

Diagnostic confidence and other factors reported by patients referred to specialist physiotherapy FND service: a preliminary report

Margarida Alves¹, Emily Jay², Simon Harrison²

¹ Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Centro Hospitalar de Setúbal, Setúbal, Portugal

² Neuropsychiatry Service, Maudsley Hospital, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

Introduction

Functional neurological disorder (FND) is a common and disabling disorder characterised by diverse symptoms, primarily involving motor function, sensory disruptions and episodes of altered awareness.

Physiotherapy is widely used in a multidisciplinary approach, supported by Consensus Recommendations⁶ and an ongoing randomized controlled trial (Nielsen et al., 2019).

The Neuropsychiatry Service at the Maudsley Hospital provides outpatient physiotherapy, along with inpatient and day hospital settings.

Aim & Method

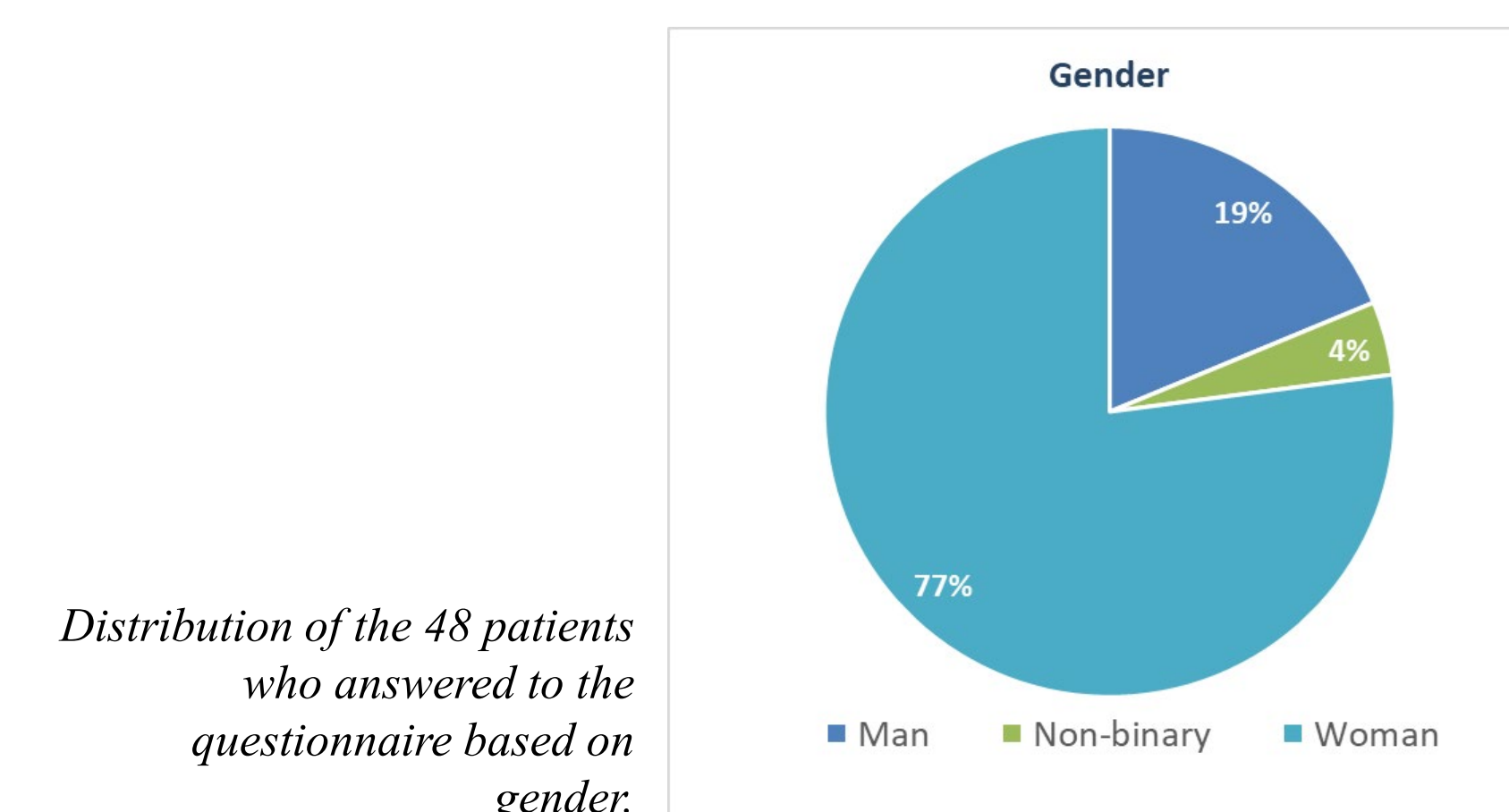
Our aim was to characterise the patients with FND referred for physiotherapy.

Patients referred for specialist FND outpatient **physiotherapy at Maudsley Neuropsychiatry Service** completed a **brief 12-item questionnaire** addressing themes relevant for the initial assessment.

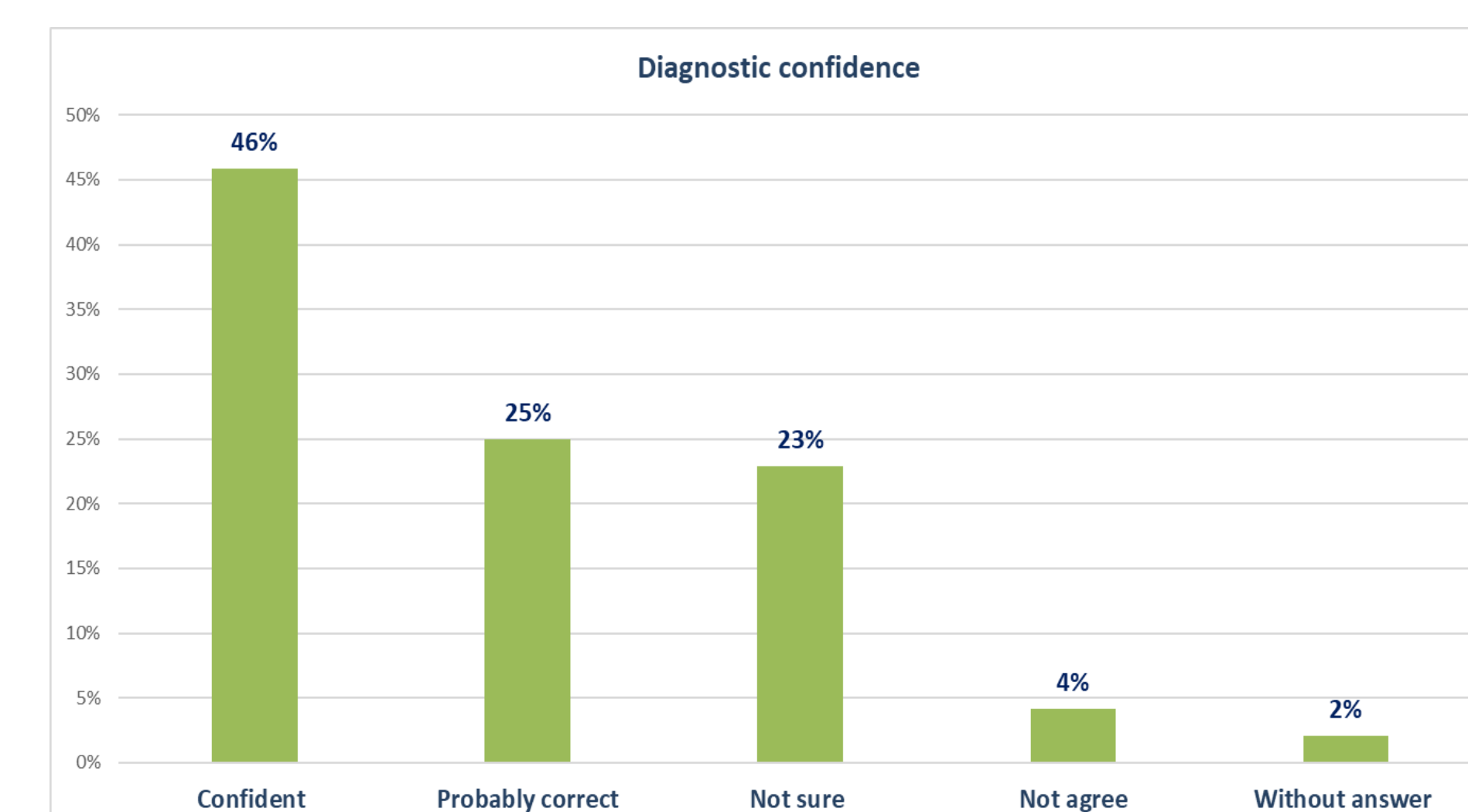
We present a summary analysis of the responses and link these findings to a literature review (2012-2023).

Results

- **November 2, 2021- January 25, 2024**
- **48 patients**
- **Gender:** 77% women, 19% men, 4% non-binary.



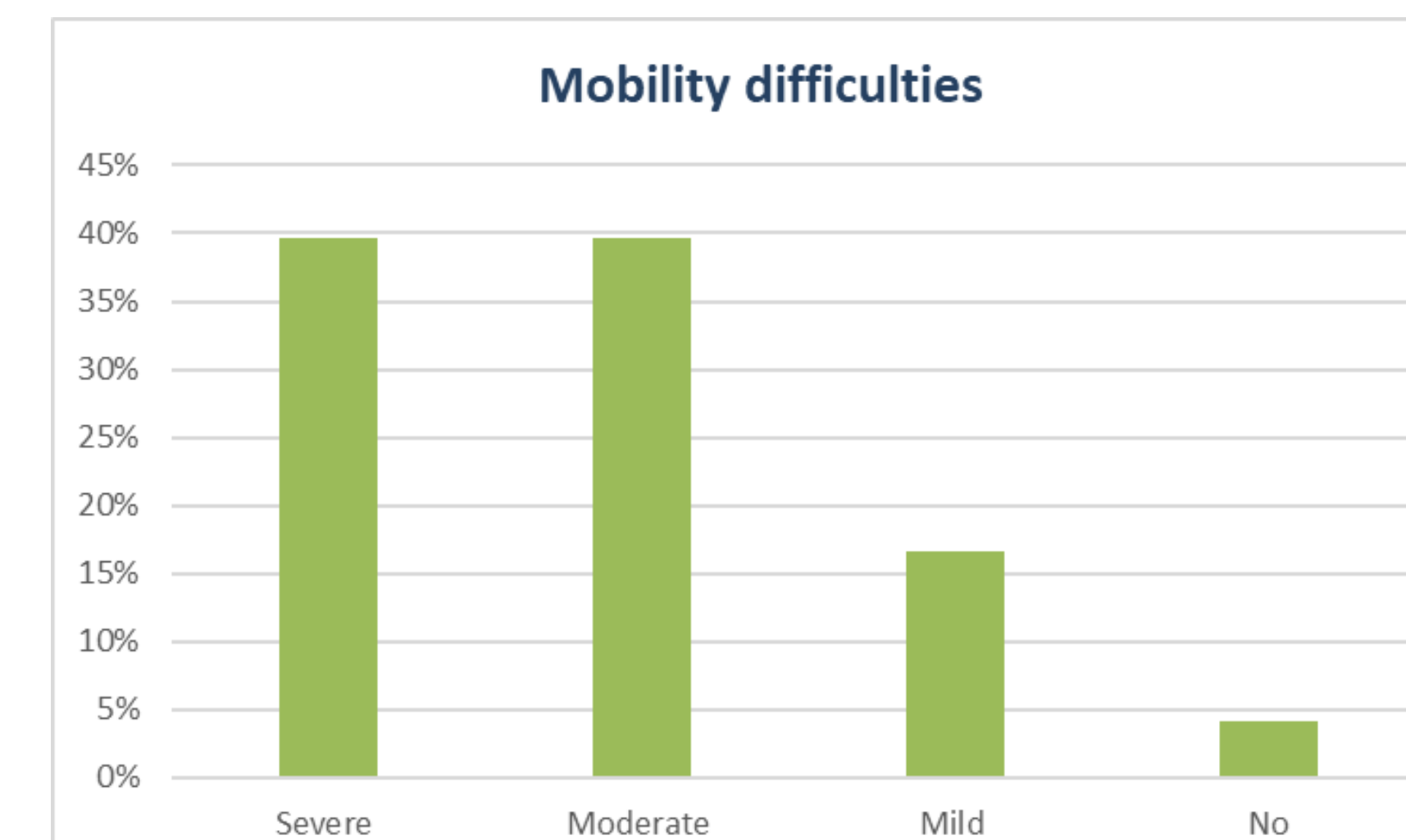
- **Age:** 18-68 years (median 40)
- **Diagnostic confidence:** 46% confident, 25% probably correct, 23% not sure and 4% did not agree.
- **Self-care challenges:** 40% moderate to severe.
- **Impact on usual activities:** 65% moderate to severe.



Distribution of the 48 patients who answered to the questionnaire in terms of diagnostic confidence.

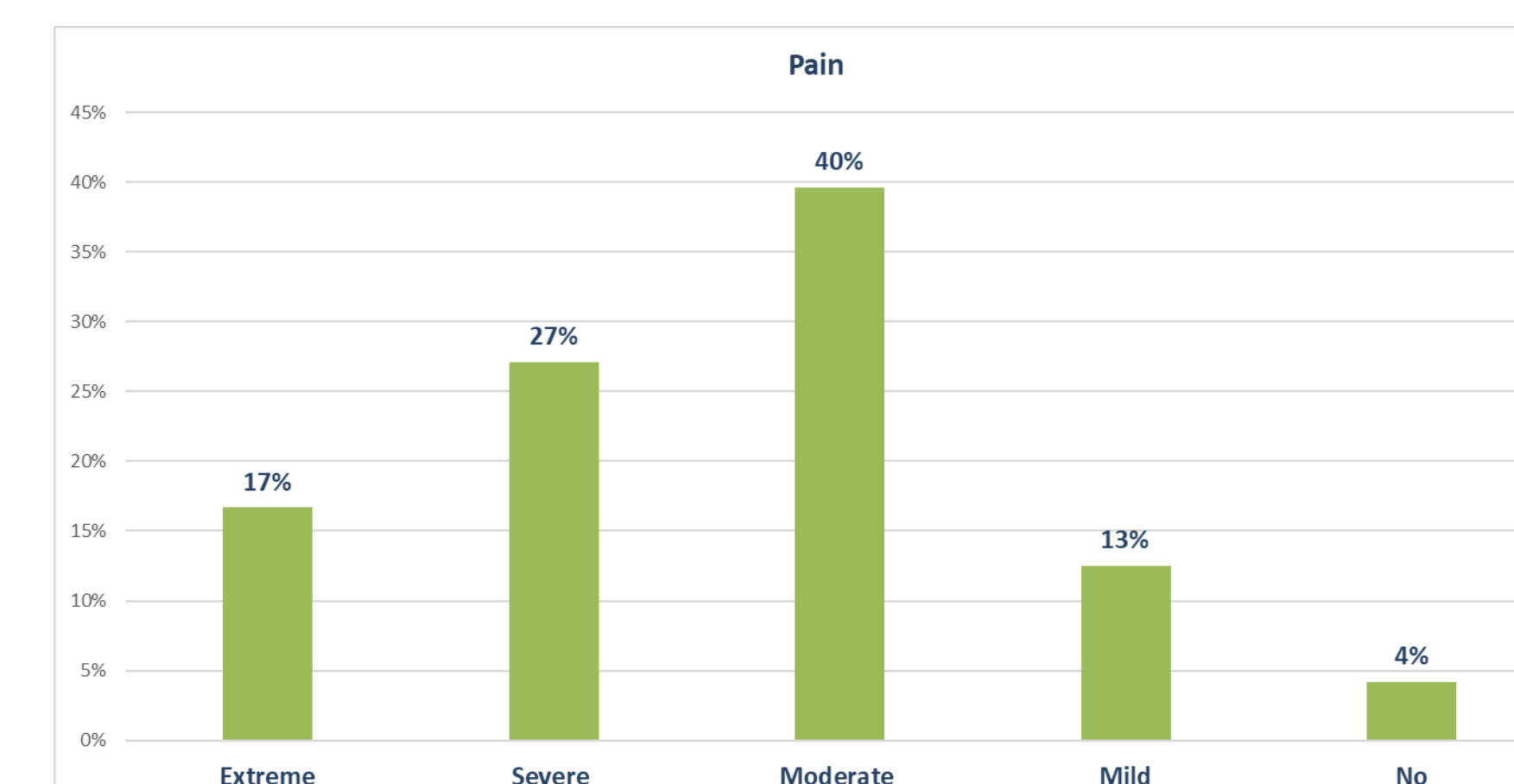
Results

- **Mobility difficulties:** 80% moderate to severe.



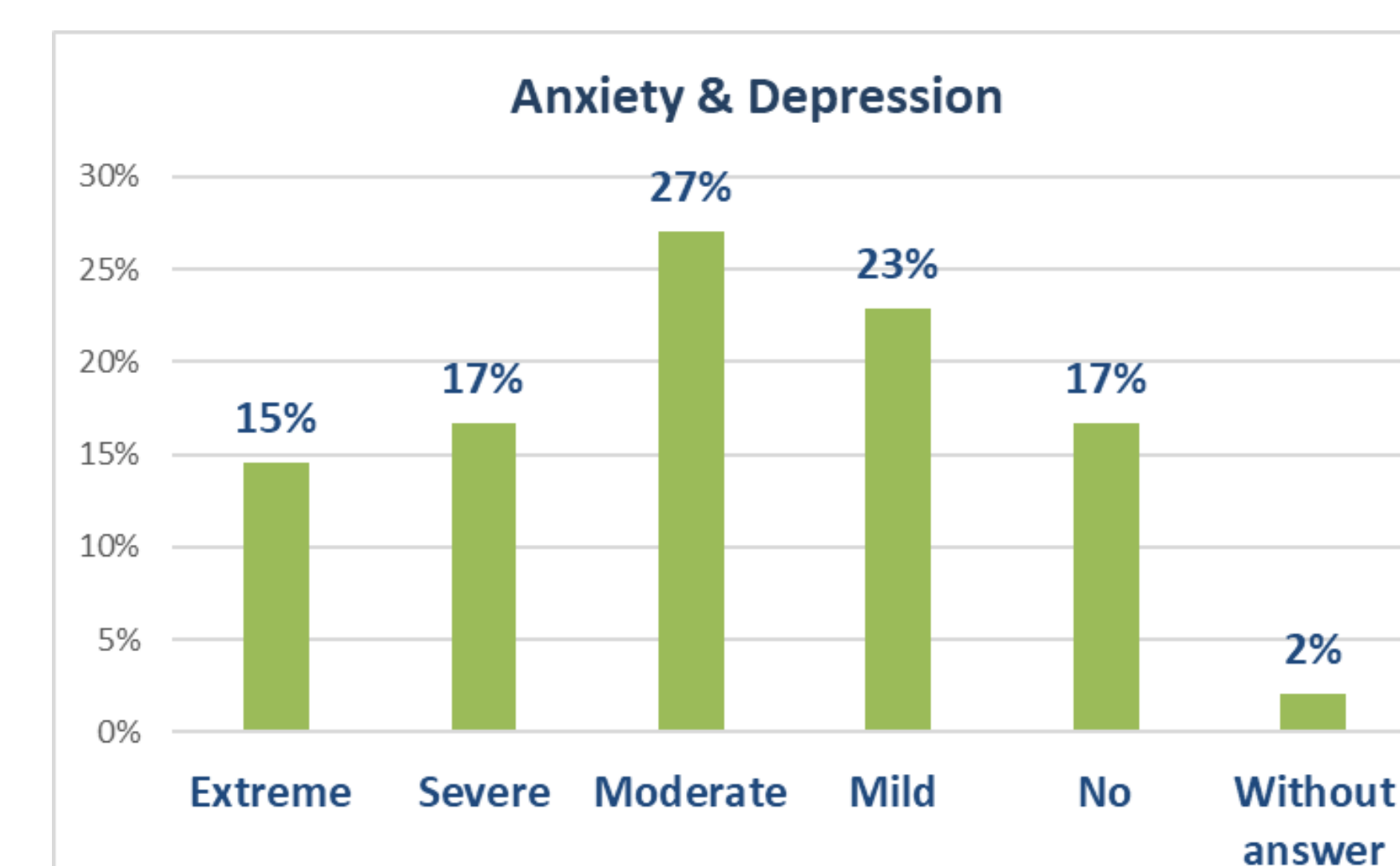
Distribution of the 48 patients who answered to the questionnaire on the severity of mobility difficulties.

- **Pain:** 44% severe to extreme.



Distribution of the 48 patients who answered to the questionnaire on the presence of pain.

- **Anxiety/depression:** 32% severe to extreme.



Distribution of the 48 patients who answered to the questionnaire on the presence of anxiety or depression.

Discussion & Conclusion

- **This data comes from a particular population** – patients referred for outpatient physiotherapy to a tertiary specialist neuropsychiatry service, which also provides inpatient and day hospital therapeutic options.
- The patients had high mobility difficulties with impact on self-care and in the usual activities. Even so, if we were to repeat the questionnaire in another setting such as inpatient, the impact would probably be higher.
- **A quarter of the patients** either were **not sure or did not agree** with the diagnosis. The delivery of a diagnosis of FND is well known to be an important in initial therapeutic step (Gilmour et. al, 2020; Nielsen et. al, 2015; Espay et. al, 2018) and the confidence in correctness of diagnosis is as effective as cognitive behaviour therapy (Goldstein et.al, 2015).
- Almost **half of the patients** had **significant comorbid pain** and almost **a third significant mood and anxiety difficulties**. **Pain is prevalent in FND** and is an established **potential barrier to effective physiotherapy** (Glass et. al, 2018). Graded exercise therapy that suits the patients' particular symptoms is recommended.
- Recovery potential is unlikely to be fixed and can shift over time, depending on the perpetuating factors. **Successful outcomes, therefore, depend on the right patient engaging in the right treatment at the right time**. It is important to identify patients with therapeutic potential and allocate resources for rapid treatment initiation in those individuals.