Asperger's Disorder in Secondary Environments: A Needs Assessment

KATE ENGELHARDT, MSW
LEND FELLOW, 2010-2011

Background

- **Purpose of the research:**
  - Understanding inclusion in secondary school environments
  - Identifying specific areas in need of development amongst secondary school-based professionals
- **Development of personal interest:**
  - First internship- school social work in a secondary school
  - Understanding the emotional experiences of students with Asperger's Disorder in and out of the classroom
  - Varying levels of professional awareness on the impact of exclusion in the school community for identified students and their peers

Background

- ## The literature says.....
  - General focus is on Classical Autism and Elementary age children (Ballan & Hoban, 2006; Early 1995)
  - Observational studies:
    - Students with disabilities have limited interactions with typically developing peers in classroom scenarios. (Carter et al, 2008)
    - Students with disabilities have few interactions with typically developing peers outside of the classroom (Cutts & Sigafoos, 2001).
  - Students with Asperger's Disorder may not be identifiable to their peers based on appearance. They can often succeed in general education settings without direct adult assistance (Safran, 2002)

Background

- **The literature also says….**
  - In general education settings, students with Asperger's Disorder can become more identifiable because of their difficulty navigating complex social interactions (Aldoen & Stella, 2001) .
  - Effective communication is essential (Grandin, 2006; Jackson, 2002).
  - Lack of understanding by all members of the school community leads to general frustration, behavioral difficulties, ineffective learning, and high levels of bullying (Biggs, Simpson, & Gaus, 2010; Adreon & Stella, 2001).
  - Group projects in classroom environments can lead to better social learning for all parties. Staff can translate the idea of community effort into the development and modeling of policies that emphasize teamwork and prosocial interactions (Aldoen & Stella, 2001).

Research Questions/Hypotheses

- ## What training have school based professionals received in relation to inclusion of students with Asperger's Disorder in secondary schools?

  - Hypothesis: I believe that limited numbers of general education staff will have received Asperger's Disorder related training while Special Educators and staff members who provide instructional support (social work, guidance counselors, school psychologists, etc) will have some training.

- ## What do school based professionals perceive as barriers to creating a fully inclusive secondary school community?

  - Hypothesis: I believe that professionals will identify a lack of resources and training as barriers to creating an inclusive school community

Research Questions/Hypotheses

- Are school based professionals willing to collaborate with professionals from other disciplines when shaping school policy?
  - I believe that professionals will report that they typically work within their own discipline

- What professions do school based professionals identify are necessary to the collaborative process?
  - I believe that professionals will report that they typically work within their own discipline

Methods

- **Participants** – All professionals at one Connecticut High School including general education teachers, administrators, instructional support professionals, graduate interns, etc. were included in the study. All responses were anonymous.

- **Recruitment** – Initial contact requesting permission occurred with the school social worker and building administrator. Following approval, questionnaires, introductory letters, and addressed, postage paid envelopes were placed in all staff mailboxes.

- **Sample size** – N=79

Methods

- **Measures and Instruments**
  - Participants were asked to complete a 16 item quantitative questionnaire.
  - Items on the questionnaire targeted:
    - Prior training regarding Asperger's Disorder
    - Willingness to participate in future training with the option of specifying types of training
    - Staff perception as barriers to referrals and full inclusion
    - Staff experiences with referring students for support services
    - Staff history of interdisciplinary teamwork in developing policy proposals
    - Professional background and demographics

Methods

- **Data Collection and Analysis**
  - Questionnaires were returned to the A. J. Pappanikou Center via mail.
  - Responses were entered into SPSS for data analysis two weeks after survey distribution.

Results: Demographics

- Response rate = 19% (15 surveys)
- 43% male, 57% female
- Ethnicity (open-ended response):
  - 100% white, non-Hispanic
- Race (open-ended response):
  - 92% white
  - 8% human
- Profession breakdown:
  - 60% = general education teachers
  - 20% = support professionals
  - 13% = paraprofessionals
  - 6% = special education teachers

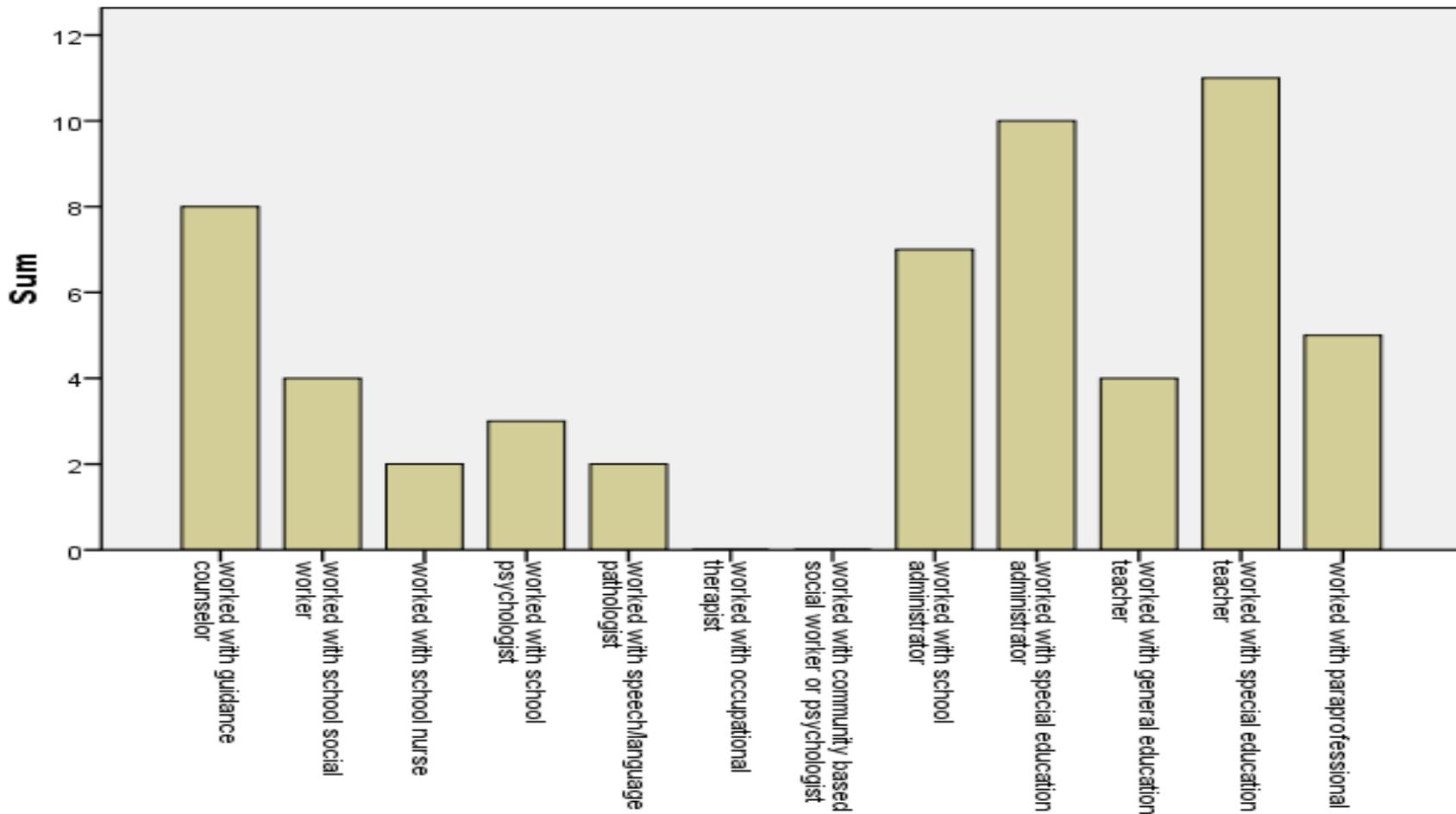# Results: Referrals to Support Professionals

- 93% of respondents referred students to support professionals during the last school year
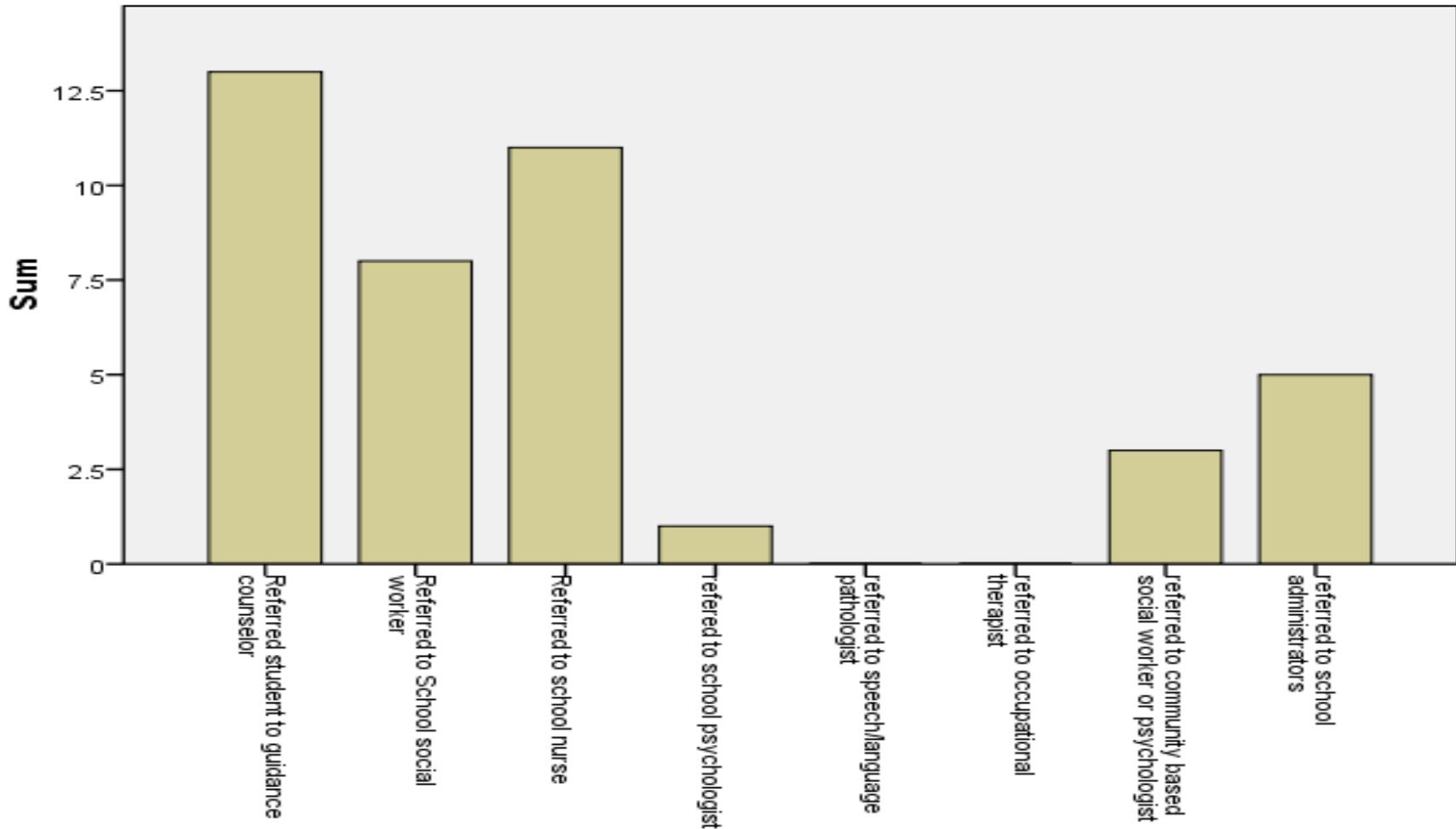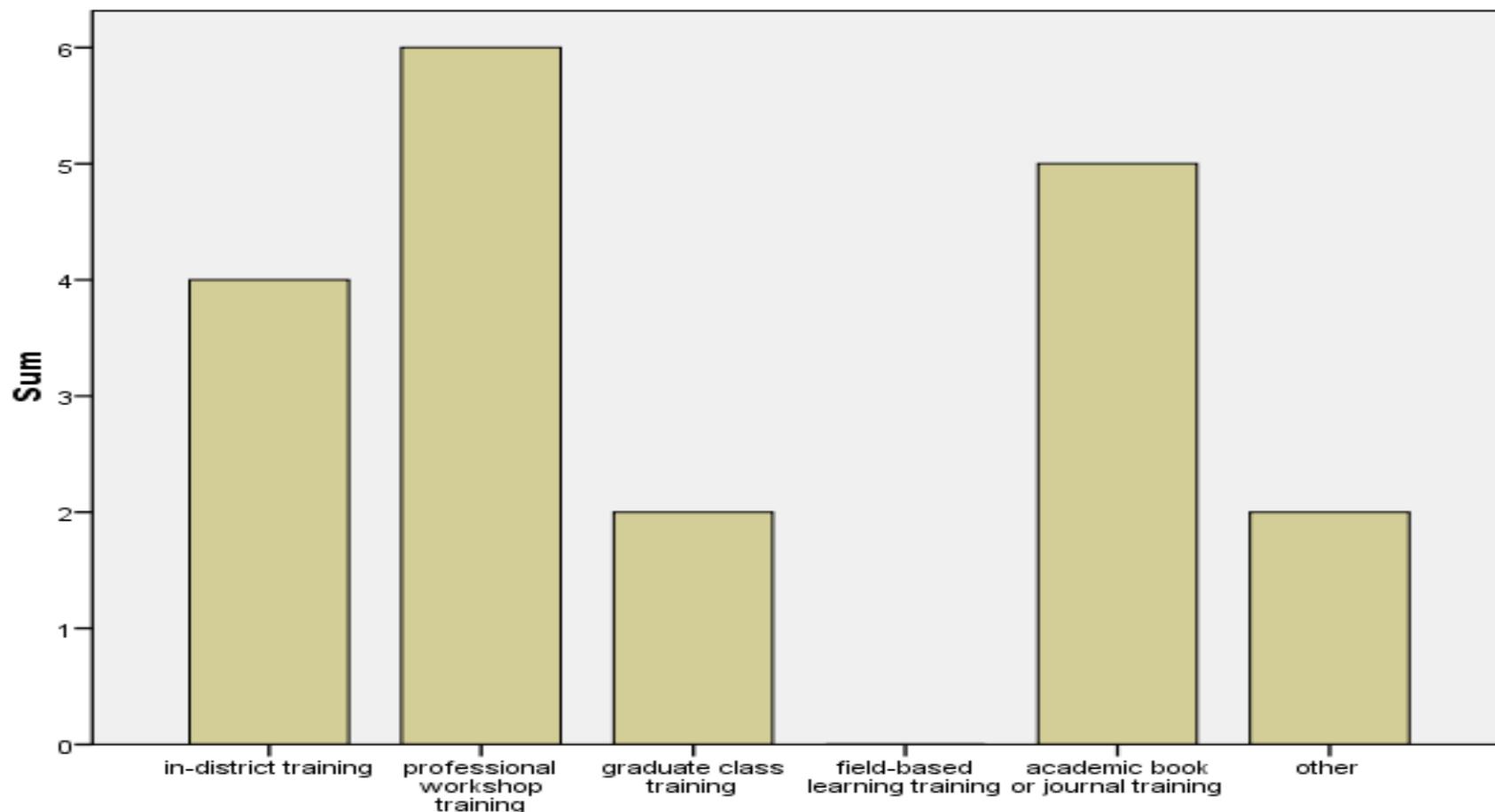
Results: Policy Collaboration

- 87% worked with members of other professions regarding policy change
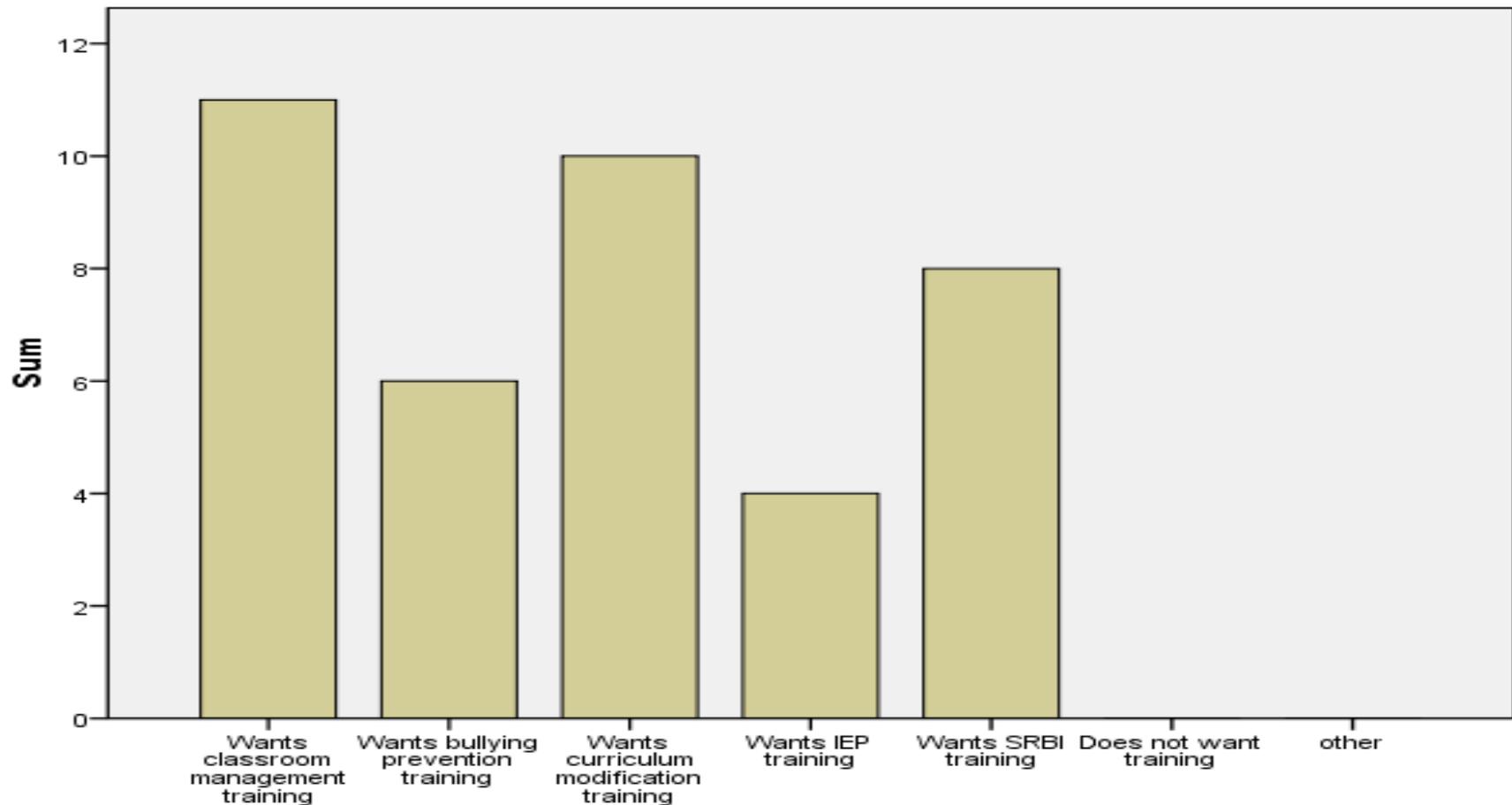
Results: Asperger's-Specific Training

- 67% have received training specific to Asperger's Disorder, 90% of those without any follow-up training or technical assistance
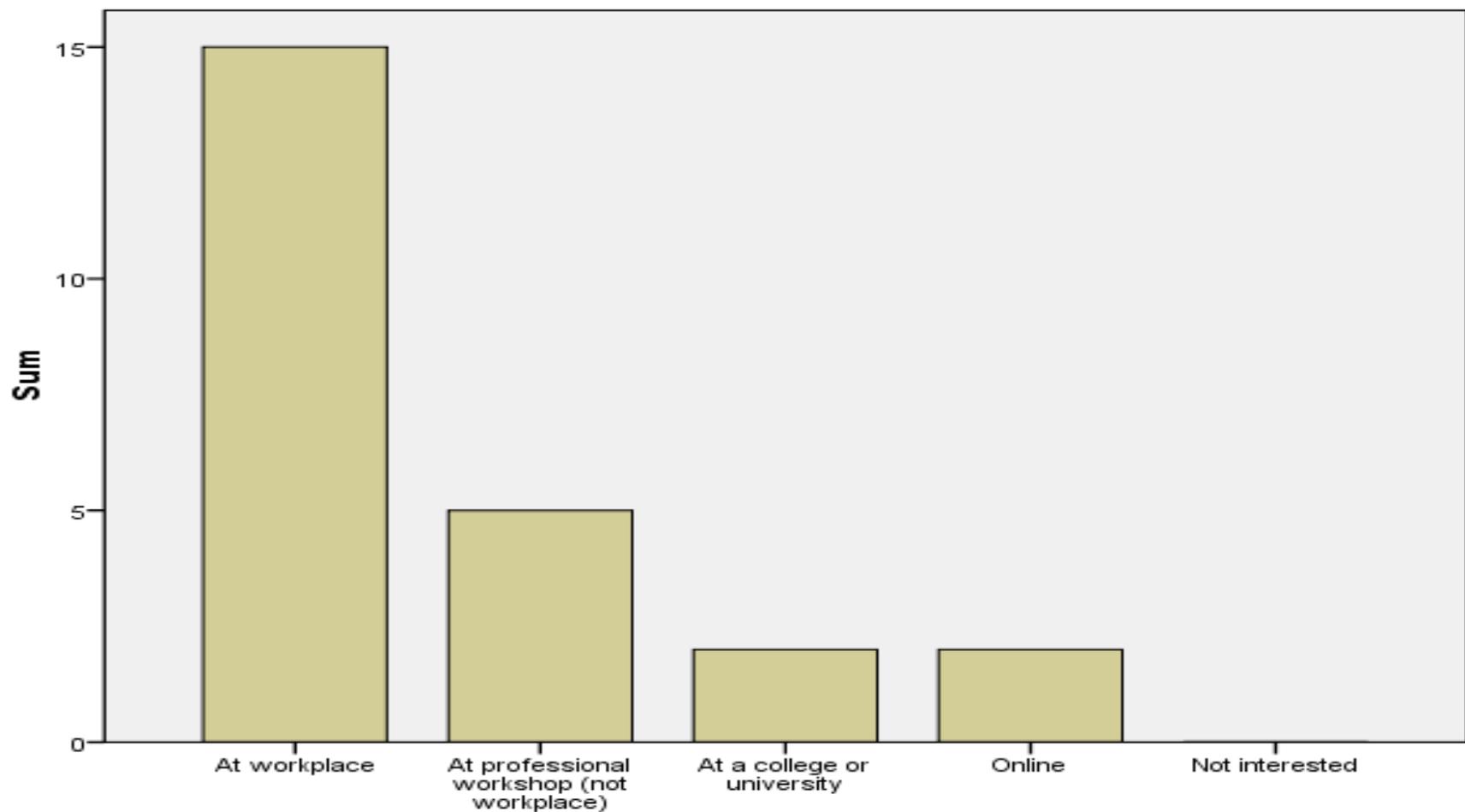
Results: Interest in Training

- **100% were interested in receiving training!**

Results: Training Specifics

- 86% are willing to commit 1 hour -3 hours to training....where?

Results: Barriers to Inclusion

- 87% felt that limited training regarding Asperger's Disorder was a barrier to inclusion
- 67% indicated a lack of general knowledge about the disorder
- 53% felt that limited collaborative time between professionals was a barrier
- 47% identified the attitudes of teachers and staff

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Results: Barriers to Inclusion Graph
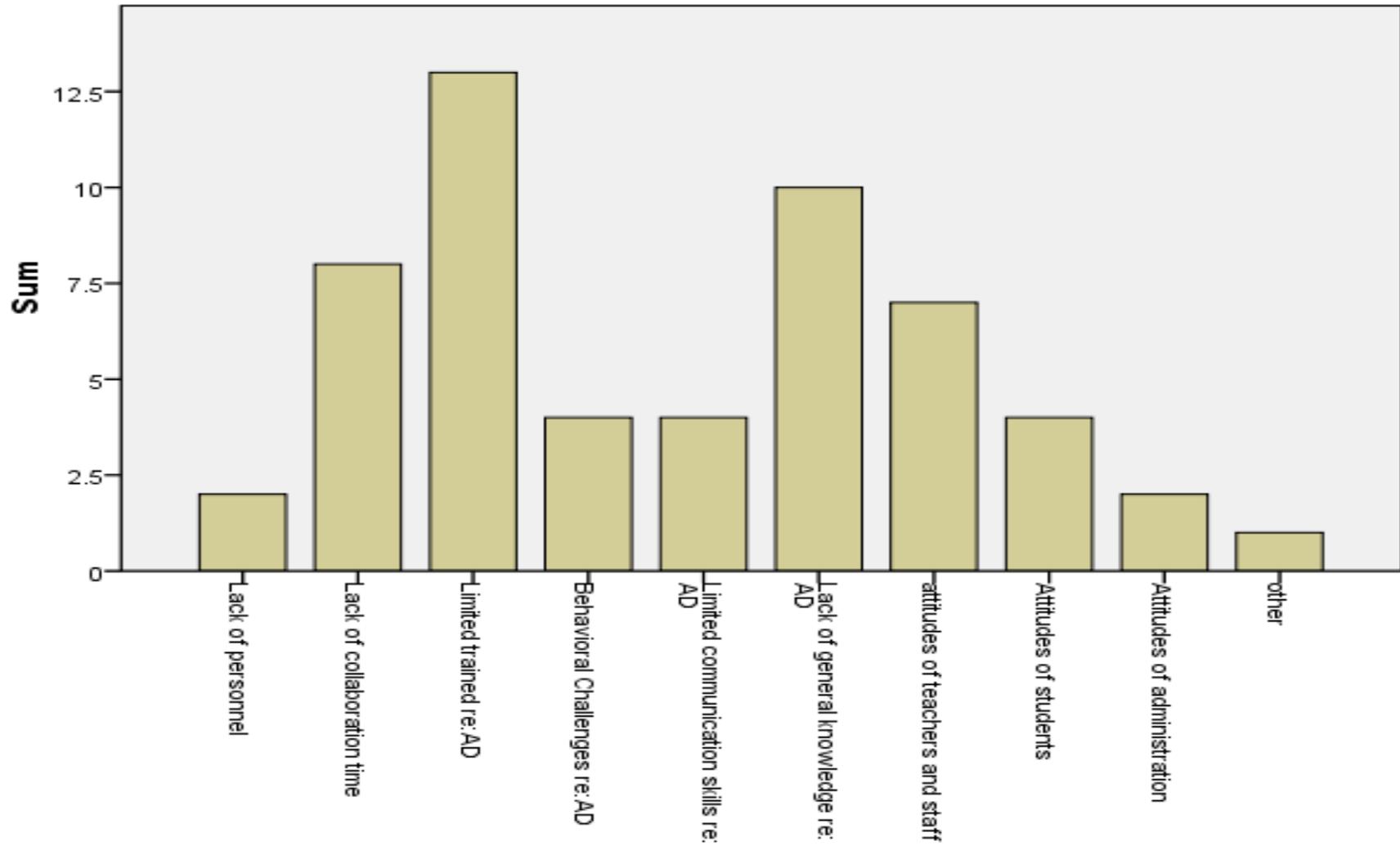
Discussion

- **Implications:**
  - Professionals have identified a need and desire for training opportunities. The time specified would be appropriate for a professional development workshop.
  - Improved training, policies, and teamwork can lead to a more inclusive secondary community for the entire student population.
  - Results are not generalizeable due to the small sample size and low response rates. Initial results do indicate the need for further research with an expanded sample.

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Last One!

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