

Pastor Attrition: Myths, Realities, and Preventions

Study sponsored by:
Dr. Richard Dockins and the North
American Mission Board

Objectives

- ❑ Quantify how many pastors leave the pastorate
- ❑ Identify and measure factors that challenge pastors
- ❑ Discover and quantify the healthy interventions that help pastors survive and thrive until retirement

Methodology Phase 1

- Qualitative in-depth telephone interviews with 16 individuals experienced in pastoral care among those leaving or considering leaving the ministry addressing:
 - Conflict in the church
 - Burnout
 - Moral lapse
 - Illness
 - Change in calling
 - Family issues
 - Poor fit with church(es)
 - Lack of preparation for the job

Methodology Phase 2

- ❑ The phone **survey of current pastors** of Evangelical and Black Protestant denominations was conducted March 5-18, 2015
- ❑ The calling list was a random sample, stratified by church membership and denominational groups, drawn from a list of all Evangelical and Black Protestant churches
- ❑ Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called
- ❑ The completed sample is 1,500 pastors
- ❑ Responses were weighted by region and denominational group to more accurately reflect the population
- ❑ The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed ±2.7%
- ❑ This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting
- ❑ Margins of error are higher in sub-groups

Methodology Phase 3

- ❑ The online **survey of former senior pastors** was conducted August 11-October 2, 2015
- ❑ The sample lists were provided by four Protestant denominations:
 - ❑ Assemblies of God,
 - ❑ Church of the Nazarene,
 - ❑ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and
 - ❑ Southern Baptist Convention
- ❑ Each survey was completed by an individual who has served as a senior (or sole) pastor but stopped serving as senior pastor prior to age 65
- ❑ The completed sample is 734 former pastors

Pastor Attrition Myths

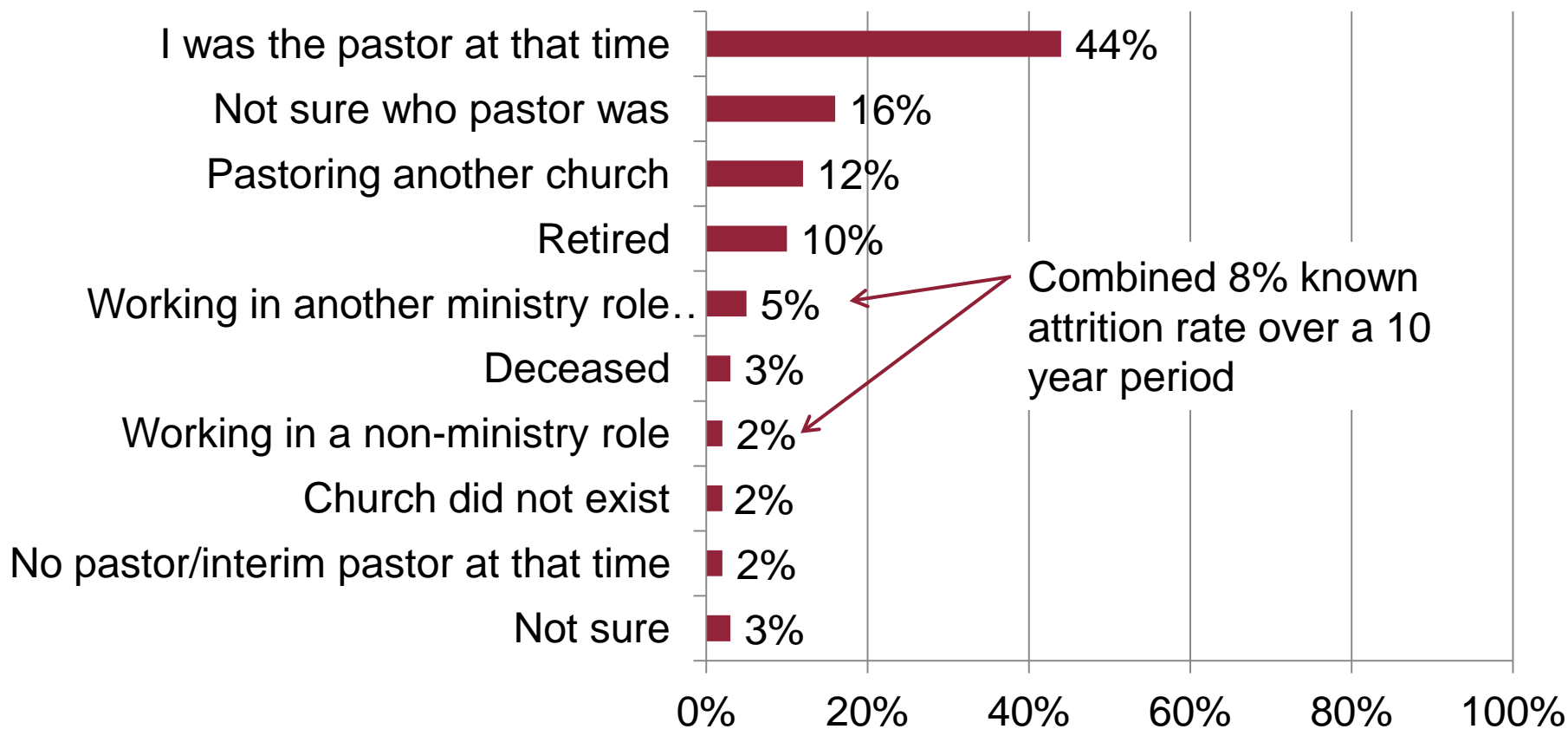
Pastor Attrition Myths

Have you heard?

1,500 pastors
leave the ministry every month
70% battle depression
78% have no close friends

Most current pastors know where the church's pastor from 10 years ago is today

Whereabouts of February 2005 Pastor of this Church



Combined responses for n= 1500

Q2: "In what year did you become the senior pastor of this church?"

Q5: "As far as you know, which of the following best describes where that pastor is today?"

Actual Pastor Attrition is 1% a year

Among Evangelical and Black Protestant denominations, about 1% leave pastoral ministry prematurely each year (prior to retirement or death)

Realities of Pastoral Ministry

- ❑ 84 percent say they're on call 24 hours a day.
- ❑ 80 percent expect conflict in their church.
- ❑ 54 percent find the role of pastor frequently overwhelming.
- ❑ 53 percent are often concerned about their family's financial security.
- ❑ 48 percent often feel the demands of ministry are more than they can handle.

12 Preventions that Improve the Odds of Staying in the Pastorate

6 things for pastors to address:

- ❑ Share struggles with spouse at least once a month
- ❑ Share struggles with a Bible study group at church
- ❑ Take courses on interpersonal skills
- ❑ Consistently protect time with family
- ❑ Spouse is very satisfied with your marriage
- ❑ Avoid this attitude: “This church would not have achieved the progress it has without me”

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

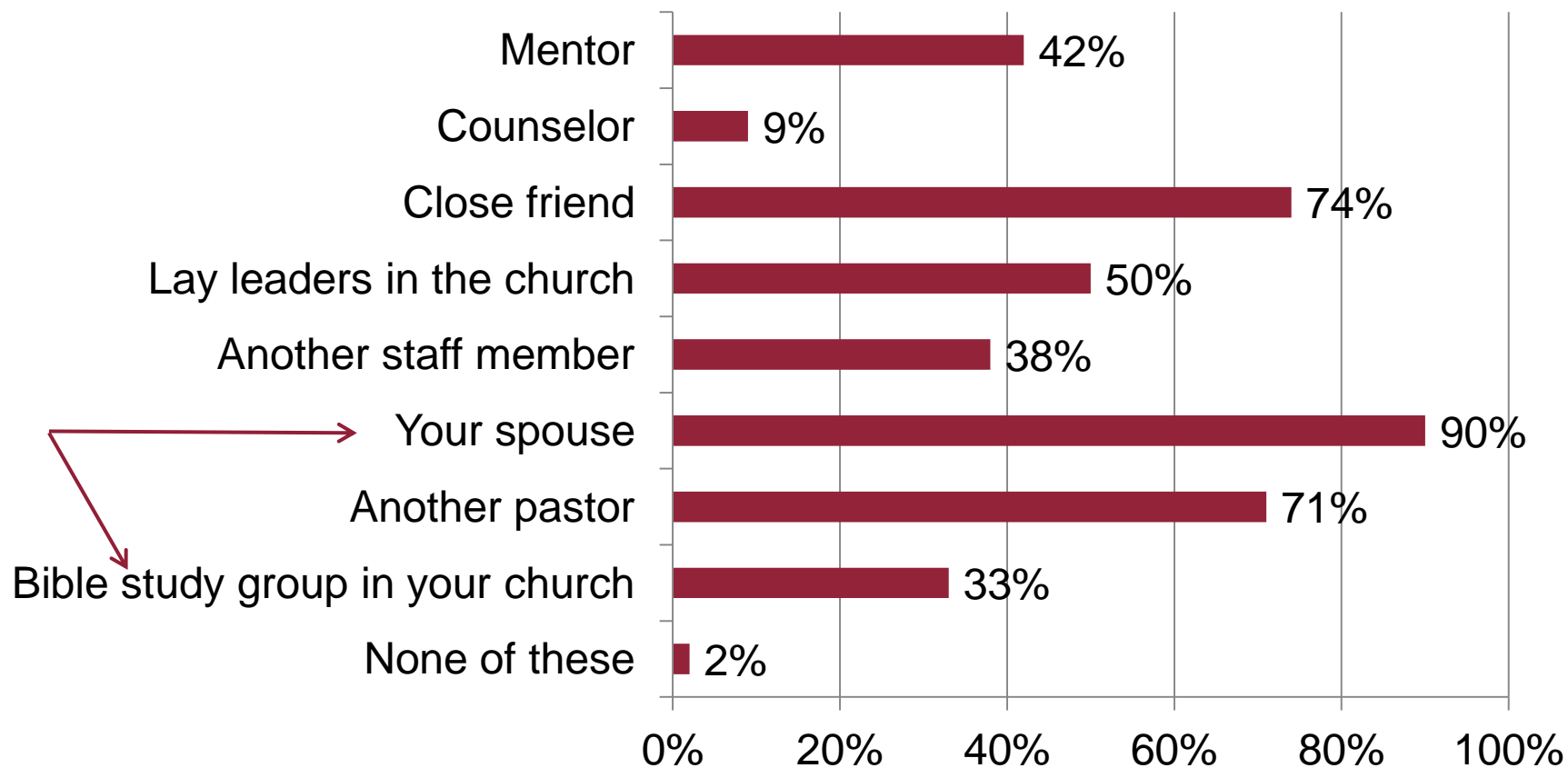
Pastors who share their struggles with their **Spouse** at least once a month are 5.5 times more likely to still be in ministry

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

Pastors who share their struggles with
**A Bible study group in their
church** at least once a month are 3.1
times more likely to still be in ministry

A majority of pastors meet to share their struggles with a spouse, another pastor, and/or a close friend at least once a month



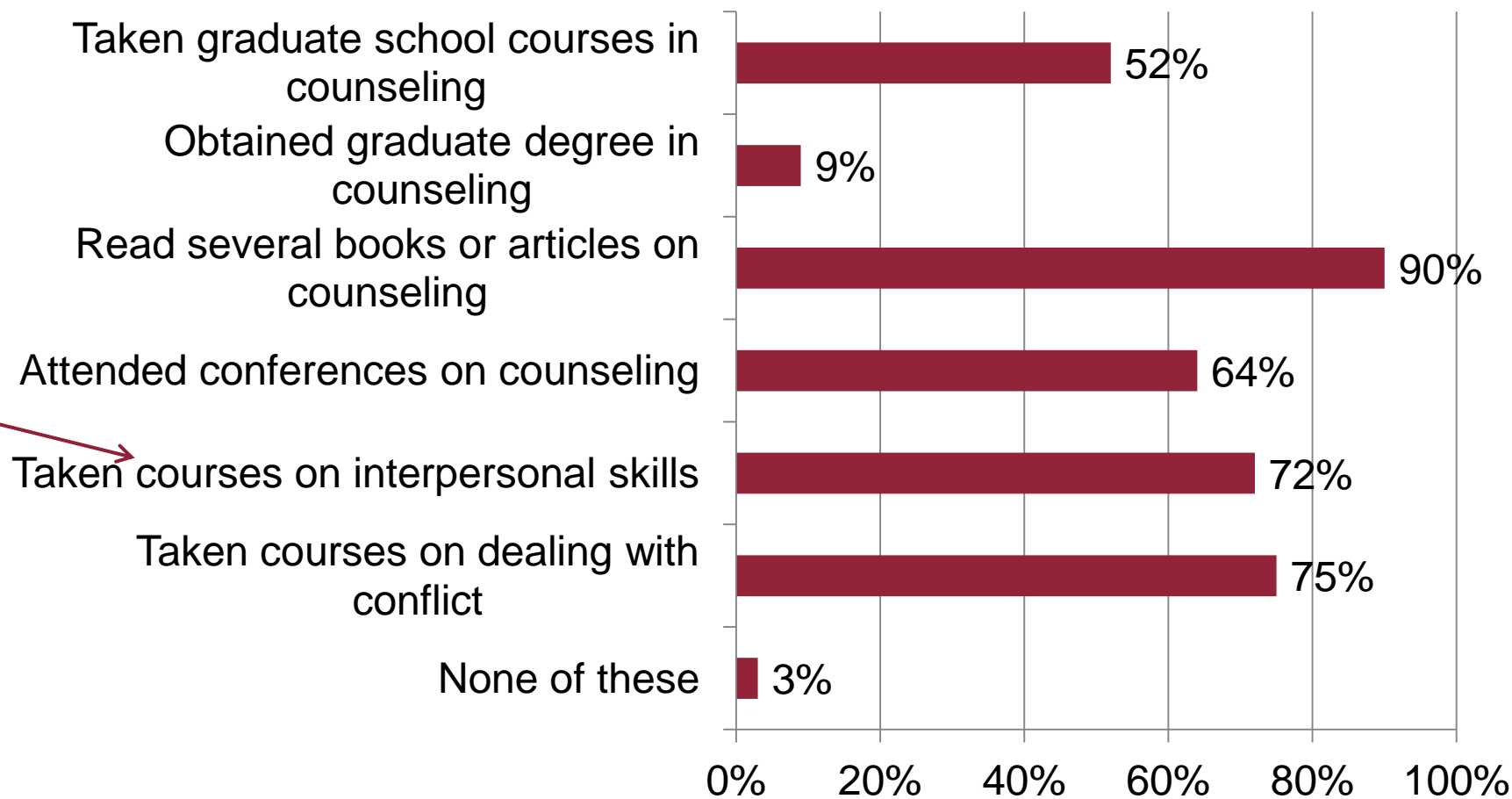
Not sure: <1%

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

Pastors who have **Taken courses on interpersonal skills** are 4.9 times more likely to still be in ministry

Most pastors indicate they have received training in counseling and interpersonal skills



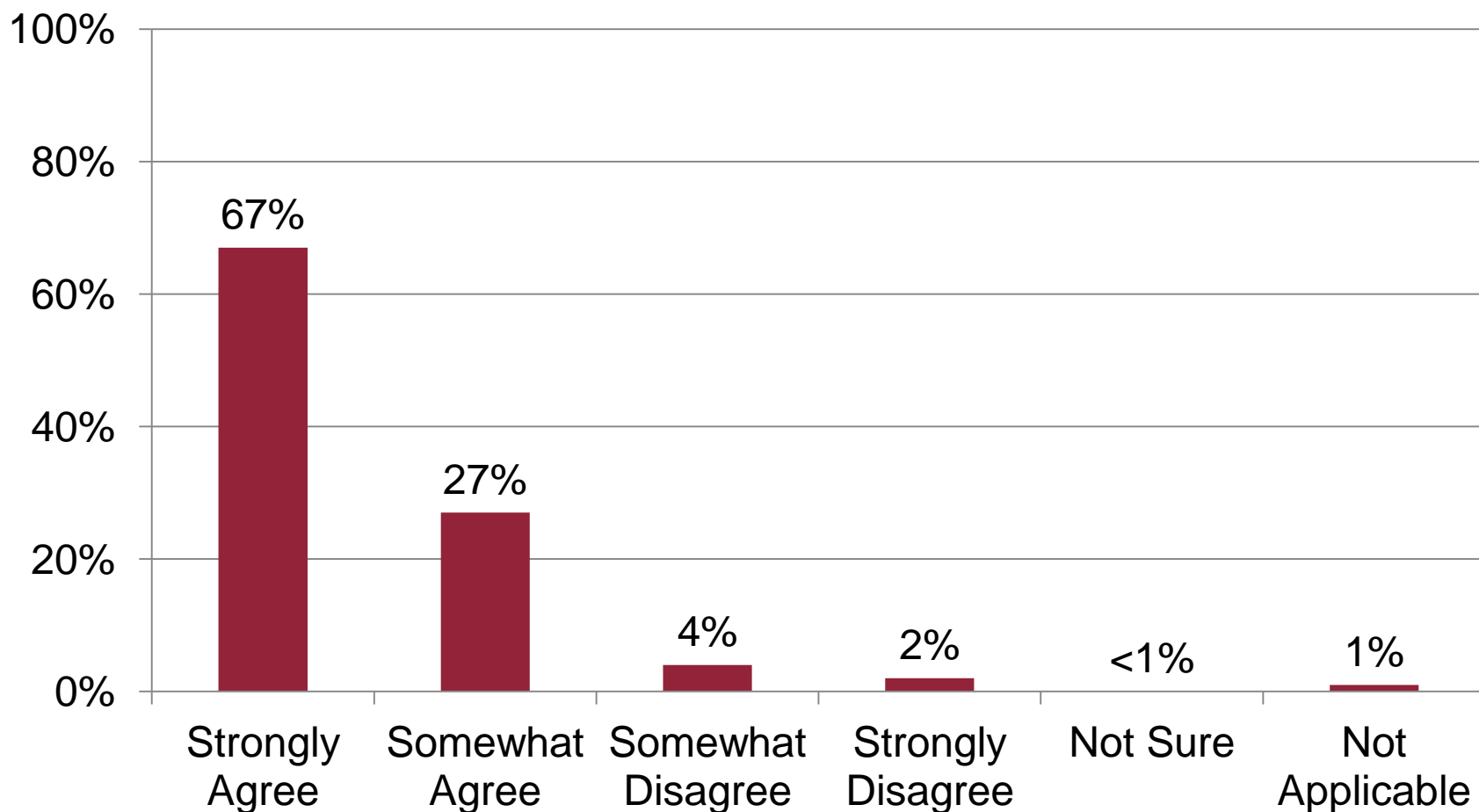
Not sure: <1%

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

A 1 unit increase in agreement that “**I consistently protect time with my family**” are 2.2 times more likely to still be in ministry

Over 9 out of 10 pastors agree that they consistently protect time with their family



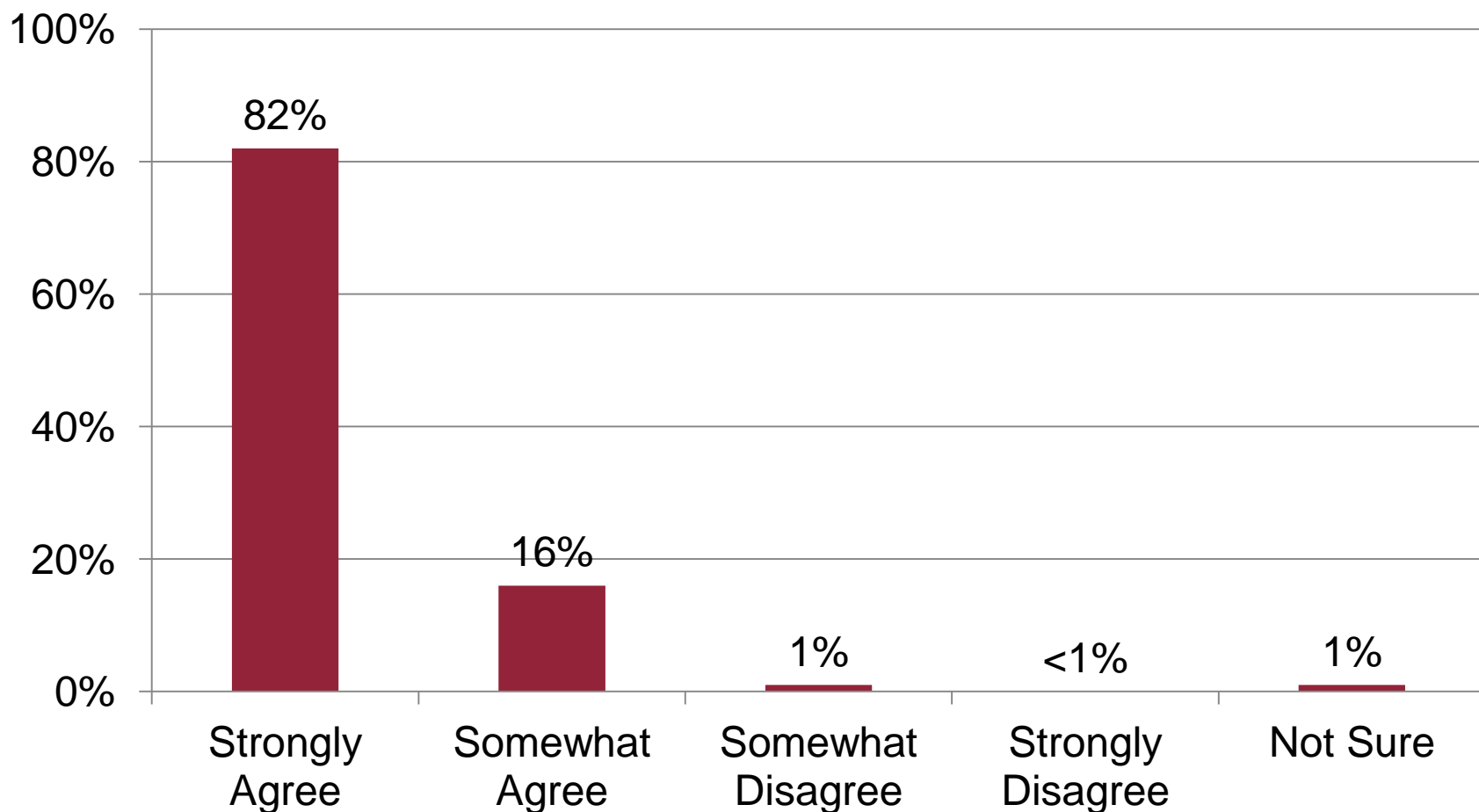
Q9: "I consistently protect my time with my family."

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

A 1 unit increase in agreement that
**“My spouse is very satisfied with
my marriage today”** are 2.3 times
more likely to still be in ministry

98% of pastors agree that their spouse is very satisfied with their marriage today

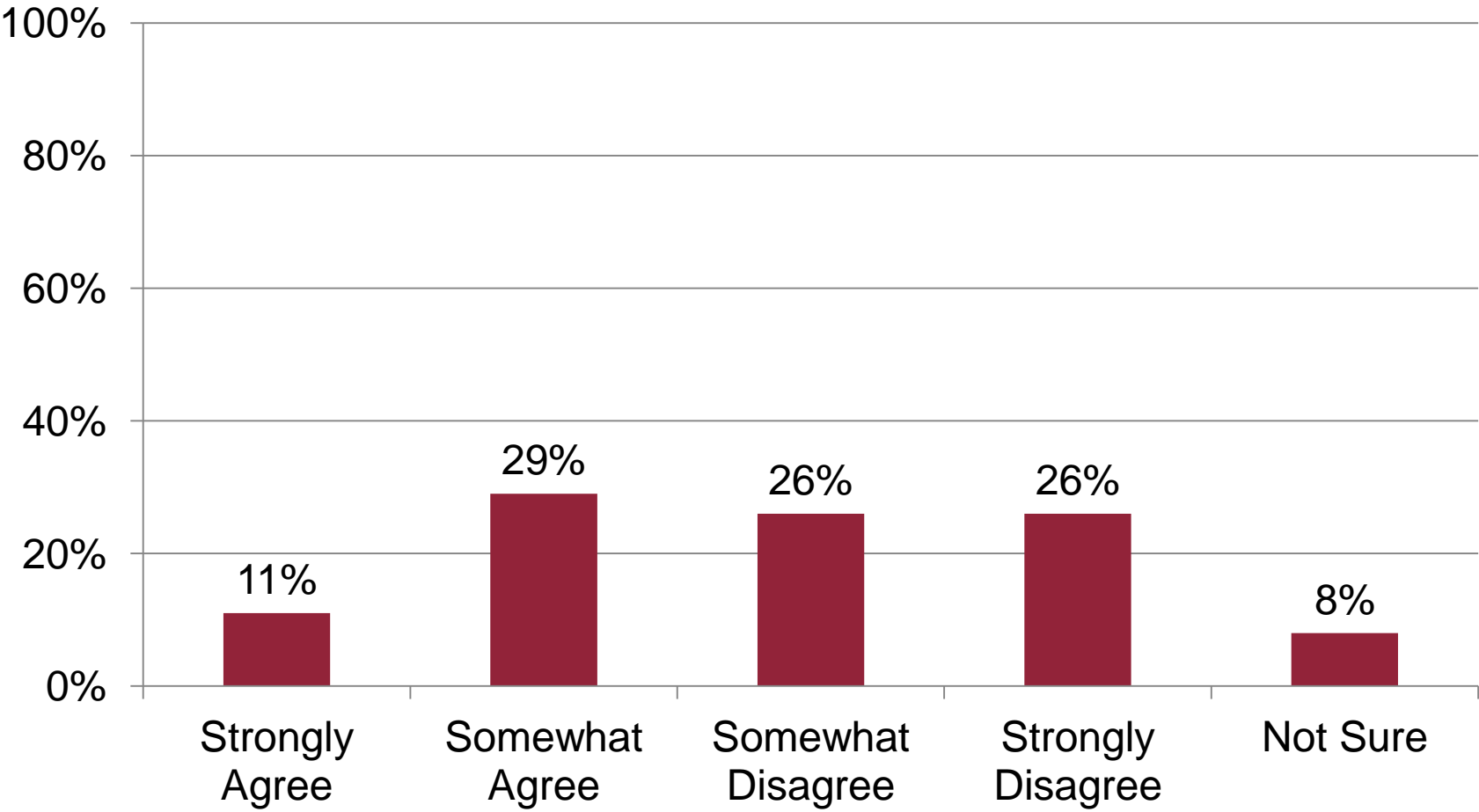


Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

A 1 unit increase in agreement that
**“This church would not have
achieved the progress it has
without me”** are 3.3 times *less* likely
to still be in ministry

4 in 10 pastors agree their churches would not have achieved the progress they have without them



Q27: "This church would not have achieved the progress it has without me."



12 Preventions that Improve the Odds of Staying in the Pastorate

6 things for churches to address:

- ❑ Have a list of counselors to refer people to
- ❑ Have a plan for the pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical
- ❑ Have a document that clearly communicates the church's expectations of the pastor
- ❑ Have a process for church discipline
- ❑ Avoid setting unrealistic expectations of pastor
- ❑ Regularly provide pastor's family with genuine encouragement

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

Pastors in churches that have **a list of counselors to refer people to** are 4.5 times more likely to still be in ministry

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

Pastors in churches that have a **plan for the pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical** are 2.6 times more likely to still be in ministry

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

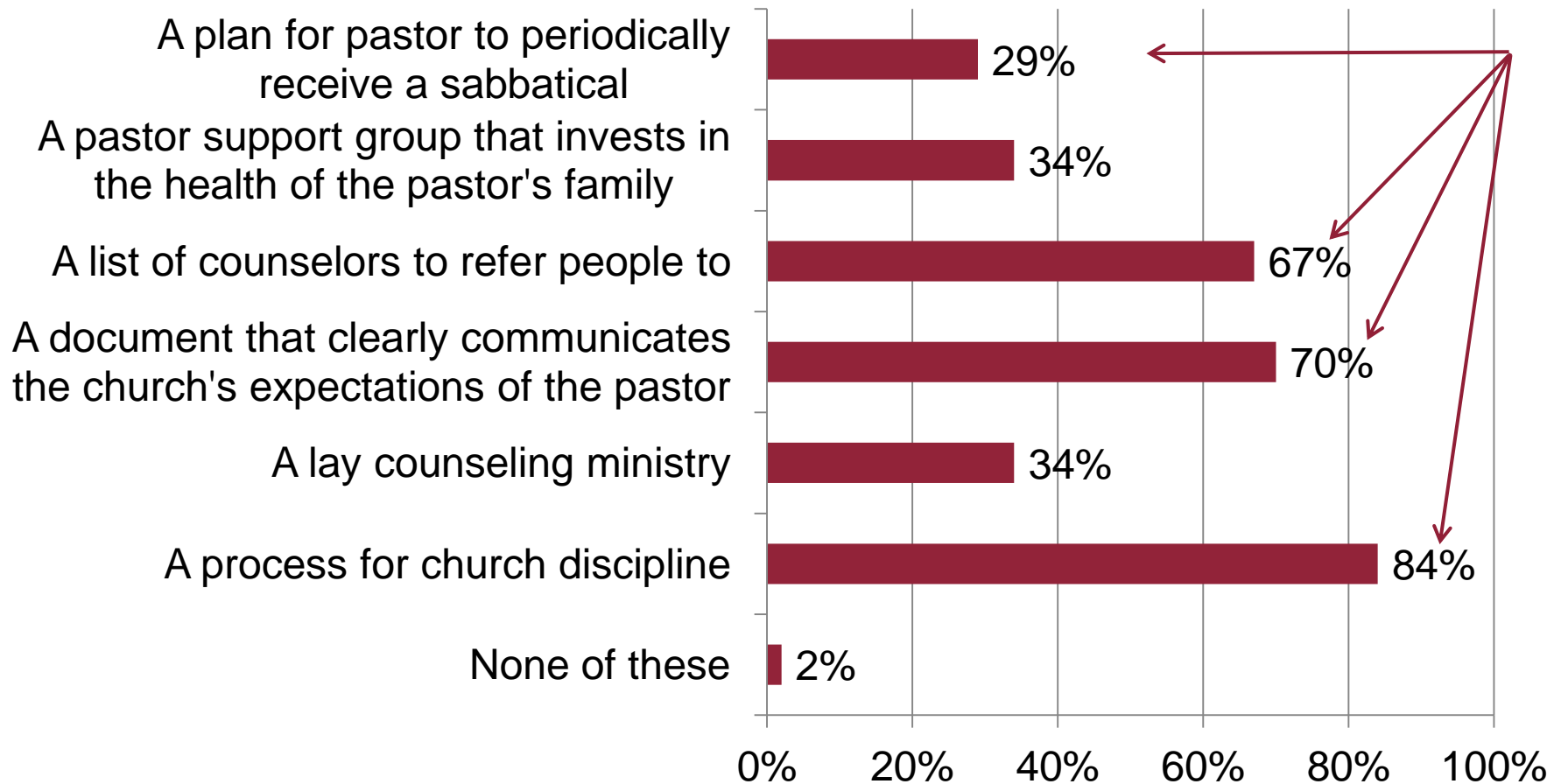
Pastors in churches that have a **document that clearly communicates the church's expectations of the pastor** are **3.3 times more likely** to still be in ministry

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

Pastors in churches that have a **process for church discipline** are 4.3 times more likely to still be in ministry

Majority of churches have in place: a process for church discipline, a document that communicates church's expectations, and a list of counselors to refer people to



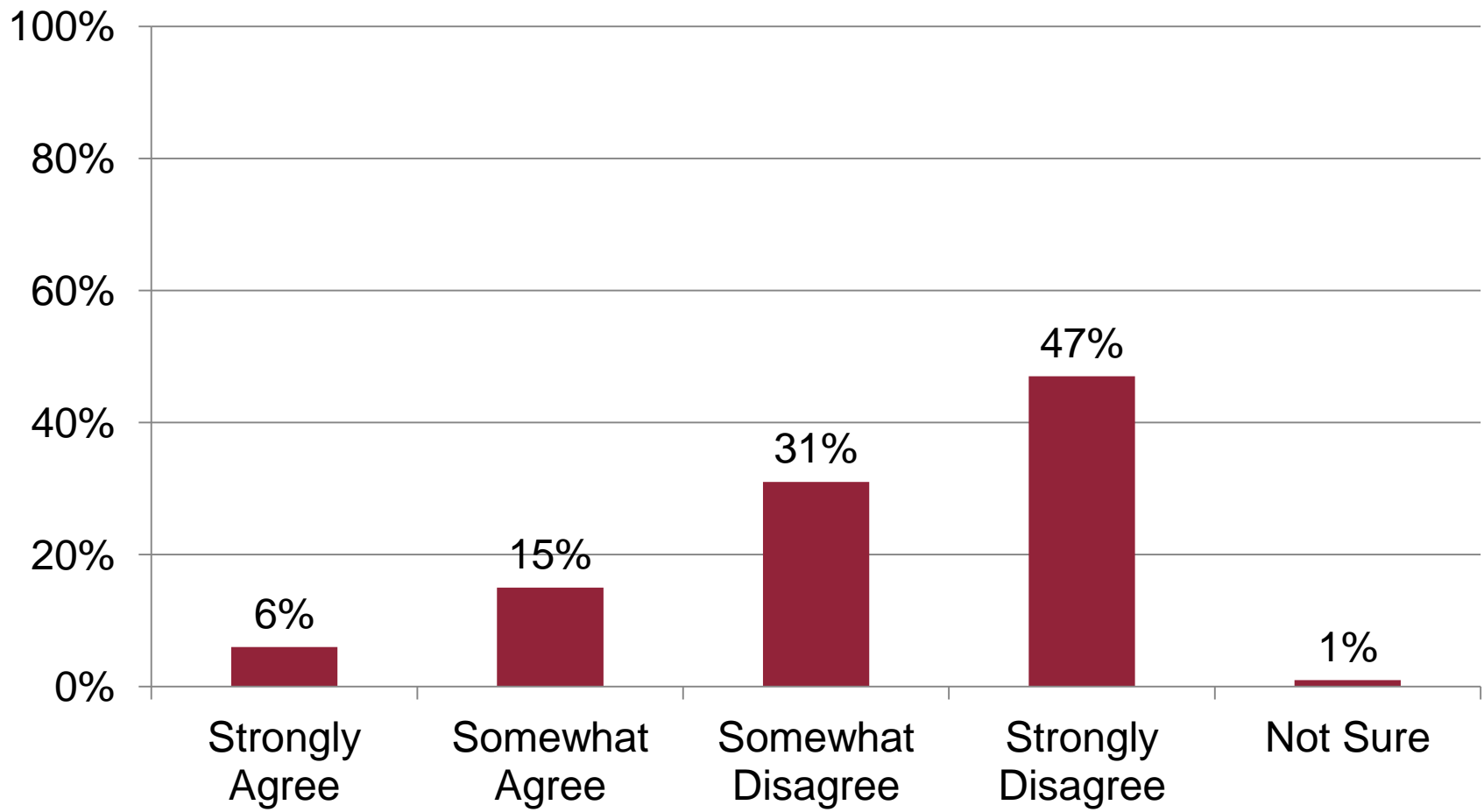
Not sure: <1%

Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

A 1 unit increase in agreement that
**“My church has unrealistic
expectations of me”** are 1.9 times
less likely to still be in ministry

More than 1 in 5 pastors agree their church has unrealistic expectations of them

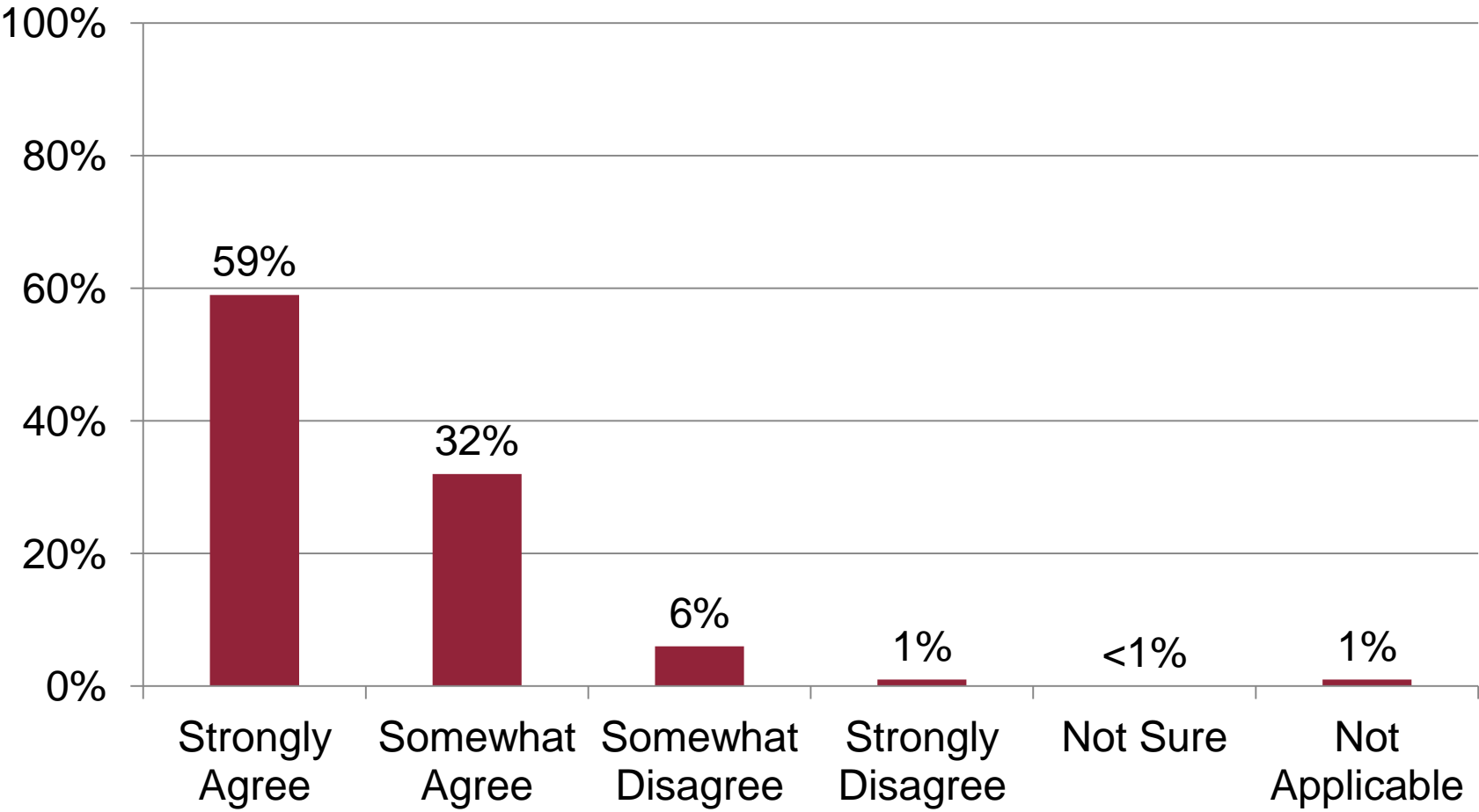


Preventing Pastor Attrition

Holding all other significant variables fixed...

A 1 unit increase in agreement that **“My congregation regularly provides my family with genuine encouragement”** are 2.0 times more likely to still be in ministry

More than 9 in 10 agree their families regularly receive genuine encouragement from their congregations



Q36: "My congregation regularly provides my family with genuine encouragement."



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Pastor Attrition Research

Reports available at:

www.lifewayresearch.com/pastorprotection