

Transitioning Acute Care to Community Care by Implementing a Virtual-Based Postpartum Support Group



Adrienne Pang, RN, BScN, MHM; Faiven Ghirmai, RSW, MSW, BA; Juliette Harriott, RSW, MSW, BA; Adeola Oyinsan, RN, BScN, MBA; Bridget Burling, BA (Hons), MPR; David Paniccia, R.Kin, BKin, MSc eHealth; Raman Preet Rai, RN, BScN, MScN



Lessons Learned

- Virtual group therapy programs provide an effective platform to address mental health challenges.
- Online self-referral processes allow increased accessibility for patients to access healthcare services.

Description

Postpartum mothers have been shown to benefit from peer support groups. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated symptoms associated with mood and anxiety disorders during the perinatal period.

To incorporate innovative ideas into the current healthcare climate, a virtual-based peer support program for postpartum patients was implemented at Humber River Hospital (HRH). Operating on a weekly basis, this 12-week program was designed to broaden postpartum patients' support network. Facilitated by the social worker, program content was driven by patients' needs. Patients seeking support registered online and were screened by a social worker for eligibility. Ineligible patients were referred to other community services.

Actions Taken

Internal and external communications provided insights from experts operating similar virtual-based programs. To ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of this virtual postpartum support group, a multidisciplinary team collaborated on a program plan, support group content, evaluation metric development, and targeted marketing strategies.

Summary of Results

The online self-referral process streamlined patients' access to services, bypassing the need for healthcare provider referral. The convenience of a virtual program promoted strong attendance consistently. Program participants described improved connections with their newborns, and were better able to cope with symptoms associated with mood and anxiety disorders.

References

Best Start Resource Centre. (2009). *Creating Circles of Support for Pregnant Women and New Parents: A Manual for Service Providers Supporting Women's Mental Health in Pregnancy and Postpartum*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
 Ontario's Registered Nurses Association, *Best Practice Guidelines; Interventions for Postpartum Depression*. (2005). Retrieved from: <http://www.rnao.org>.



Figure 1. Several marketing techniques were utilized to encourage patients to register through the online self-referral process. Marketing techniques included posters displayed in every maternal child patient room, advertising cards included in discharge packages, social media posts on HRH's social media accounts and posts targeting Facebook interest groups.

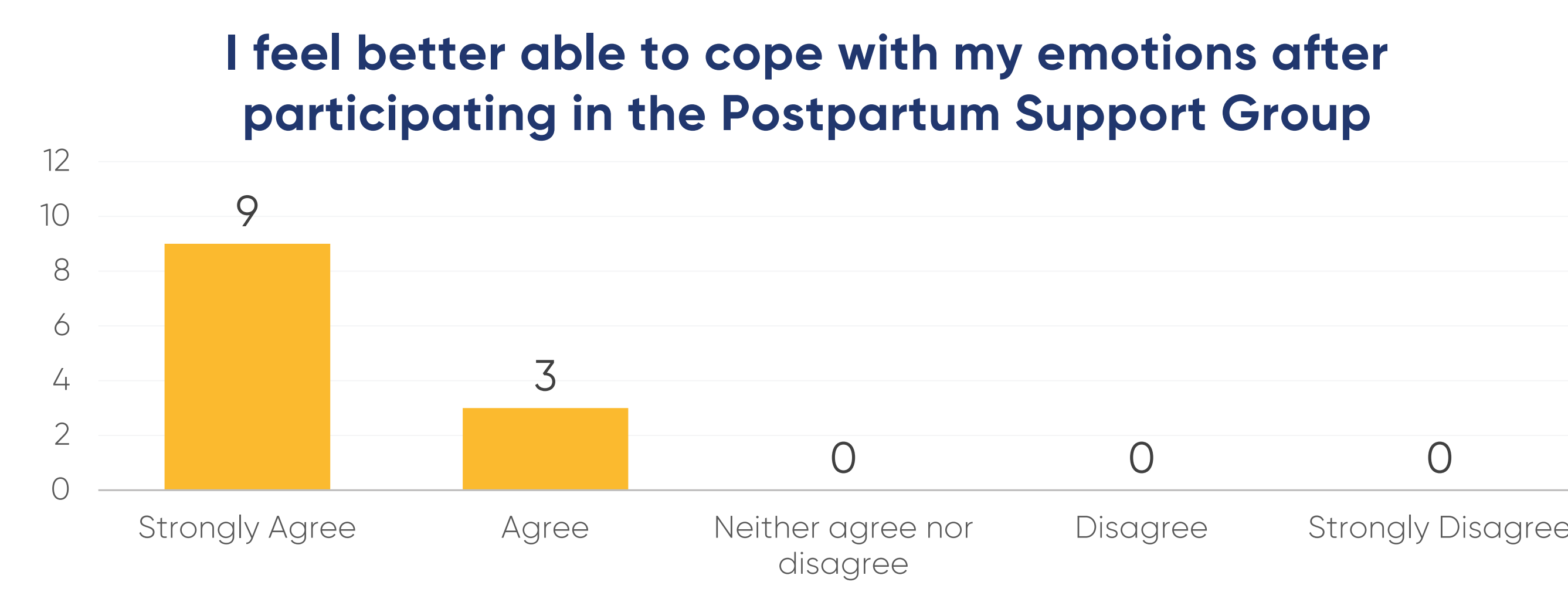
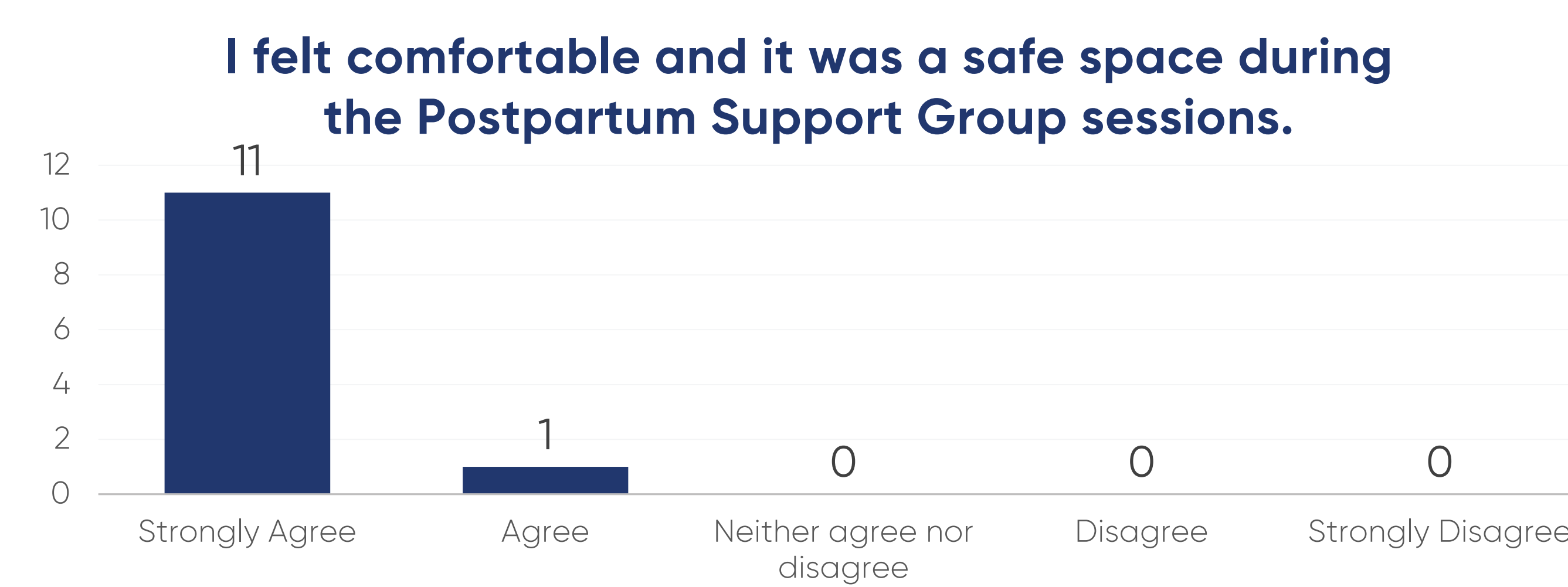
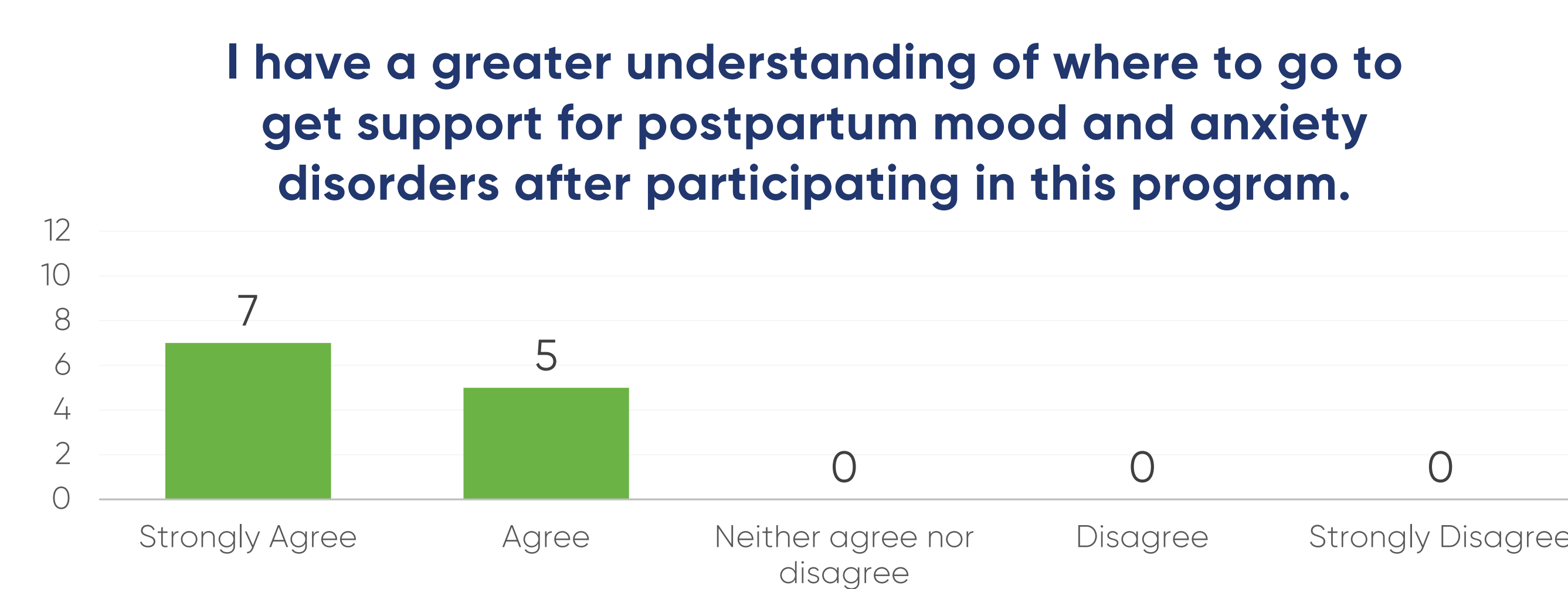
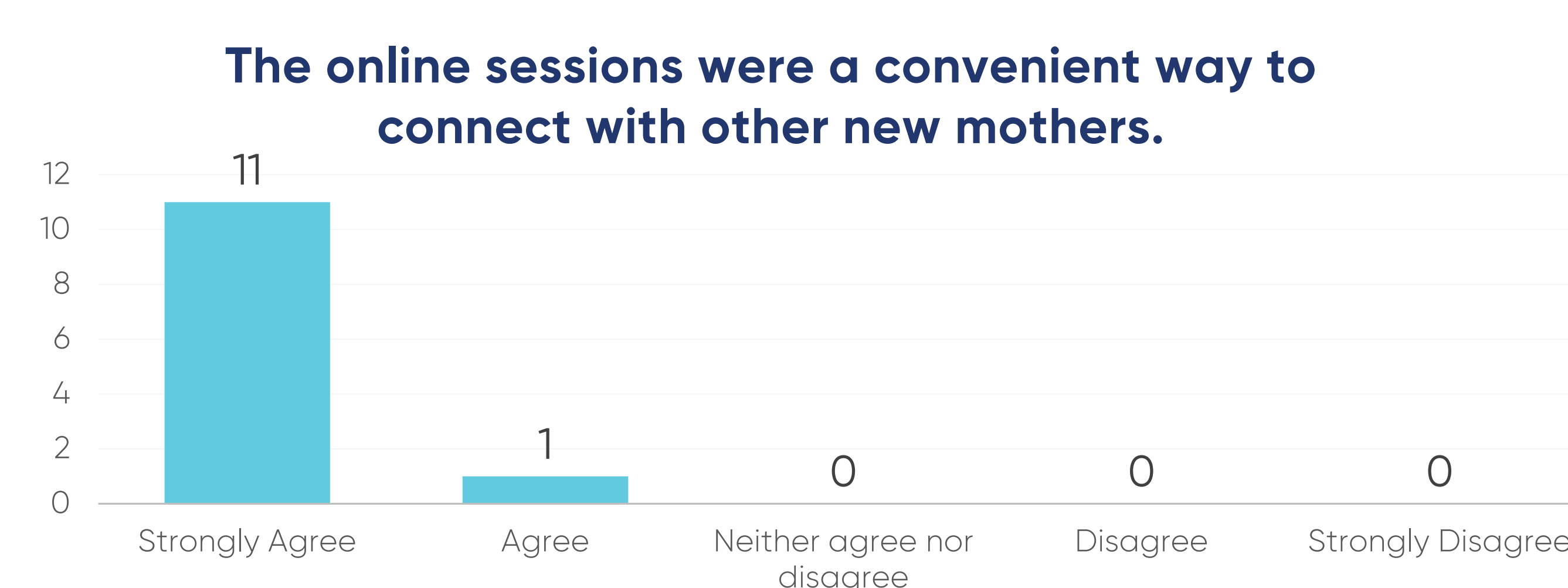


Figure 2. Evaluation results of the participants taken at the end of the 12-week virtual postpartum support program