



January 2016

## Final Report

Public Opinions of Disaster Preparedness in Florida Communities


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**UF | IFAS**  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Center for  
Public Issues Education

PIE2015/16-07



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## Executive Summary

### Public Opinions of Disaster Preparedness in Florida Communities

January 2016

## Introduction

In Florida and throughout the United States, natural and man-made disasters account for millions of dollars in recovery that put a strain on the economy. Examining consumers' perceptions and knowledge regarding community preparedness is important to both the sustainability of Florida's economy and its communities. This survey examined what Floridians think about (1) their perceptions of their community with regards to the likelihood of a disaster, (2) their perceptions toward the vulnerability of their community to different types of disaster, (3) their perceptions of their communities' overall preparation for a disaster or an emergency, (4) their perceptions of their own preparation for a disaster or an emergency, and (6) their perceptions of their own financial preparedness.

## Key Findings

The key findings of the study include the following:

- Almost half of respondents defined a man-made disaster as a disaster caused by man that was not nature or weather-related.
- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Community is defined as a group of people that share a geographical location or setting."
- Almost half of the respondents felt it was somewhat or very likely a natural disaster would happen in their community in the next year.
- When respondents were asked how vulnerable they perceived their communities to be to seven different types of disasters, the majority of them felt their communities were somewhat or very vulnerable to disasters that result from extreme weather events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, strong thunderstorms, floods, and droughts.
- Most respondents were somewhat or very confident that their local law enforcement and their family were prepared to handle disasters or emergencies.
- Respondents had slightly more confidence in the state and local government being prepared to handle disasters or emergencies than the federal government.
- A majority of the respondents reported recovery programs and direct assistance targeting those in need are somewhat or very important programs and services needed following a disaster or crisis.
- Over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their community needs additional programs to help in recovery following disasters and that there are programs in their community that are proactive in preparing for disasters.
- Forty percent of respondents felt their community would be able to deal with a natural disaster if it impacted their community in the next three days, while 33% of them felt their community would be able to deal with a man-made disaster if it impacted their community in the next three days.
- When respondents were asked what level of priority should be given to improving disaster preparedness by local officials, most respondents said it should be a high or urgent priority.
- Sixty-one percent of the respondents indicated they prepare for a disaster or crisis during hurricane season.
- A little over half of the respondents reported they have a disaster or emergency plan for themselves or their family.
- Of the respondents who reported they had a disaster or emergency plan, about a quarter of them indicated they developed their plan from a suggested format from a nonprofit organization.

- Of the respondents who reported they had developed their disaster or emergency plan from a suggested format from a non-profit organization, resources they sought the most when developing their plan were the American Red Cross, the fire department, and local TV stations.
- A majority of the respondents felt they would be able to evacuate if necessary and able to obtain news and emergency information from emergency officials.
- In the past five years, 17% of the respondents were affected by a disaster or crisis.
- Those respondents affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years said peace of mind and their property were the most impacted by the disaster or crisis.
- Almost half of the respondents affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years had participated in a compensation process.
- A majority of the respondents affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years said they and their families had fully recovered from the disaster or crisis.
- Local TV stations and major TV networks were resources the majority of the respondents were somewhat or extremely likely to use when seeking information during a disaster.
- Eighty-three percent of the respondents were familiar with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.
- A majority of the respondents who were familiar with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, felt it greatly or somewhat affected coastal communities in Florida.
- Similar percentages of the respondents reported they had emergency funds that would cover 1 to 3 months (38%) and 4 to 6 months (36%) of necessary household expenses.

## Background

In Florida and throughout the United States, natural and man-made disasters account for millions of dollars in recovery that put a strain on the economy. In Florida alone, 16 disasters including hurricanes, tropical storms, tornadoes, flooding, severe storms and straight-line winds, were declared between 2004 and 2013. Florida has a wide range of natural disasters that regularly affect the state's economy which include hurricanes, tropical storms, tornadoes, wildfires and floods. Man-made disasters, such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, can also be devastating to the state's economy. Florida's growing communities have to plan and be prepared to handle these types of disasters. Governments must prioritize planning and preparations in order to protect its citizens' health, safety and welfare. Therefore, examining consumers' perceptions and knowledge surrounding community preparedness is essential to the future of Florida's economy.

This survey specifically examined:

- The public's perceptions of their community with regards to the likelihood of a disaster.
- The public's perceptions toward the vulnerability of their community to different types of disaster.
- The public's perceptions of their communities' overall preparation for a disaster or an emergency.
- The public's perceptions of their own preparation for a disaster or an emergency.
- The public's perceptions of their financial preparedness.

## Methods

In January 2016, an online survey was distributed to a representative sample of Florida residents using non-probability sampling. Qualtrics, a survey software company, distributed the survey link to 768 Florida residents, 18 or older. Of these potential respondents, 525 completed responses were recorded. To ensure that the data were representative of the Florida population according to the 2010 U.S. Census (seen in Table 1), the data were weighted to balance geographic, age, gender, and race/ethnicity data with the Florida population (Kalton & Flores-Cervantes, 2003). Weighting procedures are



commonly used in non-probability samples to compensate for selection, exclusion, and non-participation biases (Baker et al., 2013).

Public opinion research commonly utilizes non-probability samples to make population estimates (Baker, et al., 2013). According to previous literature, non-probability samples can yield results comparable and in some cases better than probability-based samples (Abate, 1998; Twyman, 2008; Vavreck & Rivers, 2008).

The survey was reviewed by a panel of experts, listed in the acknowledgements, for face and content validity before implementation.

## Description of Respondents

*Table 1: Weighted demographics of survey respondents*

Demographic Category	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48.9
Female	51.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Hispanic	22.5
<b>Race</b>	
Native American	0.2
Asian	3.0
African American	17.0
White	77.1
<b>Age</b>	
19 and younger	1.3
20-29 years	12.8
30-39 years	12.2
40-49 years	14.2
50-59 years	13.5
60-69 years	11.1
70-79 years	7.4
80 and older	4.9
<b>Rural Urban Continuum</b>	
Metro- Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more	63.1
Metro- Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	25.7
Metro- Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	4.8
Nonmetro- Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area	3.5
Nonmetro- Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area	2.6
Nonmetro- Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area	0.3

## Political Beliefs and Affiliation

A Democratic political affiliation was reported by 43% of respondents, followed by a Republican affiliation (27%), and an Independent affiliation (25%) (Figure 1). Additionally, 41% of respondents reported moderate political ideologies (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Political Affiliation

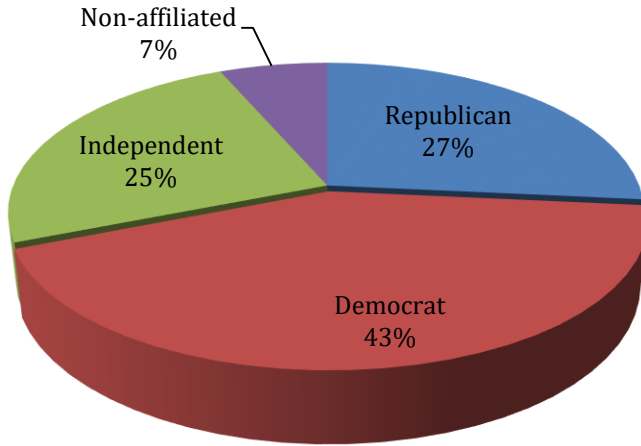
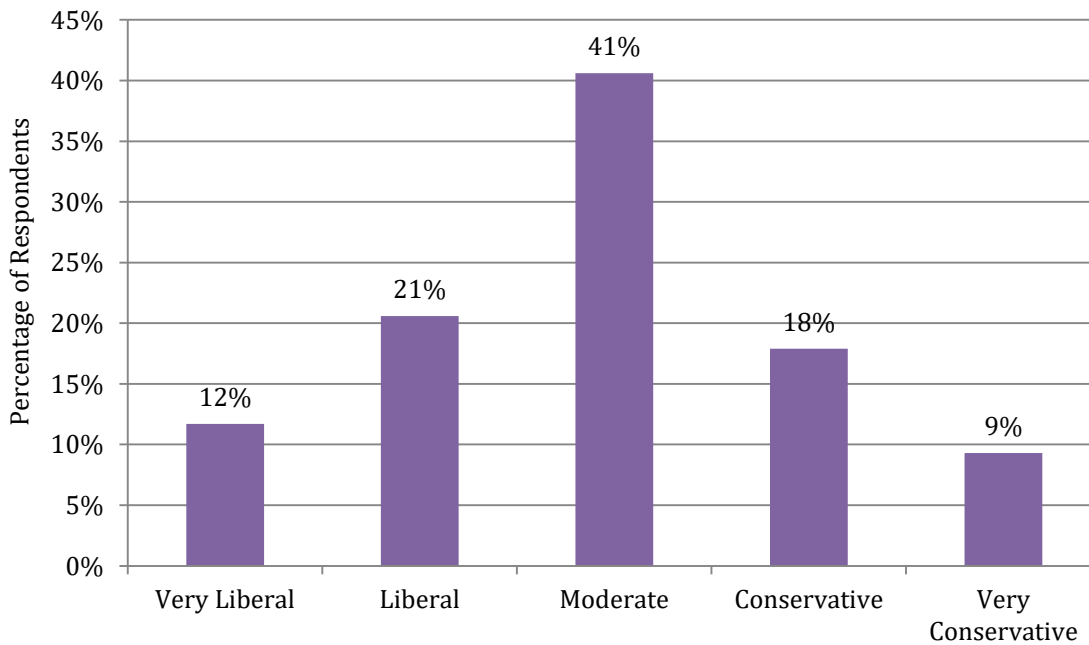


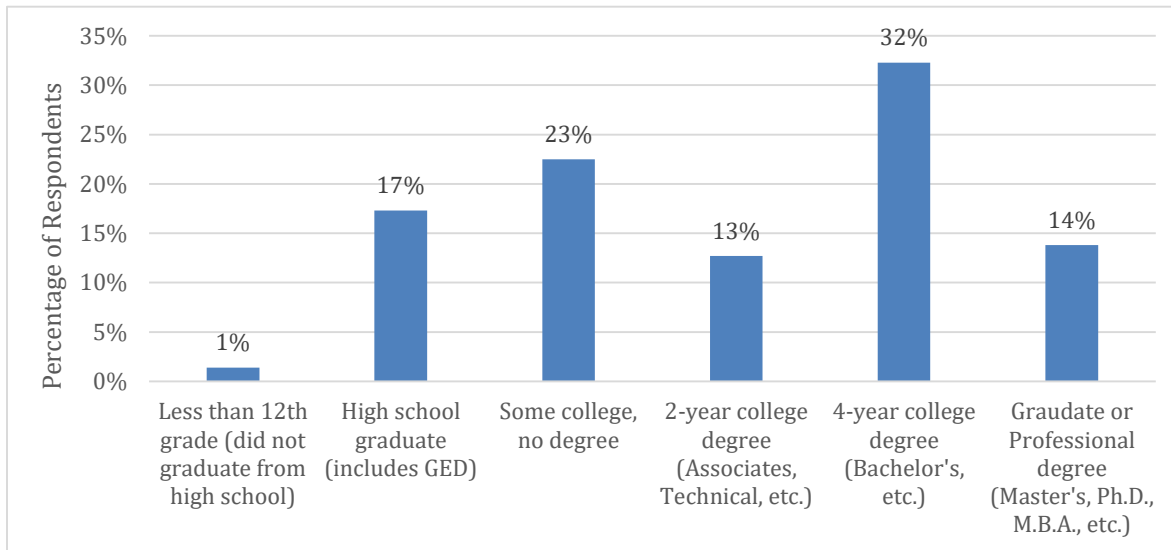
Figure 2. Political ideological leaning



## Education

Thirty-two percent of respondents reported they had attained a 4-year college degree and 23% of them indicated they had attended some college but had not attained a degree (Figure 3).

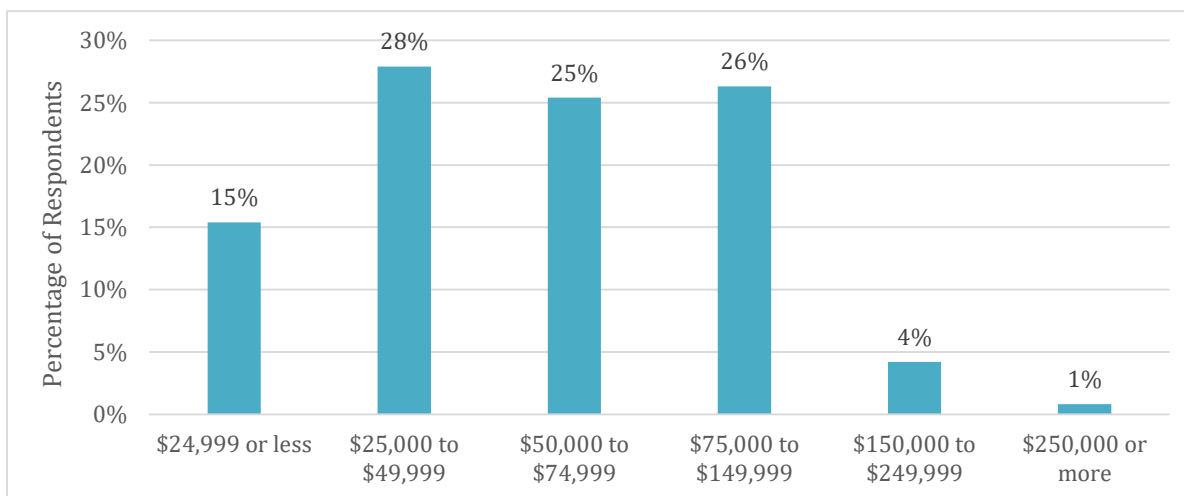
Figure 3. Education



## Income

Similar percentages of the respondents reported having income between \$25,000 to \$49,999 (28%), income between \$75,000 to \$149,999 (26%), and income between \$50,000 to \$74,999 (25%) (Figure 4). Twenty-eight percent of the respondents reported they expected a change in next year's family income.

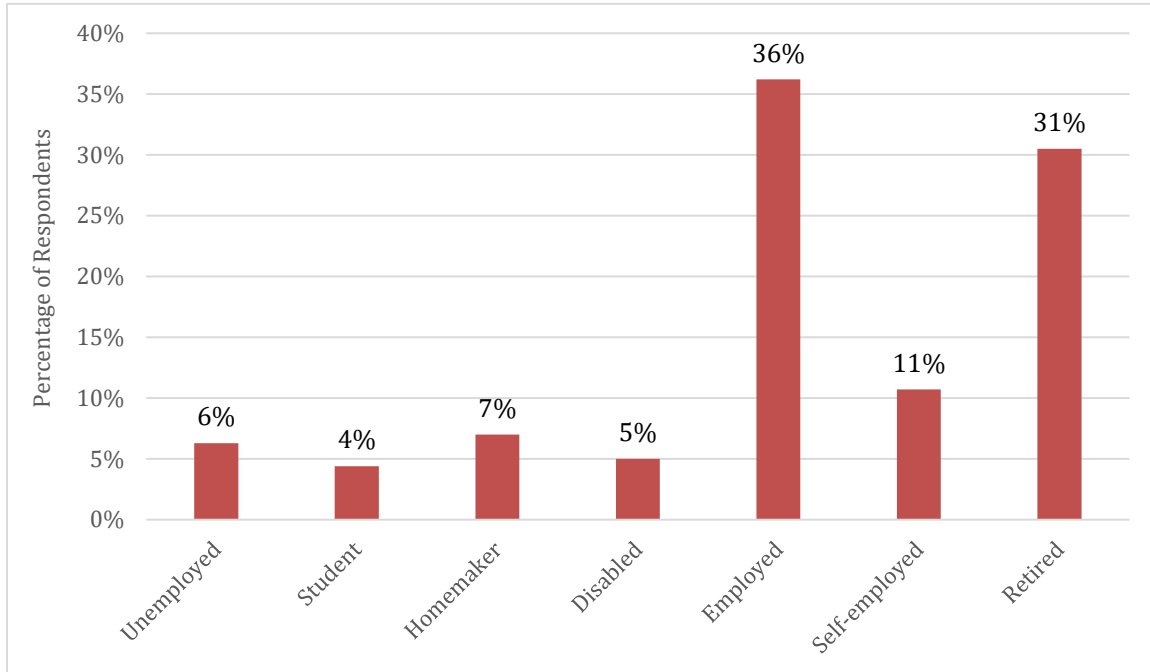
Figure 4. Income



## Employment Status

Thirty-six percent of the respondents reported they were employed full-time and 6% of them reported they were unemployed. Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicated they were retired (Figure 5). Of those respondents who reported they were retired ( $n=160$ ), 96% of them said they were retired and not working and 4% of them are retired and working part-time.

Figure 5. Current employment status



## Results

### Importance of Florida Issues

Respondents were asked to rate the level of importance they associated with 15 specific issues on a five-point scale (1 = *Not at all important*, 2 = *Slightly important*, 3 = *Fairly important*, 4 = *Highly important*, 5 = *Extremely important*). Respondents could also indicate that they were *Unsure* of the importance they associated with an issue. Table 1 details the percent of respondents who rated each issue as *Highly important* or *Extremely important*. Respondents identified healthcare and the economy as the most important issues, at 86% and 84% respectively (Table 2).

**Table 2. Importance level of issues**

Florida Issue	% of respondents rating the issue extremely or highly important
Health care	86%
Economy	84%
Public education	77%
Water	76%
Taxes	75%
Environmental Conservation	71%
Immigration	68%
Food production	63%
Housing and foreclosures	62%
Climate change	60%

### Respondents' perceptions of a man-made disaster (n=557)

Respondents were asked to define a man-made disaster as an open-ended response. Forty-six percent of them said it was a disaster caused by man that was not nature- or weather-related (Table 3). All responses were coded and some respondents gave multiple answers. The following quotes are examples of the open-ended responses received with regard to this theme:

- “An event not caused by nature. It is an event that man's actions hurt the environment in a major way.”
- “It is some event caused deliberately by a person. It could be caused by negligent behavior as well.”
- “A disastrous event caused directly and principally by one or more identifiable deliberate or negligent human actions.”

Eight percent of the respondents said a man-made disaster was any type of chemical explosion, spill, or leak. The following quotes are examples of the open-ended responses received with regard to these themes:

- “Destruction of the environment, through use of environmentally destructive chemicals, example -- the BP oil spill.”
- “Toxic spills, like ammonia spilling from a truck or train.”
- “Example: What BP did to the Gulf of Mexico a few years ago.”

Additionally, 6% of respondents said a man-made disaster was some type of pollution or contamination. The following quotes are examples of the open-ended responses received with regard to this theme:

- “In Florida, I consider the pollution of the Indian River lagoon system due to excessive use of fertilizers and runoff or sink-holes caused by messing with the groundwater tables to be man-made disasters.”

- “A breach in Lake O's levee...Pollution -- water, air, light...”
- “Pollution of the environment.”

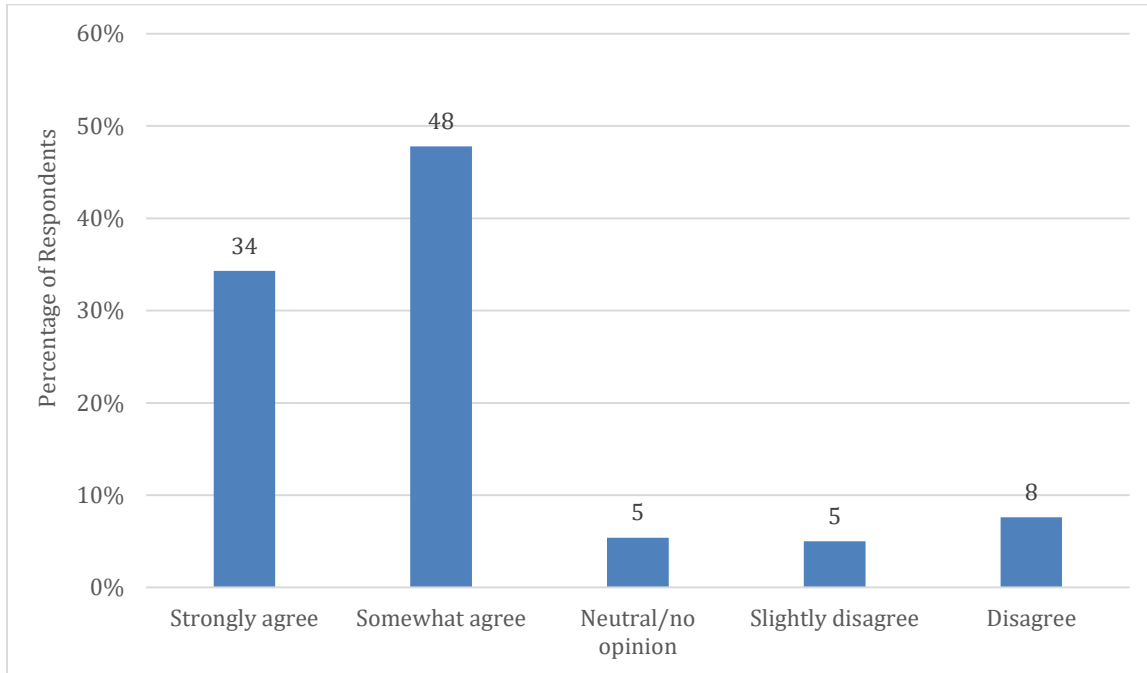
**Table 3. Definition of a man-made disaster (n=557)**

<b>Definition of a man-made disaster</b>	<b>%</b>
A disaster caused by man; not nature/weather related	45.7
Chemical explosion/spill/leak	7.8
Pollution/contamination	5.6
Climate change/global warming	4.7
Fire	4.4
Hurricane/tornado/floods	3.5
Bomb/explosion	2.9
War	2.8
Accident/wreck/crash/derailing	2.6
Terrorism	1.9
Nuclear power plant melt down/H-bomb	1.9
Bridge/building collapse	1.5
Government	1.4
Environmental/nature	1.2
Inevitable	1.2
Poverty	0.7
Not good/bad/terrible	0.7
Failure of infrastructure/equipment/power outage	0.6
Poor land planning/overcrowding	0.5
Mass shooting	0.4
Destruction of the earth	0.4
Water shortage	0.4
Crime	0.3
Unemployment	0.1
Guns	0.1
Miscellaneous	2.9
Don't know	1.7
No answer	2.3

### Definition of Community

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “Community is defined as a group of people that share a geographical location or setting.” Of the respondents, 82% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 6).

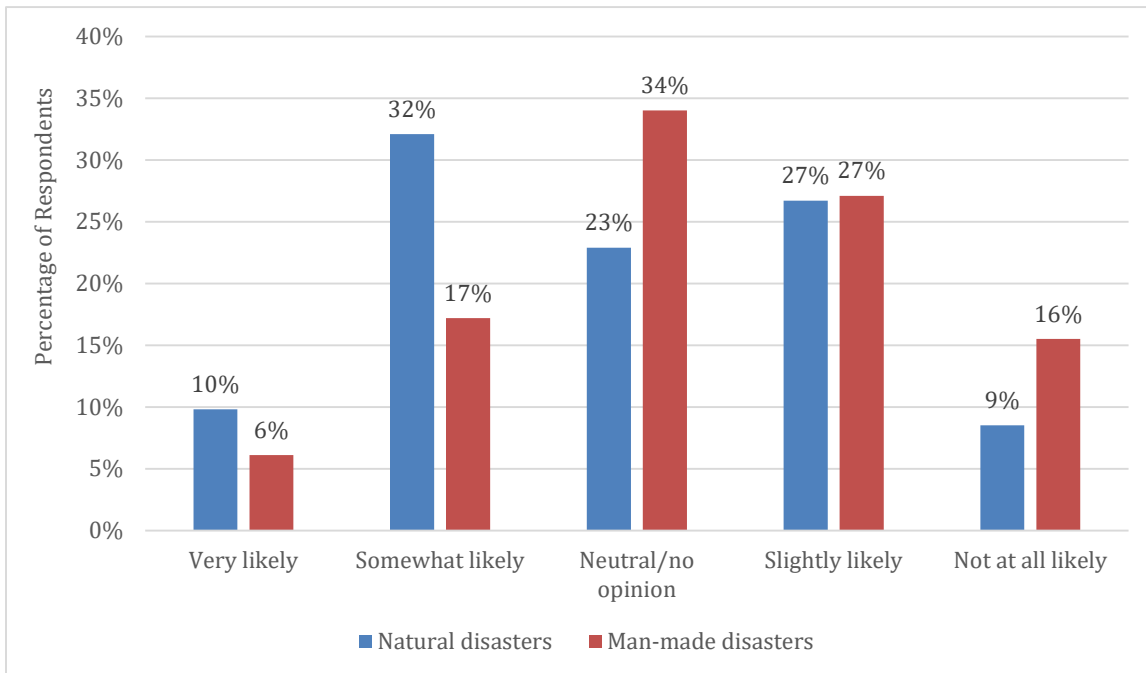
*Figure 6. Definition of community*



### Likelihood of Disasters Happening in the Respondent's Community

Respondents were asked for the likelihood of natural and man-made disasters happening in their communities in the next year. Man-made disaster was not defined for respondents as they were asked to provide their own definition earlier in the survey. Of the respondents, 42% indicated it was somewhat or very likely that a natural disaster would happen in their community in the next year. Twenty-three percent indicated it was somewhat or very likely that a man-made disaster would happen in their community in the next year (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Likelihood of disasters happening in your community**

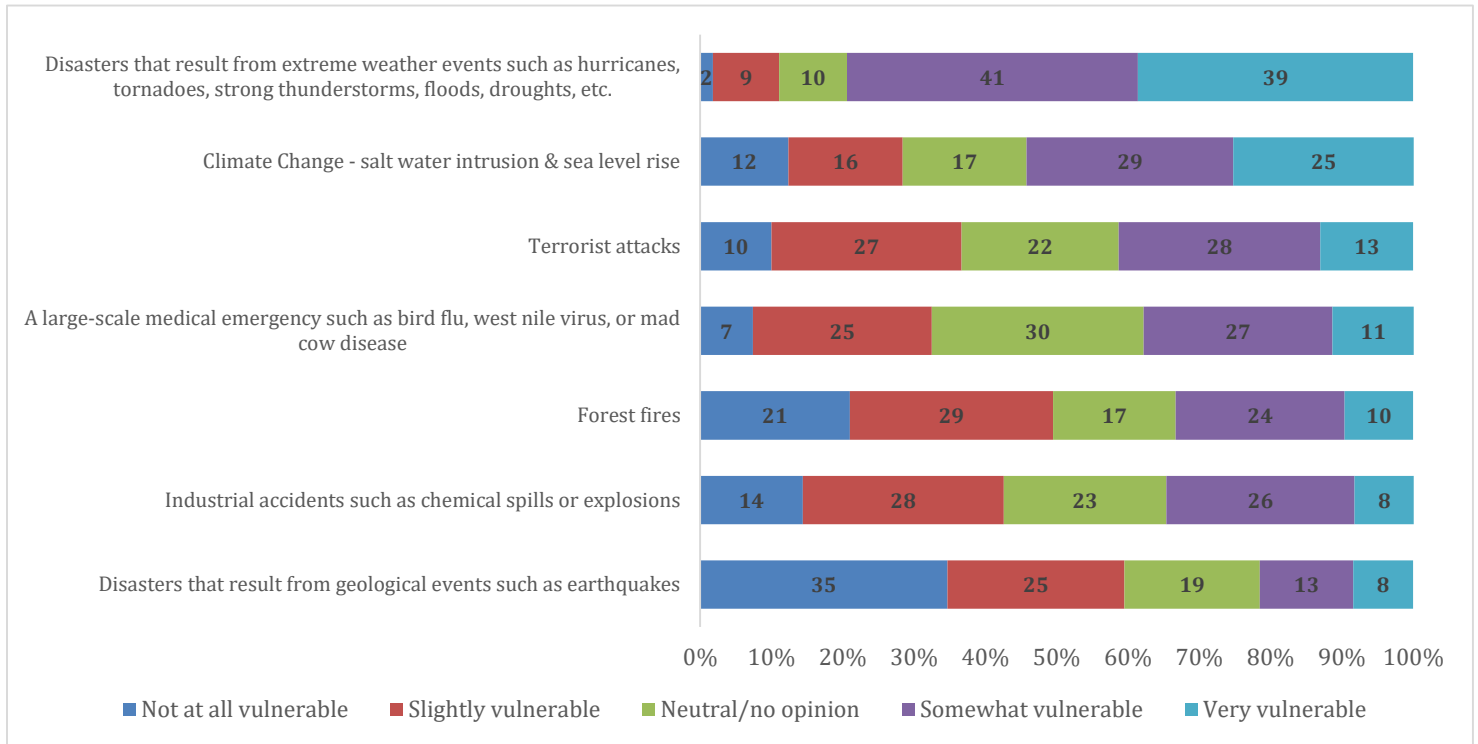


### The Level of Vulnerability of the Respondent's Community

Respondents were asked how vulnerable they perceived their communities to be to seven different types of disasters. Of the respondents, 80% perceived their communities to be somewhat or very vulnerable to disasters that result from extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, strong thunderstorms, floods, and droughts. Fifty-four percent of the respondents perceived their communities to be somewhat or very vulnerable to climate change, which includes such issues as water intrusion and sea level rise (Figure 8).



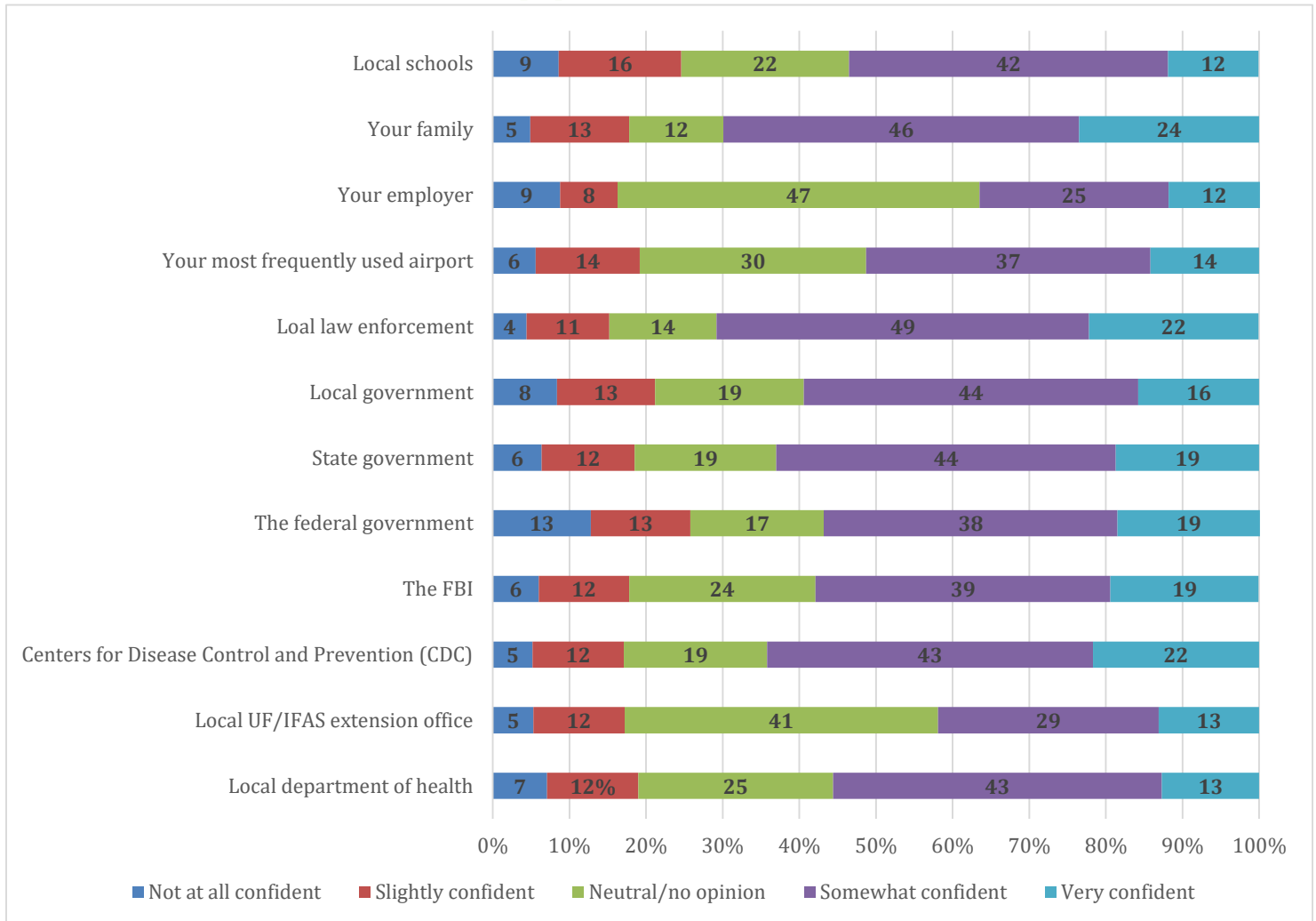
**Figure 8. The Level of vulnerability of your community**



**The Level of Confidence in Community Preparations to Handle Disasters or Emergencies**

Respondents were asked about the level of confidence they had in community preparations to handle disasters or emergencies. Similar percentages of respondents were somewhat or very confident that their local law enforcement (71%) and their family (70%) are prepared to handle disasters/emergencies (Figure 9). Respondents had slightly more confidence in the State (63%) and local government (60%) being prepared to handle disasters or emergencies than the federal government (57%). Also, respondents were neutral (47%) in the level of confidence they had in their employer being prepared to handle disasters or emergencies.

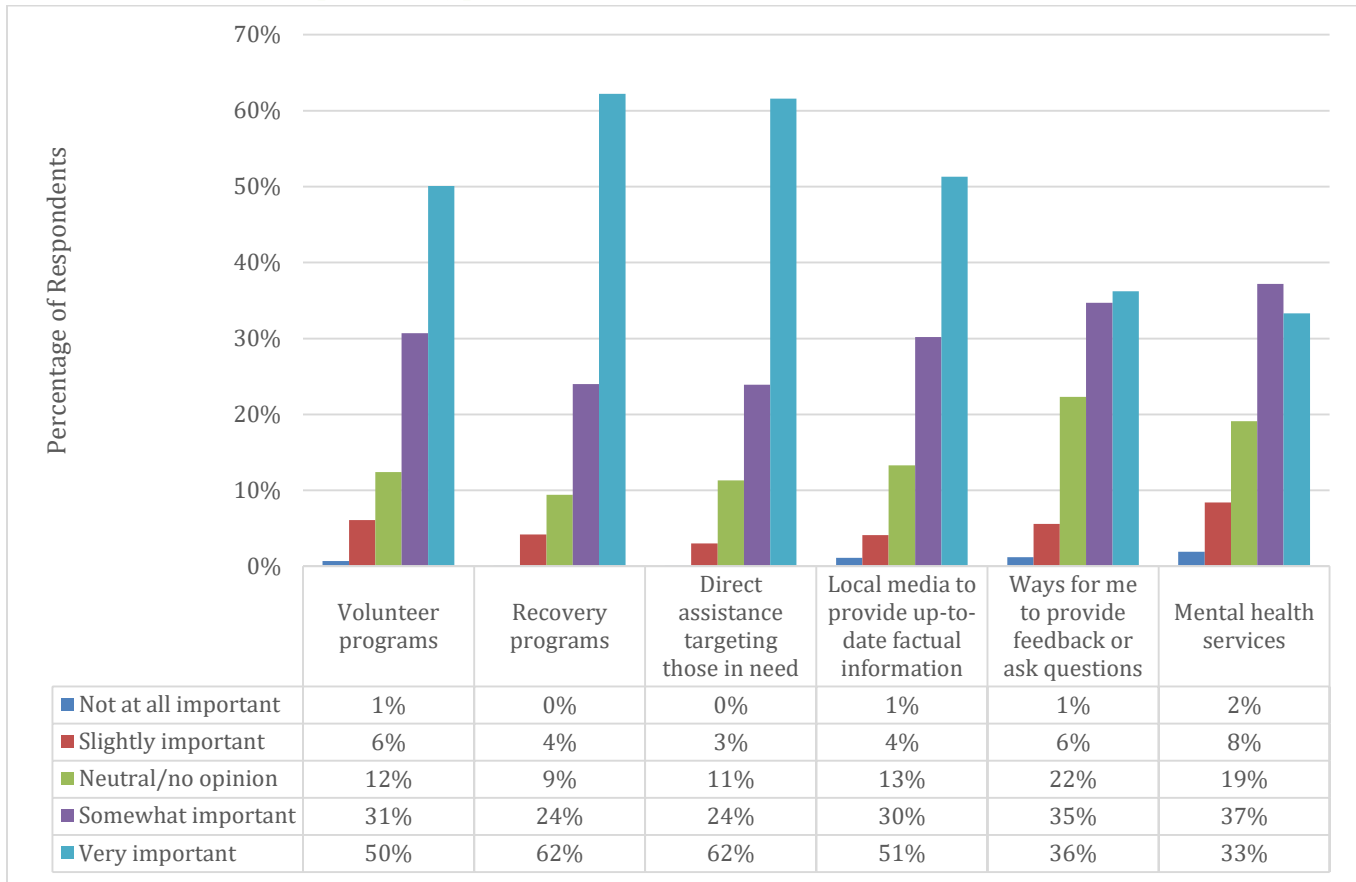
Figure 9. The level of confidence in community preparations to handle disasters/emergencies



### The Level of Importance of Programs, Services, and Communication Tools Following a Disaster or Crisis

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of different programs, services, and communication tools following a disaster or crisis. Equal percentages (86%) of respondents reported recovery programs (ex: Red Cross and church affiliated programs) and direct assistance targeting those in need (ex: governmental emergency programs) are somewhat or very important and needed following a disaster or crisis (Figure 10). Equal percentages (81%) of respondents also indicated that having local media to provide up-to-date factual information and volunteer programs (ex: clean-up and recovery, AmeriCorps) are somewhat or very important programs and services to have following a disaster or crisis.

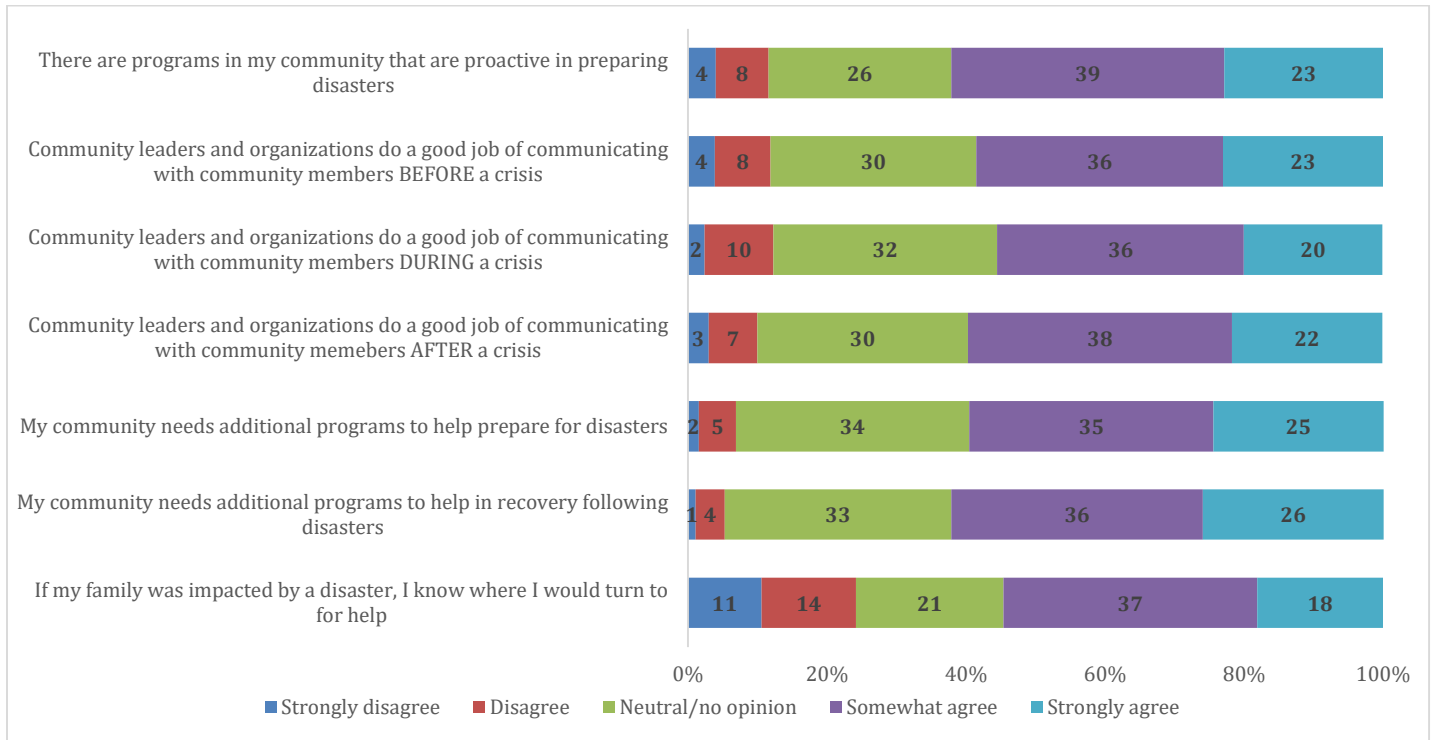
Figure 10. The level of importance of programs, services and communication tools following a disaster or crisis



### Community Disaster and Crisis Programs

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about their community. Of the respondents, equal percentages (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that their community needs additional programs to help in recovery following disasters and that there are programs in their community that are proactive in preparing for disasters (Figure 11). Also, equal percentages (60%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their community leaders and organizations do a good job of communicating with community members after a crisis and that their community needs additional programs to help prepare for disasters.

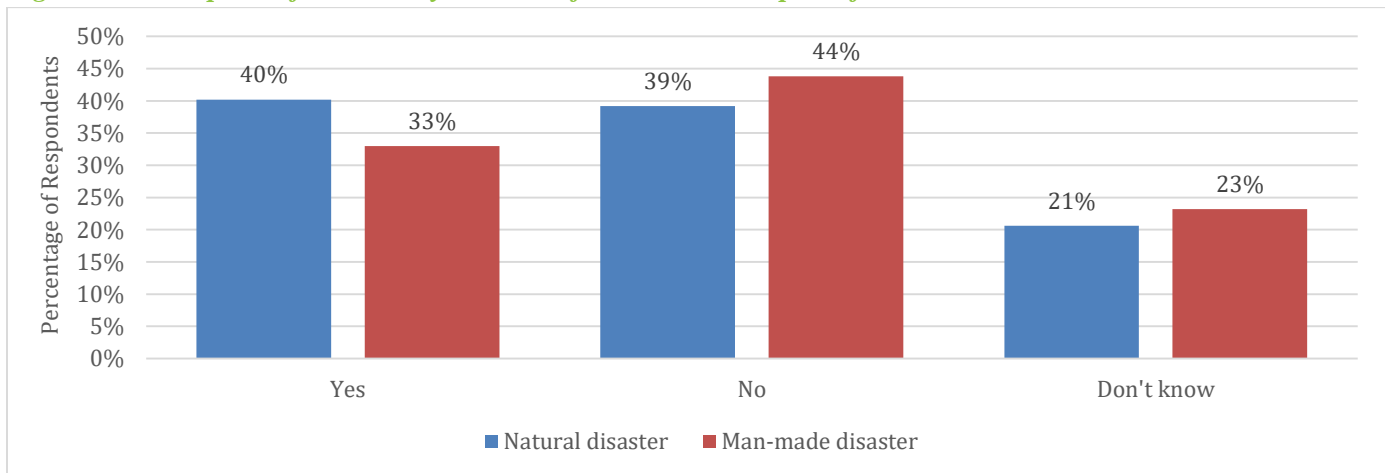
Figure 11. Community Disaster and Crisis Programs



Perception of Community Readiness for Immediate Impact of a Disaster

Respondents were asked if they felt their community was ready to deal with a disaster if it impacted their community in the next three days (Figure 12). Forty percent of respondents felt their community would be able to deal with a natural disaster if it impacted their community in the next three days, while 33% of them felt their community would be able to deal with a man-made disaster if it impacted their community in the next three days.

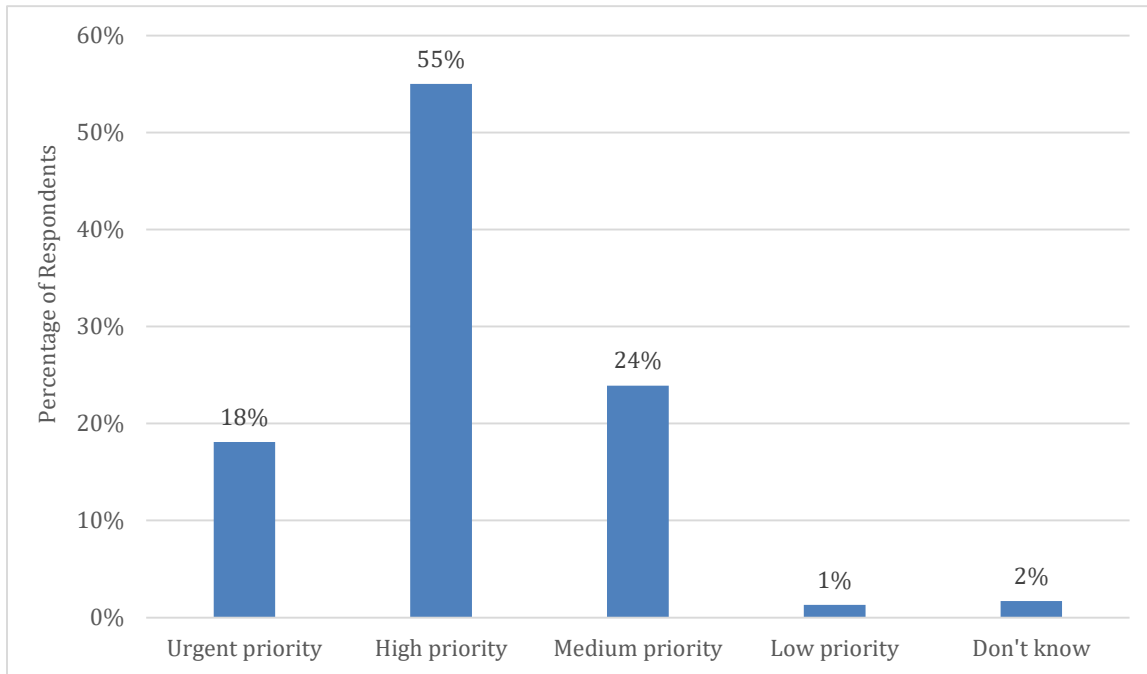
Figure 12. Perception of community readiness for immediate impact of a disaster



### Priority of Local Officials to Improve Disaster Preparedness

When respondents were asked what level of priority local officials should give to improving disaster preparedness, 73% of them reported it should be a high or urgent priority (Figure 13).

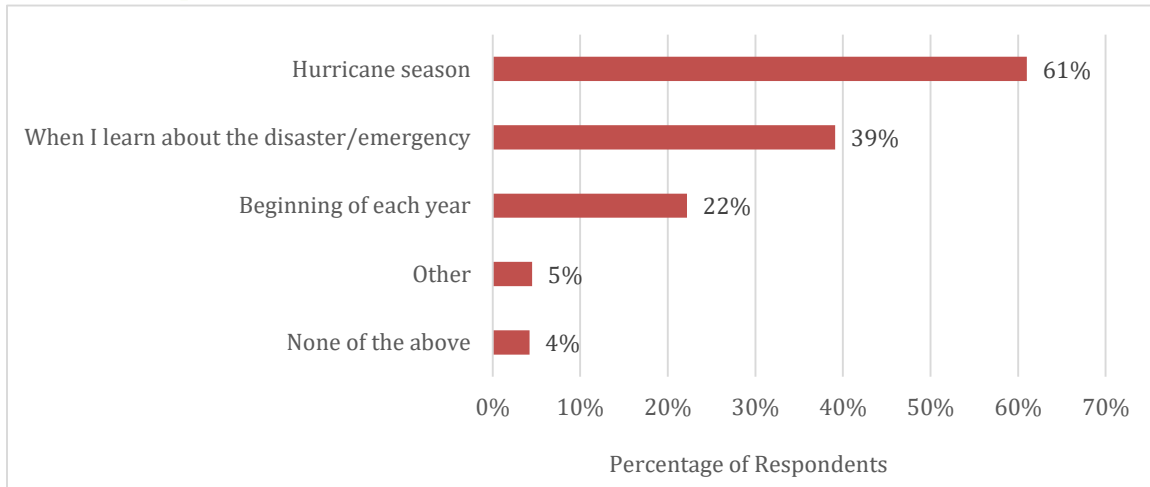
*Figure 13. Priority of local officials to improve disaster preparedness*



### Preparation for a Disaster or an Emergency

Respondents were asked when they prepare for a disaster or an emergency. Sixty-one percent of respondents indicated they prepare during hurricane season and 39% reported they prepare when they learn about the disaster or an emergency (Figure 14). Also, 22% of the respondents said they started their preparation for a disaster or an emergency at the beginning of each year.

**Figure 14. Preparation for a disaster or an emergency**

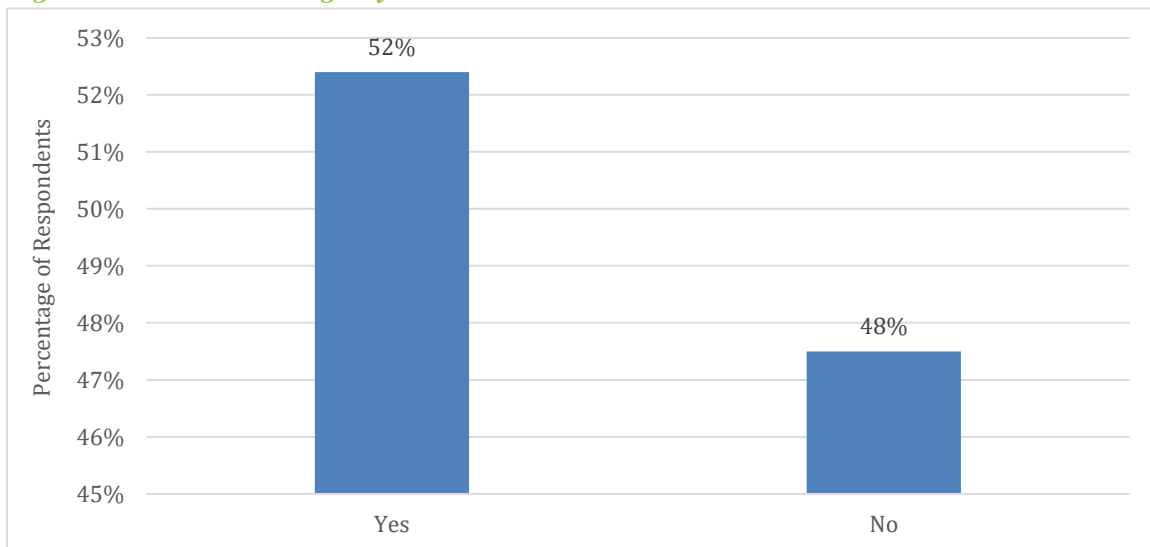


## Disaster Emergency Planning

### Disaster Emergency Plan

When asked if the respondent themselves or their family had a disaster or an emergency plan, 52% ( $n=275$ ) of them reported they currently have a disaster or an emergency plan (Figure 15).

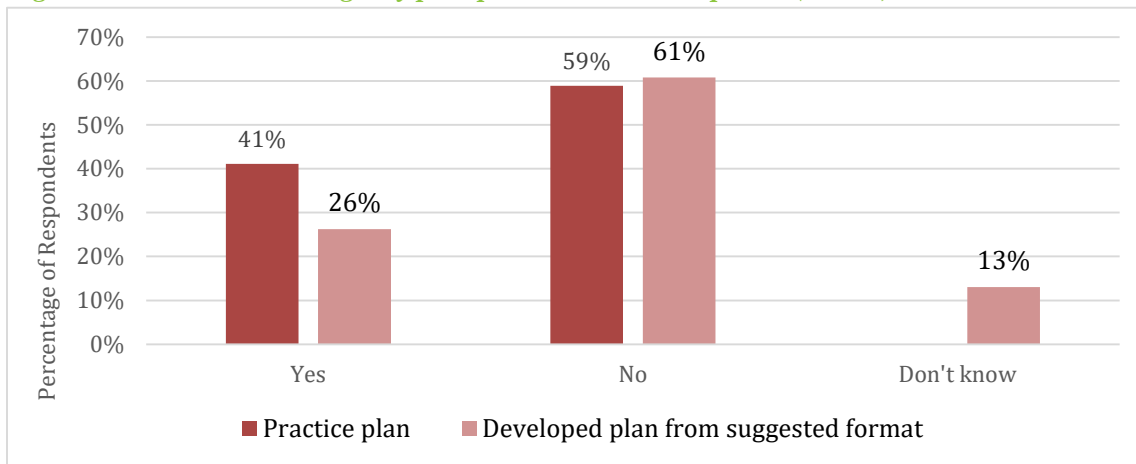
**Figure 15. Disaster Emergency Plan**



### Disaster or Emergency Plan Practice and Development (n=275)

Of the respondents who reported they had a disaster or an emergency plan (n=275), 41% (n=113), of them indicated they practice that family disaster or emergency plan (Figure 16). The respondents were not given a don't know option as to whether they practice their family disaster or emergency plan. Also, of the respondents who reported they had a disaster or emergency plan (n=275), 26% (n=72), indicated they developed their plan from a suggested format from a nonprofit organization.

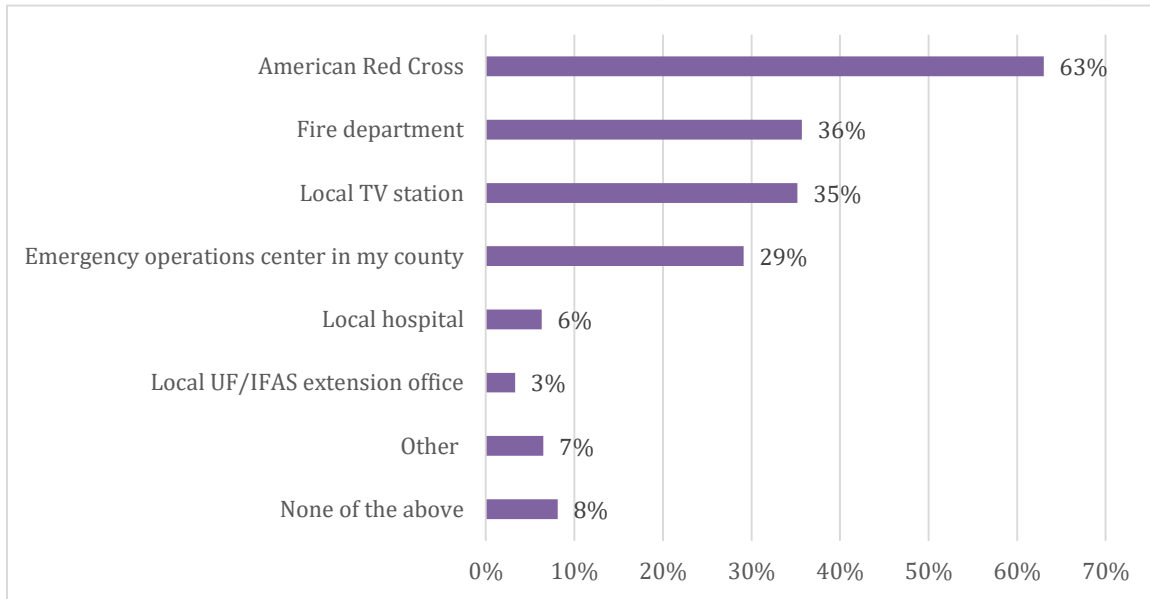
Figure 16. Disaster or emergency plan practice and development (n=275)



### Organizations used as a Resource in Development of a Disaster or an Emergency Plan (n=72)

Of those respondents who reported they had developed a disaster or an emergency plan from a suggested format from a nonprofit organization (n=72), they were asked what organizations they sought as a resource in developing their personal family plan. Respondents were allowed to choose all that applied. Sixty-three percent indicated they sought American Red Cross as a resource in developing their family plan, (36%) indicated they sought a fire department, and (35%) indicated they sought a local TV Station (Figure 17). Other sources mentioned by respondents as resources used in the development of a disaster or emergency plan were, “a checklist from a non-profit,” “the local newspaper,” “websites and pamphlets,” “the State Department of Health,” and “SERT (Florida State Emergency Response Team)”.

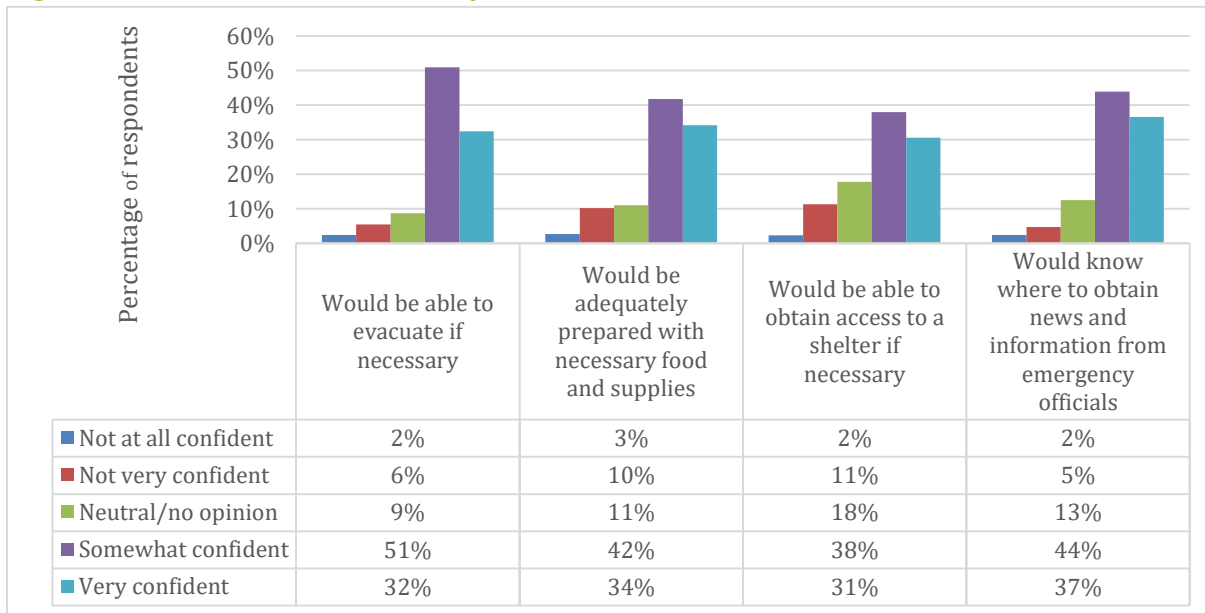
Figure 17. Organizations used as a resource in development of a disaster or an emergency plan (n=72)



**Actions Taken in Advance of a Disaster**

Respondents were asked if they would be able to take certain actions in advance of a disaster. Similar percentages of the respondents reported they would be able to evacuate if necessary (83%) and would be able to obtain news and emergency information from emergency officials (81%) (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Actions taken in advance of a disaster

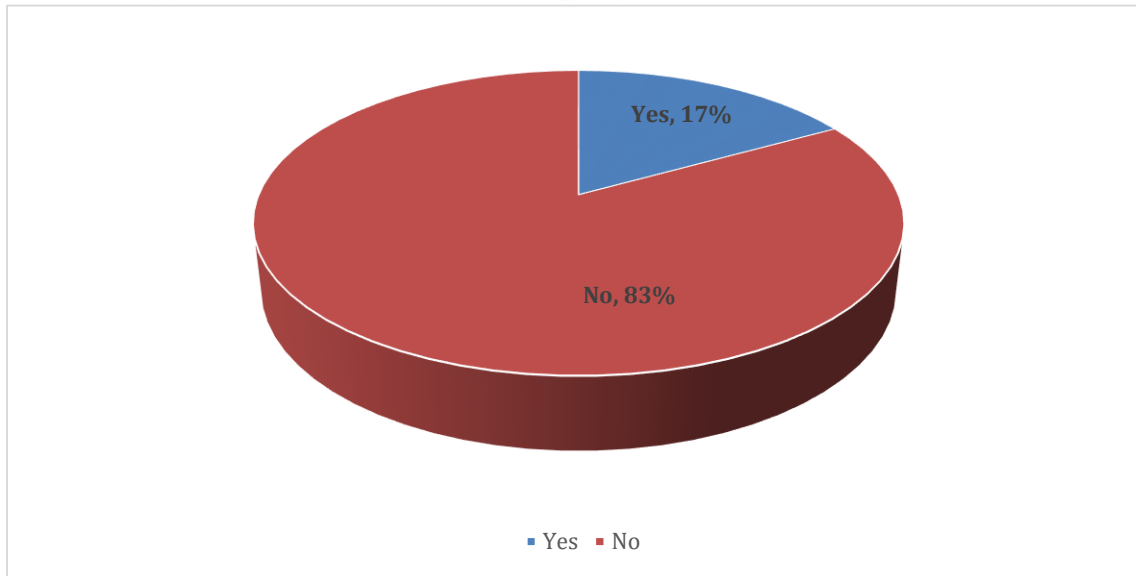




### Affected by Disaster or Crisis in the Past Five Years

Respondents were asked if they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years. Seventeen percent of the respondents reported they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years (Figure 19).

*Figure 19. Affected by disaster or crisis in the past five years*



### How Much Respondents Were Affected Due to Disaster or Crisis ( $n=89$ )

Respondents who reported they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years ( $n=89$ ) were asked to indicate on a five-point semantic differential scale which word their attitude most closely aligned with when answering the question “How much did this disaster or crisis affect you?” Respondents felt that they were more greatly affected than not greatly affected with a mean score of 3.72 (Table 4).

*Table 4. How much you were affected by disaster or crisis affect ( $n=89$ )*

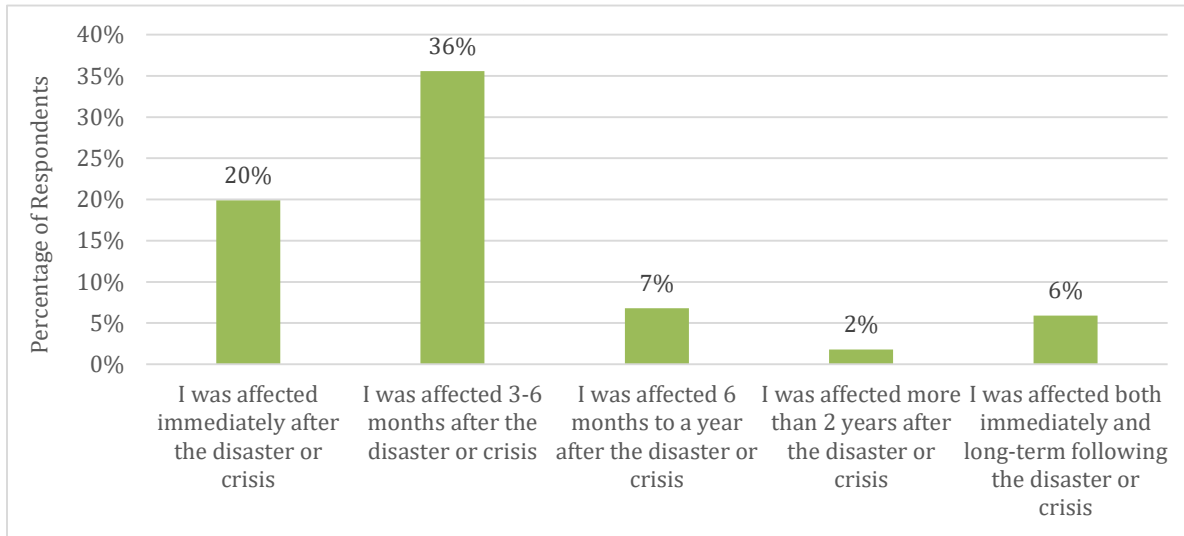
Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Not greatly affected:Greatly affected	3.72	.937

Note: Responses based on semantic differential scale from 1 to 5 with the word on the left being equal to 1 and the word on the right being equal to 5.

### Immediate or Long-term Effect of Disaster or Crisis ( $n=89$ )

Of the respondents who reported they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years ( $n=89$ ), 36% of them indicated they were still affected by the disaster three to six months after the disaster or crisis (Figure 20). Twenty percent of the respondents reported they were only affected by the disaster immediately after the disaster or crisis.

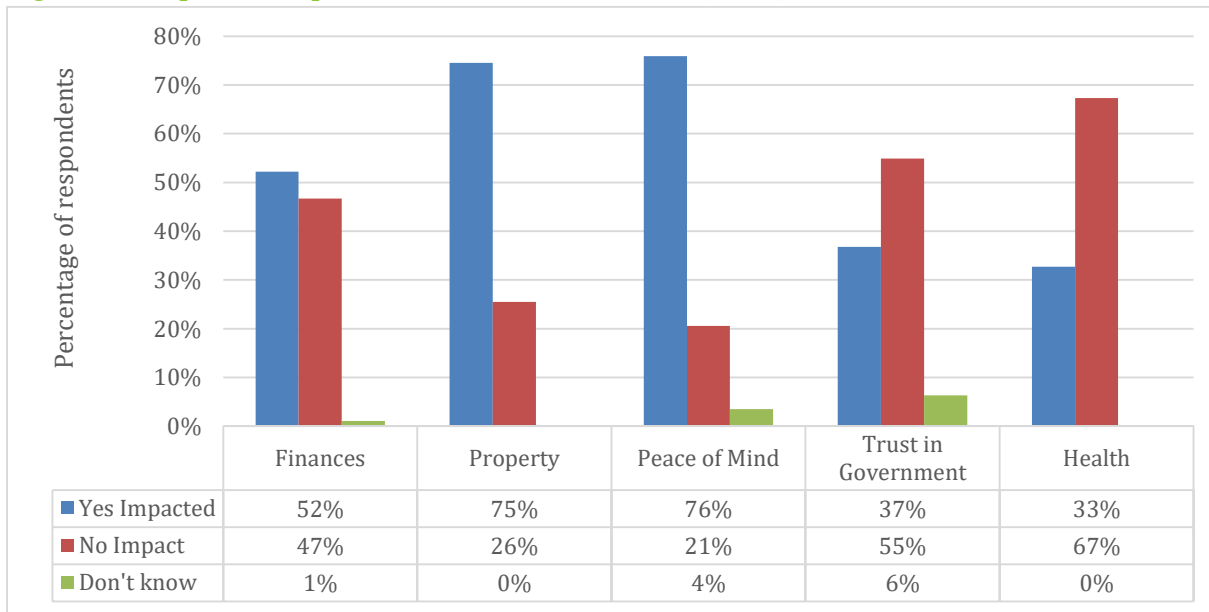
Figure 20. Immediate or long-term effect of disaster or crisis (n=89)



### Impact on Respondents Due to Disaster or Crisis (n=89)

Of the respondents who reported they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years (n=89), similar percentages of the respondents said the disaster or crisis impacted their peace of mind (76%) and their property (75%) (Figure 21).

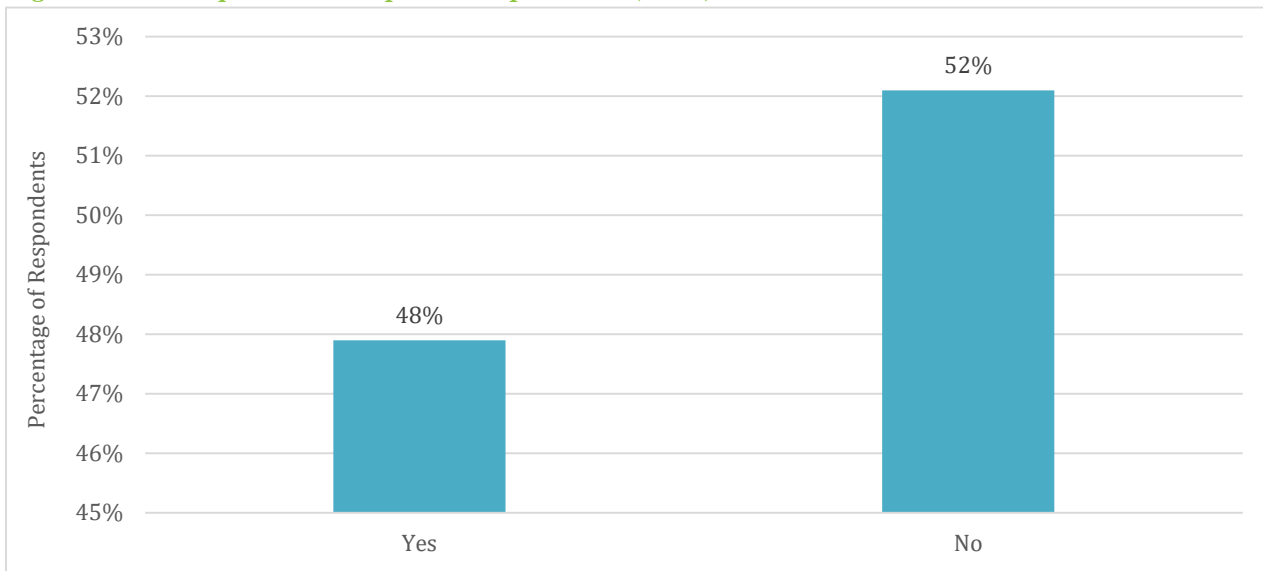
Figure 21. Impact on respondent due to disaster or crisis (n=89)



### Participation in Compensation Processes (n=89)

Of the respondents who reported they were affected by a disaster or crisis in the past five years (n=89), 48% of the respondents indicated they participated in a compensation processes, such as insurance claims and claims that are filed with the responsible party following a responsible-party man-made disaster. (Figure 22).

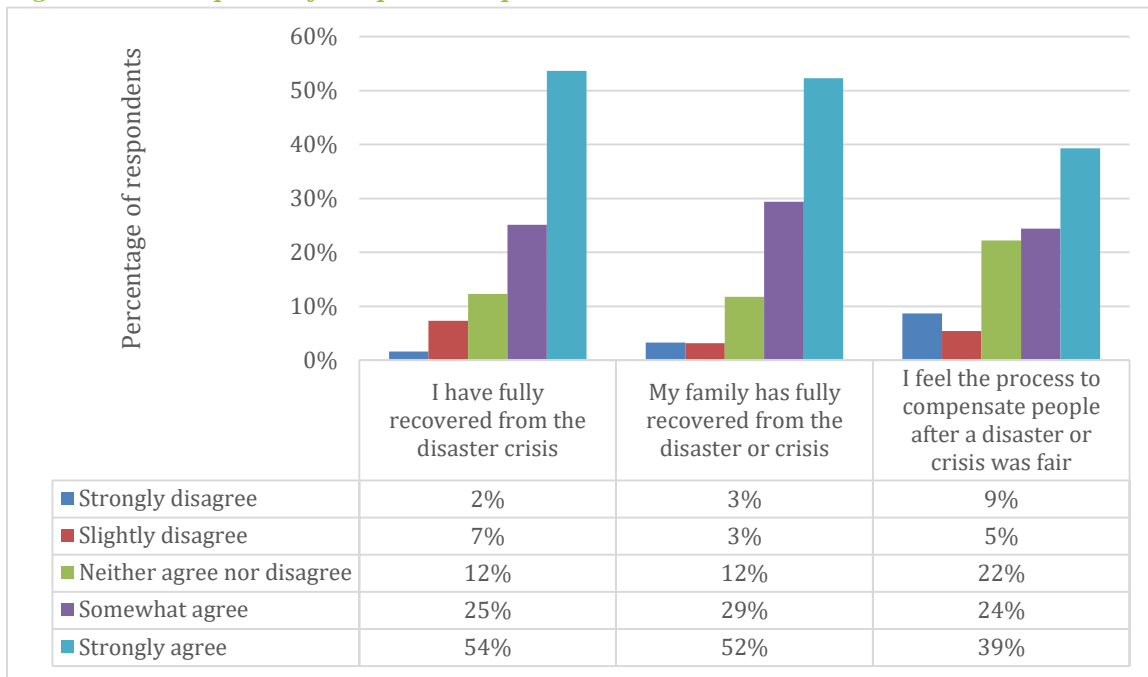
**Figure 22. Participation in compensation processes (n=89)**



### **Perceptions of Compensation Process**

Of those respondents who reported they had participated in a compensation process, similar percentages of the respondents indicated that their family had fully recovered from the disaster or crisis (81%) and they had fully recovered from the crisis (79%) (Figure 23). Sixty-three percent of the respondents who reported they participated in a compensation process reported they felt the process to compensate people after a disaster or crisis was fair.

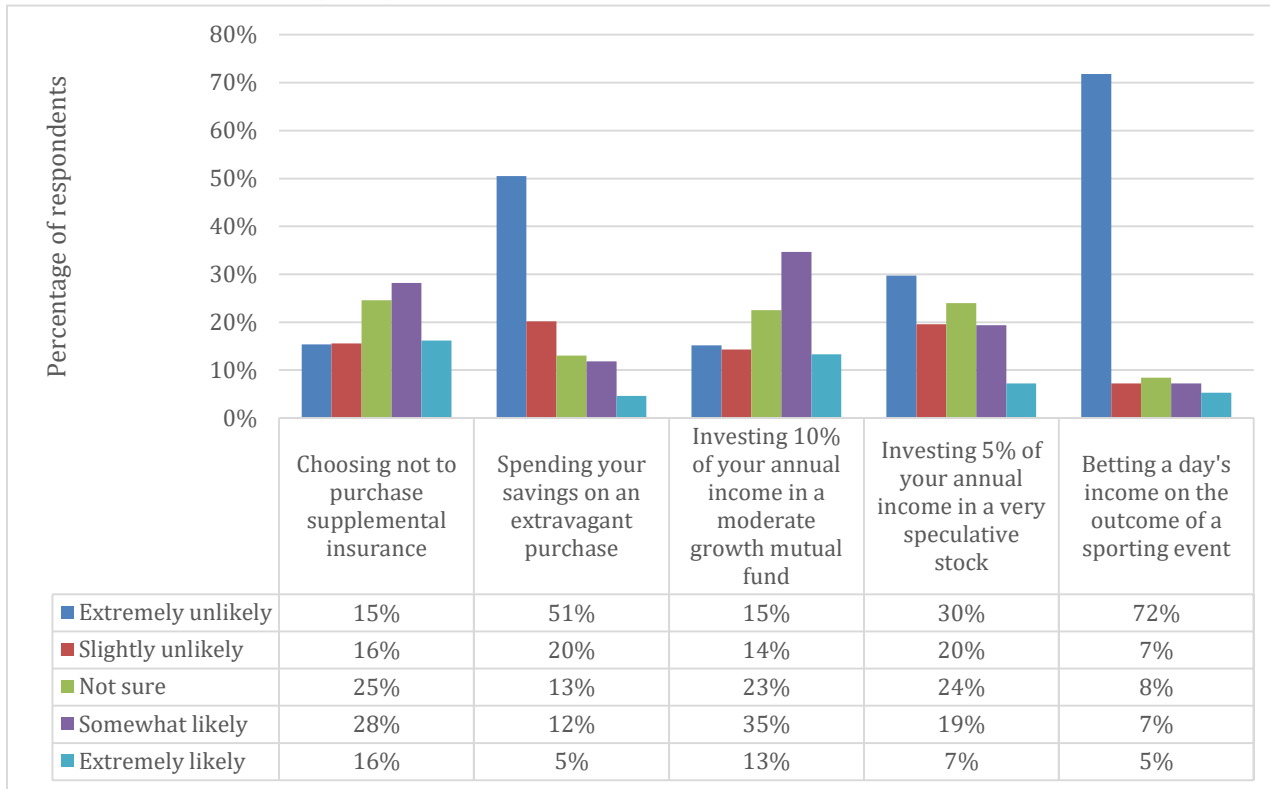
**Figure 23. Perceptions of compensation process**



### Financial Risk Perception

Respondents were asked about the likelihood that they would engage in described activities or situations with different levels of risk. Forty-eight percent of respondents reported they would be somewhat or extremely likely to invest 10% of their annual income in a moderate growth mutual fund (Figure 24). Also, 44% indicated they would be somewhat or extremely likely to choose not to purchase supplemental insurance.

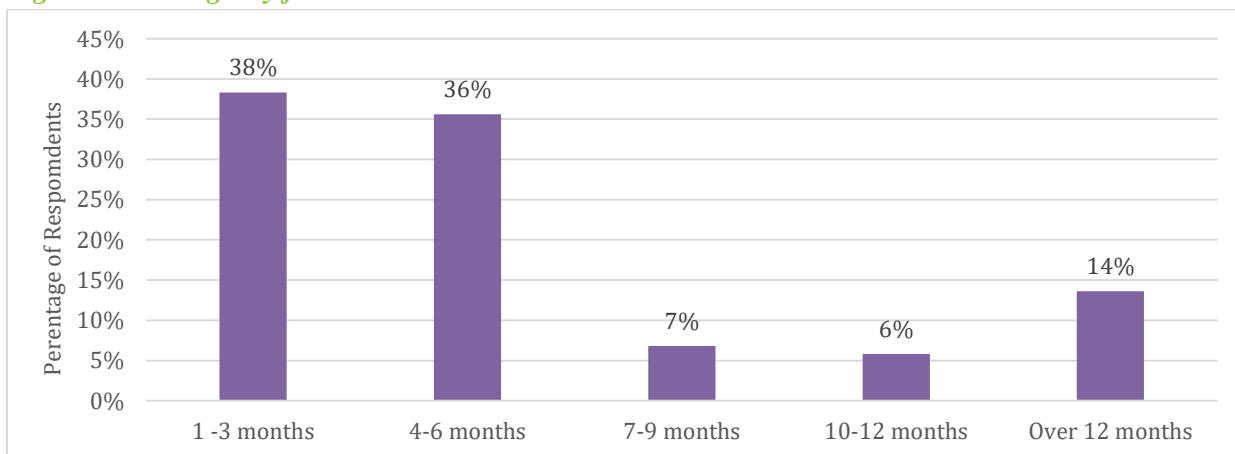
Figure 24. Financial risk perception



### Emergency Funds

Respondents were asked to provide the number of months of necessary household expenses they would estimate their emergency funds could cover excluding those savings set aside for retirement. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents reported they had one to three months of necessary household expenses covered while 36% of them indicated they had four to six months of necessary household expenses covered (Figure 25).

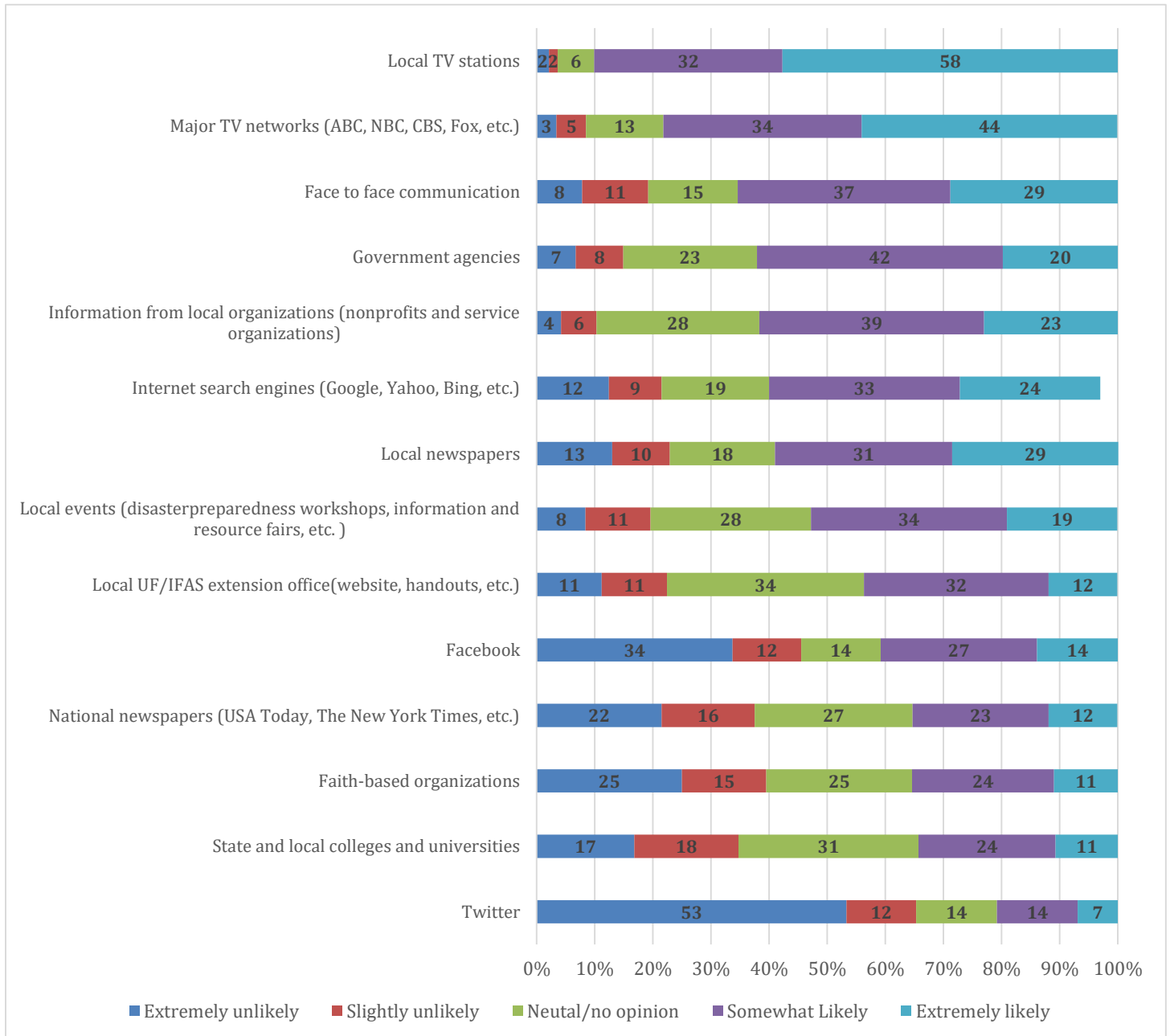
Figure 25. Emergency funds



### Likelihood of Using Resources When Seeking Information During a Disaster

Respondents were asked how likely they are to use different types of resources when seeking information during a disaster. Ninety percent of the respondents said they were somewhat or extremely likely to use local TV stations, and 78% of the respondents indicated they were somewhat or extremely likely to use major TV networks (Figure 26). Also, face-to-face communication (66%), government agencies (62%), and information from local organizations (62%) were all resources respondents reported they were somewhat or extremely likely to use when seeking information during a disaster.

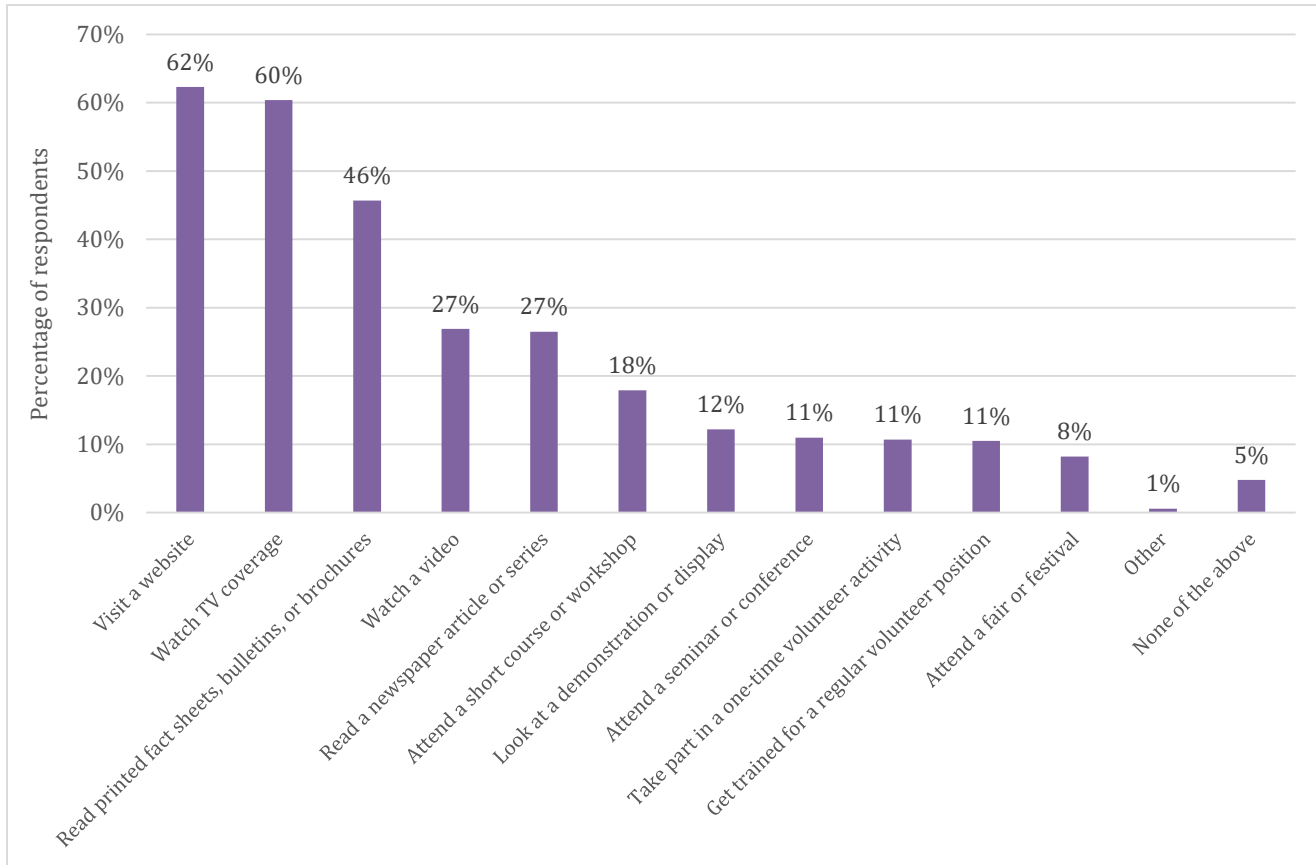
Figure 26. Likelihood of using resources when seeking information during a disaster



### Preferred Modes of Learning

Respondents were asked what type of learning opportunities they would be most likely to take advantage of when learning more about disaster and crisis preparation topics. They were allowed to select up to three items. The most popular preferred mode of learning for disaster and crisis preparation topics was visiting a website (62%), followed by watching TV coverage (60%) (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Preferred Modes of Learning

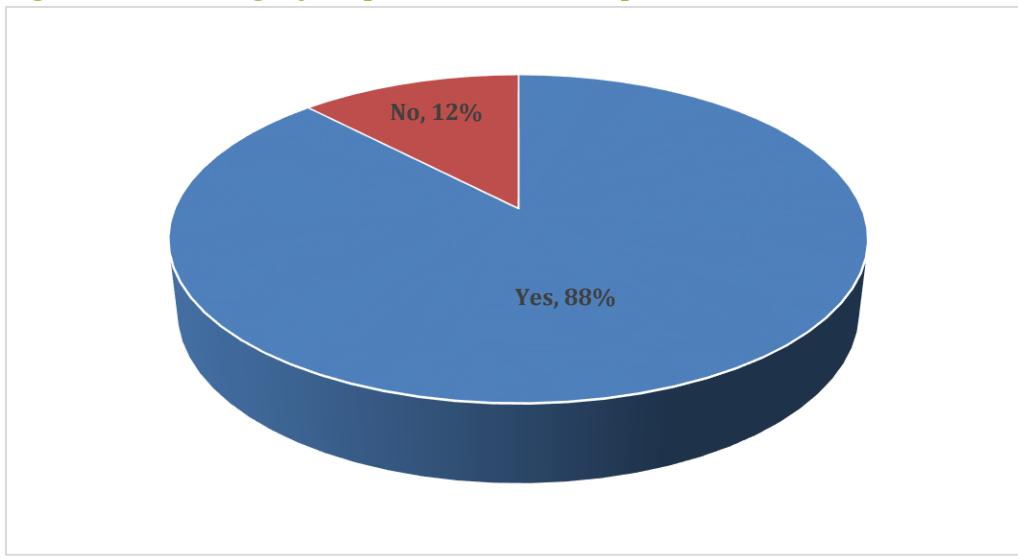


## Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

### Knowledge of Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Respondents were asked if they were familiar with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill that happened in the Gulf of Mexico. Of the respondents, 88% reported they were familiar with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill that happened in the Gulf of Mexico (Figure 28).

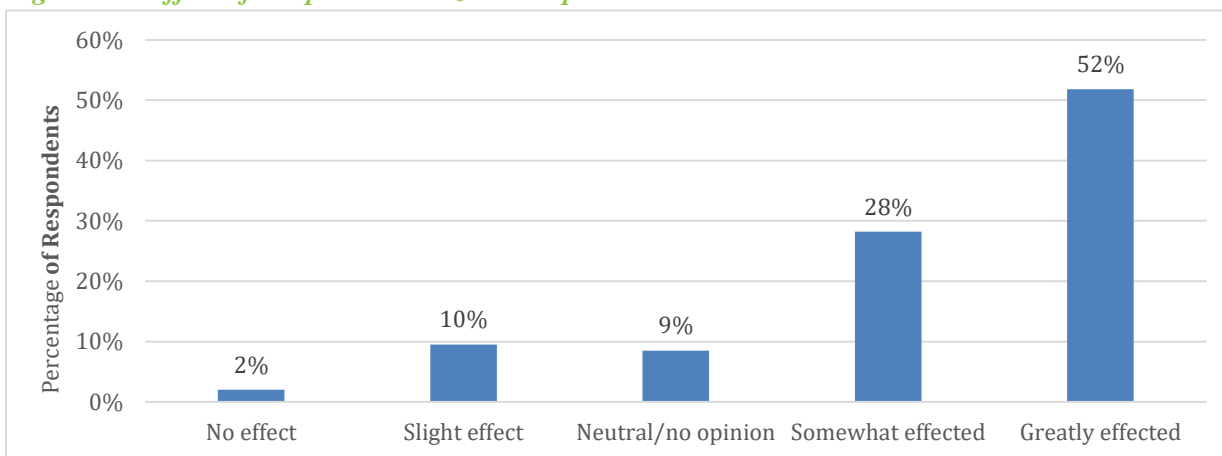
*Figure 28. Knowledge of Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*



### Effect of Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (n=461)

Respondents who reported familiarity with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (n=461), were asked how much they felt the Deepwater Horizon oil spill affected the state and coastal communities. Of those respondents, 80% of them felt the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was somewhat or greatly affected (Figure 29).

*Figure 29. Effect of Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*





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