

Perceptions of Nutritional Needs and Support of Paediatric Oncology Patient Caregivers in Government Hospitals in India

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Background

Approximately 40% of paediatric oncology patients are malnourished at diagnosis in India. Malnutrition during cancer treatment can lead to greater risk of infections, side effects, complications and treatment delays. Caregivers are integral to preventing and addressing malnutrition in children with cancer. Therefore, caregiver education is crucial to ensure that they have the knowledge required to manage this responsibility.

Objective

The aim of this study was therefore to understand the knowledge, attitudes and practices of caregivers of paediatric oncology patients belonging predominantly to a lower socioeconomic group.

Methods

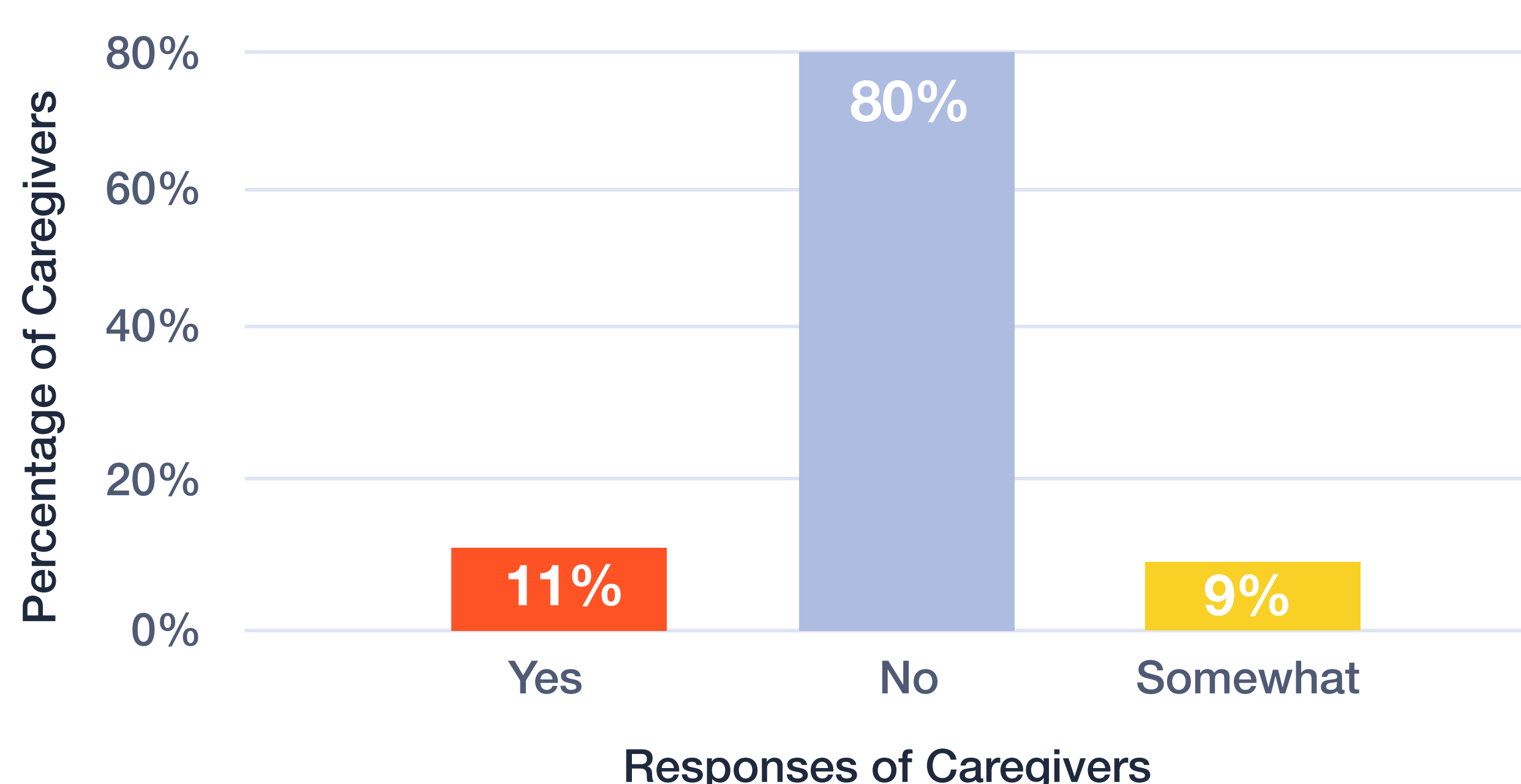
We administered a structured questionnaire to caregivers of oncology patients aged 0 to 18 years in March 2021. The study was conducted during the nutrition counselling session that Cuddles Foundation (CF) provides and questions were designed to elicit data on their knowledge and attitudes on nutrition, hygiene and health behaviours. Responses were collected on a 3-point Likert scale (Yes, Somewhat, No).

Results

Caregivers of 754 patients participated across 31 government hospitals in India. The results indicated that 80.1% of caregivers did not know the proper foods to feed their child at cancer diagnosis.

Figure 1

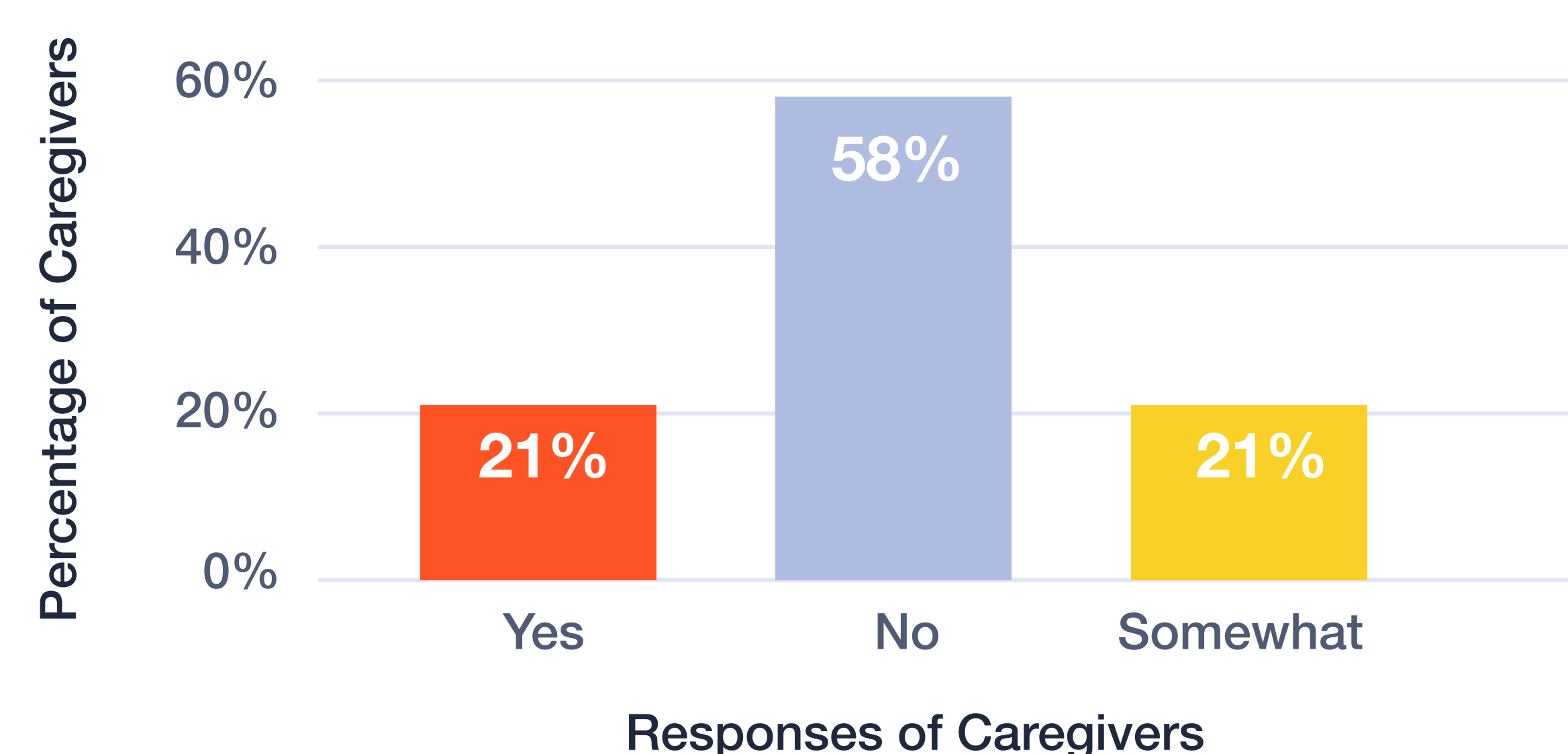
Percentage of caregivers who had the knowledge of the proper foods to feed their child after diagnosis



The findings also demonstrated that most caregivers (58.5%) were unaware of the proper hygiene practices required to handle their child's food.

Figure 2

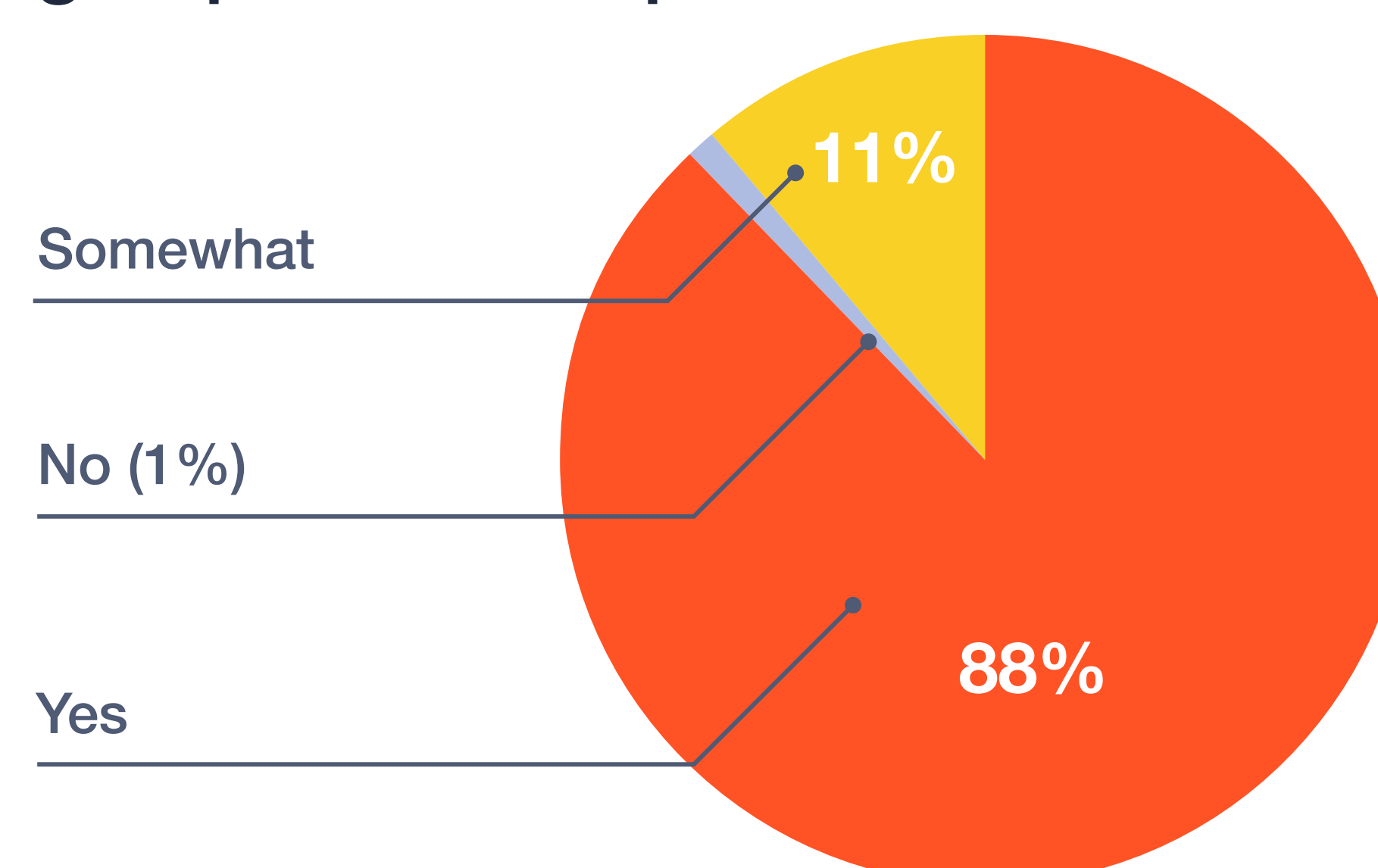
Percentage of caregivers who had the knowledge of the proper hygiene practices required to handle their child's food



Unfortunately, even after the caregivers understood the nutritional requirements, 33.9% of caregivers did not have the means to provide that for their child. The majority of caregivers (88.1%) found that the support groups conducted by CF were helpful.

Figure 3

Percentage of caregivers who found support groups to be helpful



Conclusion

The study indicates that there is a gap in the knowledge base of caregivers of paediatric oncology patients. The findings demonstrate that there is a significant requirement for not just nutritional, health and hygiene counselling but also a necessity for financial and emotional support.