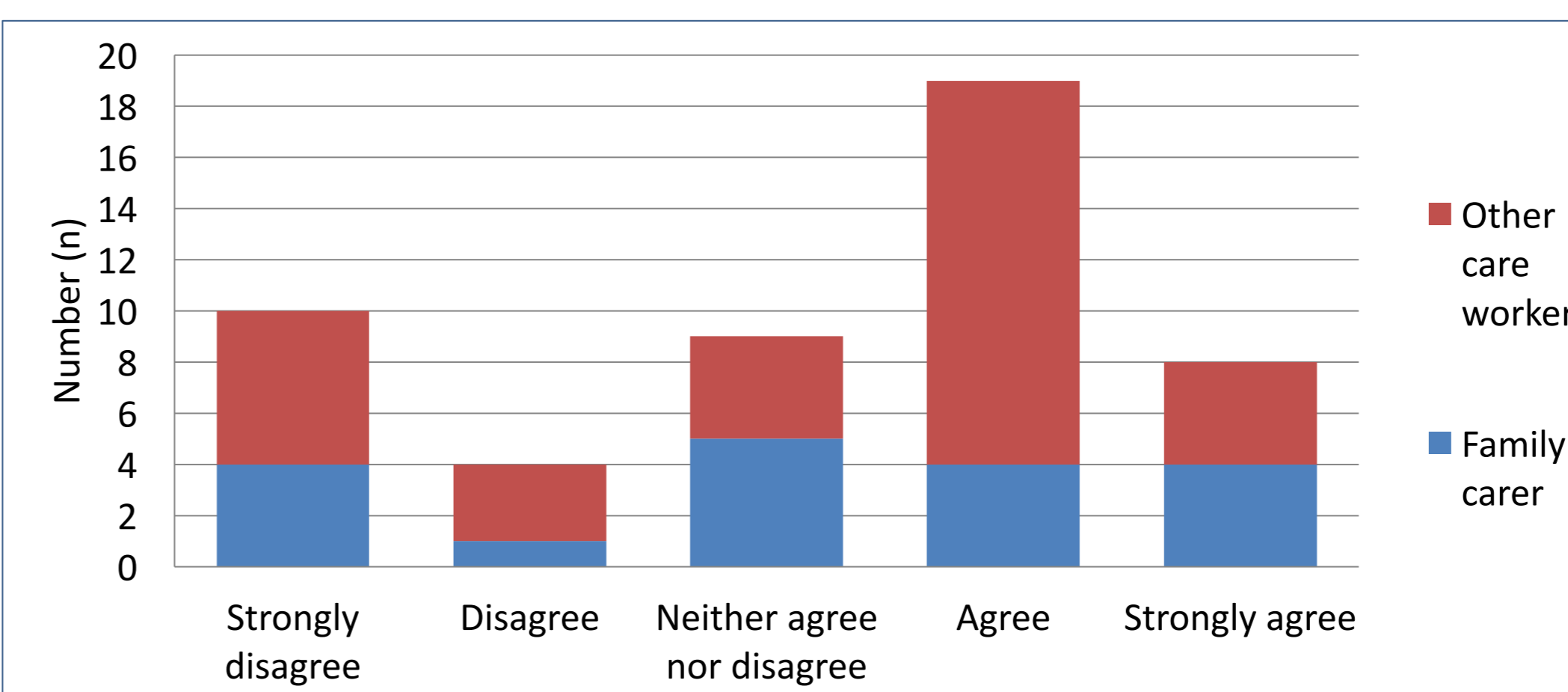
**Statement 3:**  
I would like Telephone Calls to replace some of my face-to-face psychiatric appointments after the COVID-19 pandemic has finished.



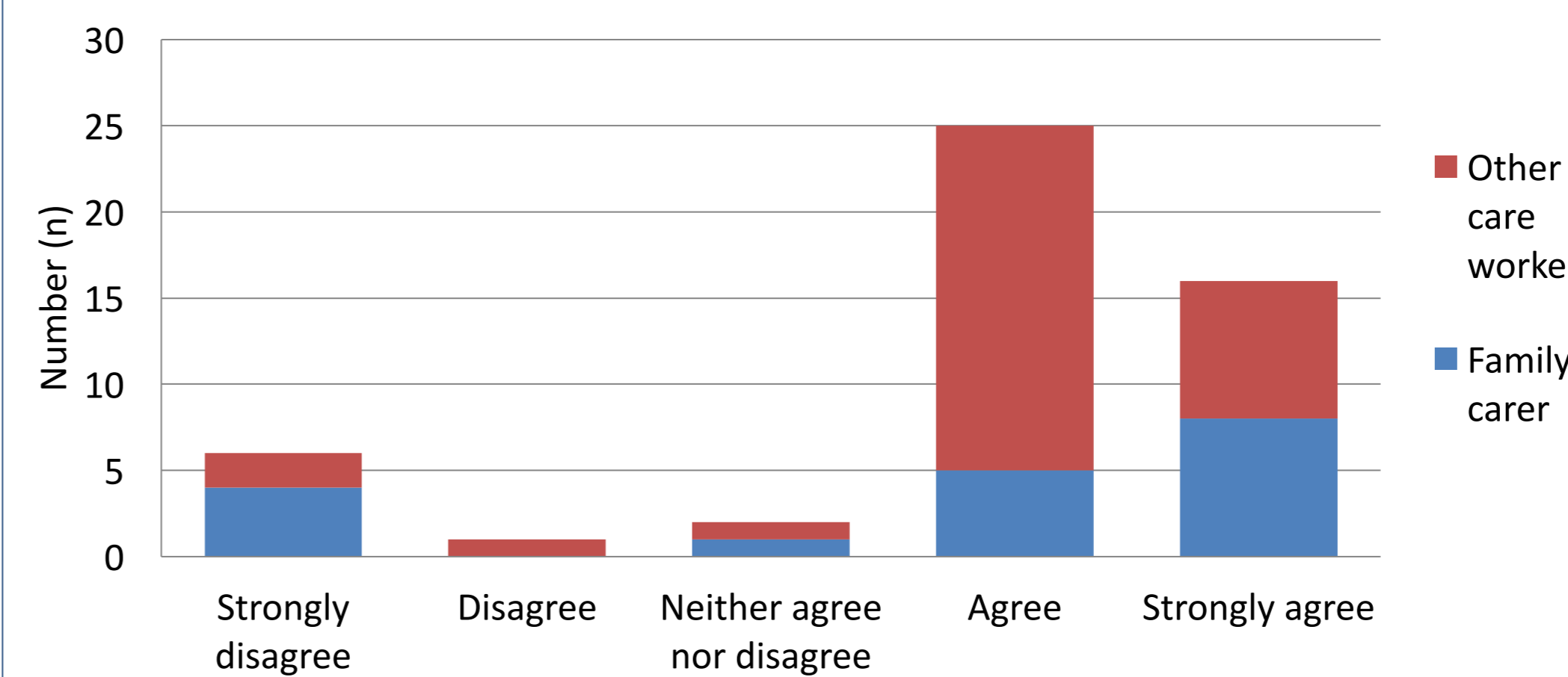
Type of carers who answered the survey



50 carers completed the survey; 18 family members and 32 other types of carer.



**Statement 4:**  
I would like Video Calls to replace some of my face-to-face psychiatric appointments after the COVID-19 pandemic has finished.



**Statement 5:**  
I have the necessary equipment and support to be able to carry out video consultations.

## Discussion

This survey shows an overall satisfaction with telephone and video call psychiatric reviews amongst carers for patients with intellectual disability. There was a preference for telephone calls rather than video calls. Feedback highlighted that this was due to the lack of access to video calls, telephone reviews were more familiar and easy to facilitate.

There are mixed views regarding whether telephone or video calls should replace some face-to-face consultations after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although it was emphasized that this question referred to "some" face-to-face reviews and not all, carers highlighted that they did not score this question highly as they wanted to ensure that face-to-face consultations still occurred amongst the telephone and video calls. The timing of this survey may have impacted this question. This was a difficult question to answer amidst the Covid-19 pandemic whilst there was still a lot of uncertainty about how safe face-to-face visits would be in the future.

The majority of carers do have the necessary equipment and support to carry out video consultations if needed. The results were similar whether family carers or other care workers were asked.

The qualitative feedback highlighted benefits of remote reviews such as the lack of interference with daily structure which can sometimes have big consequences particularly for the client group with co-morbid autism.

As well as showing carer satisfaction, other benefits of conducting reviews in this way include:

- Improved access to healthcare professionals for appointments
- More flexibility in timing of reviews
- Savings of travelling time
- Some clients find it less distressing than if attending clinic
- Environmental benefits of reduced travel
- Cost savings on personal and service level e.g. travel expense, support costs (Gentile 2018)
- Improved clinical outcomes (Gentile et al., 2018; Szeftel et al., 2012)

## Feedback from carers:

- It means he can go to the Day Centre and not take the whole day off for a review.
- This means we can fit in the review between his activities and not interfere with the structure of his day.
- Its (video consultations) nice because sometimes he refuses to come but this way I get to see you anyway.
- If I knew there was the option to see you face to face if needed then that would be fine.
- He doesn't comply well with this as he just wants to use his iPad to play with.
- I think this is fine during the pandemic but not afterwards as she enjoys seeing you.
- I think the face to face benefits him (the patient) more.
- I want you to be able to see the patient.

## Conclusion

There are benefits to remote psychiatric reviews in this patient group. Carers recognise this and are often open to remote working. We know that people with intellectual disability are also capable of engaging with digital technologies given the right opportunities. Therefore, patients and carers should be given the option to have some reviews via telephone/video call for people with intellectual disability.

Any change in service would benefit from continuing to incorporate face-to-face reviews rather than switching to a fully remote service. This has sometimes been referred to as a 'blended care' (or 'hybrid') approach, where digital therapy is combined with traditional face-to-face meetings.

The majority of existing evidence on the use of technology in intellectual disability is focused on using technology for carrying out instrumental activities of daily life. More research is required into the effectiveness of remote consultations and the variables which might affect carer's and patient's satisfaction.