

## Abstract

### Objective

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, residency interviews have utilized the virtual interview format. Previous studies have examined applicants' perspectives of the virtual format. This study aims to re-examine the attitudes of applicants during the 2022-2023 application cycle as programs deliberate about returning to in-person or continuing with virtual interviews.

### Methods

Applicants to a single otolaryngology residency program were surveyed during the 2022-2023 application cycle.

### Results

147 out of 405 applicants (36.3%) completed surveys. Seventy respondents (48%) would have preferred in-person interviews. However, only 24 respondents (16.3%) were "dissatisfied" or "strongly dissatisfied" with the virtual interviews. 100 (68%) of applicants "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" that virtual interviews are a satisfactory medium for interacting with faculty, compared to 57 (39%) for interacting with residents. First-time applicants reported a higher mean number of interview offers received than reapplicants (15.8 vs 7.0), and a higher mean number of interviews attended (13.67 vs 6.70), ( $p < 0.00001$ ). There was no significant relationship between dedicating a year to research and number of interview offers received ( $p = 0.542$ ).

### Conclusion

The main advantages of virtual interviews remain decreased cost and time. Many respondents supported a limit on the number of interviews an applicant can accept. To address perceived disadvantages of the virtual format, many applicants advocated for increased "second-look" opportunities.

## Introduction

Virtual interviews (VIs) decrease costs and time requirements<sup>1</sup>. Some have argued that they hinder applicants' ability to interact with faculty and socialize with interns and residents<sup>2</sup>, and that the virtual setting limits applicants' ability to develop an accurate representation of the program<sup>3</sup>, and of programs to assess subtle qualities like overall "fit" of applicants<sup>4</sup>.

Recently, "preference signaling" has been introduced as a method for programs to identify highly interested applicants<sup>5</sup>. This system is expanding to allow applicants to signal 25 otolaryngology programs in the upcoming cycle. Still, applicants continue to pursue gap years, dual-apply, or send "letters of intent". The prevalence and impact of these is unclear.

A recent OPDO survey indicated that many programs (24/58) either prefer or plan to conduct interviews in-person in the upcoming cycle. As more programs are weighing the benefits of in-person versus virtual interviews, it is important to compare applicants' experiences to those of prior application cycles. Analysis of what factors may contribute to applicants receiving greater or fewer interview invitations is also worthy of discussion. This study presents survey results of applicants to otolaryngology programs during the 2022-2023 application cycle.

## Methods and Materials

The survey was designed using Qualtrics XM software. Questions about applicant demographics, experience during VIs, and post-interview communications were included along with a space for comments. Survey items were presented on binary or 5-point Likert scales.

Surveys were emailed to applicants to the Montefiore-Einstein otolaryngology residency program. No identifying information was collected in the main survey. Demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Comments were reviewed by all authors. The data analysis for this paper was generated using Qualtrics XM, Version [March 2023] (Provo, UT, USA).

## Results

### Overall Level of Satisfaction with Virtual Interviews

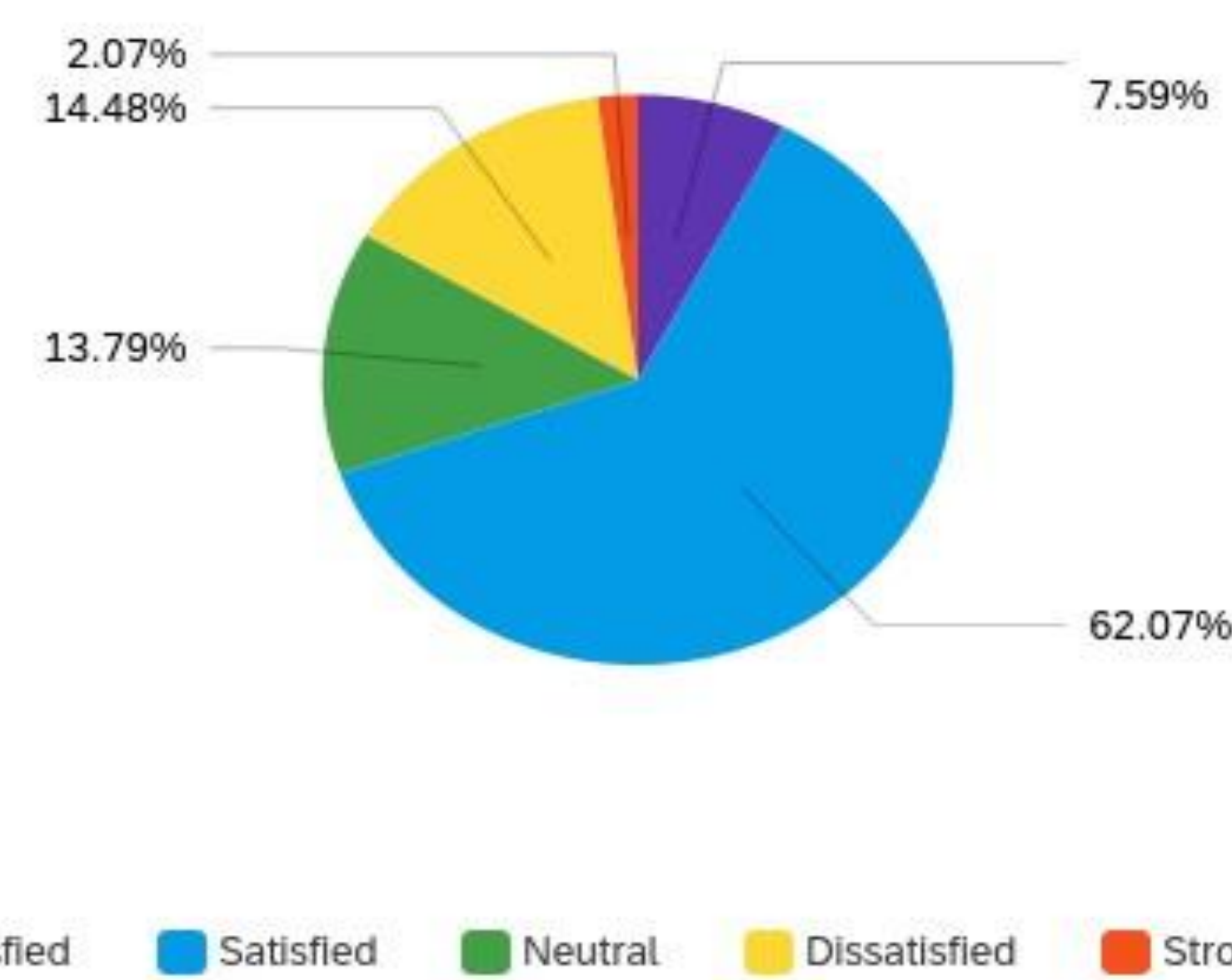


Figure 1: Applicant satisfaction of virtual interviews (n=147)

Given the inherent advantages and disadvantages of virtual interviews, would you have preferred in-person interviews?

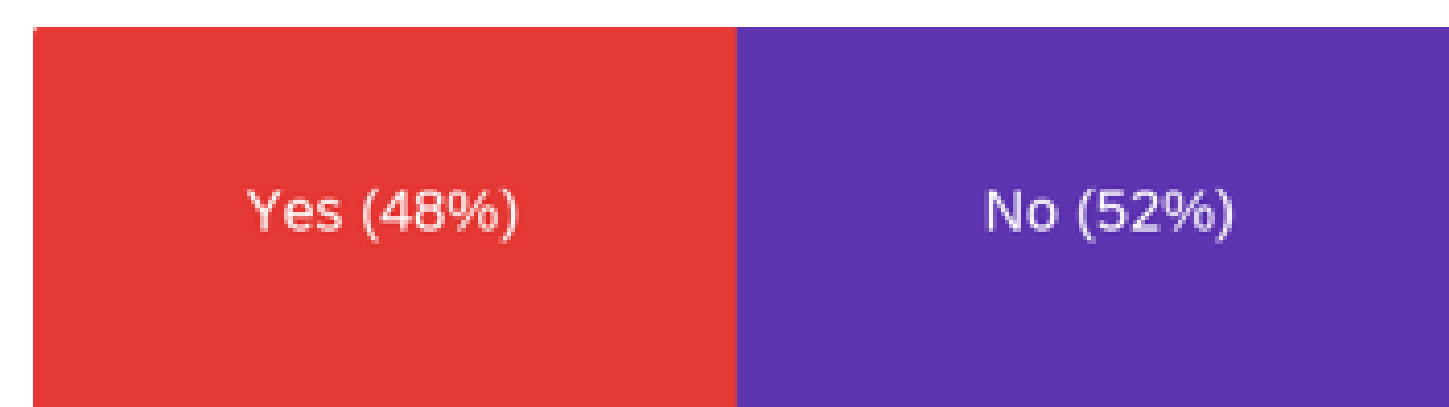


Figure 2: Applicant preferences regarding in-person interviews (n=147)

### Through the Virtual Interview, Applicant Ability to Assess

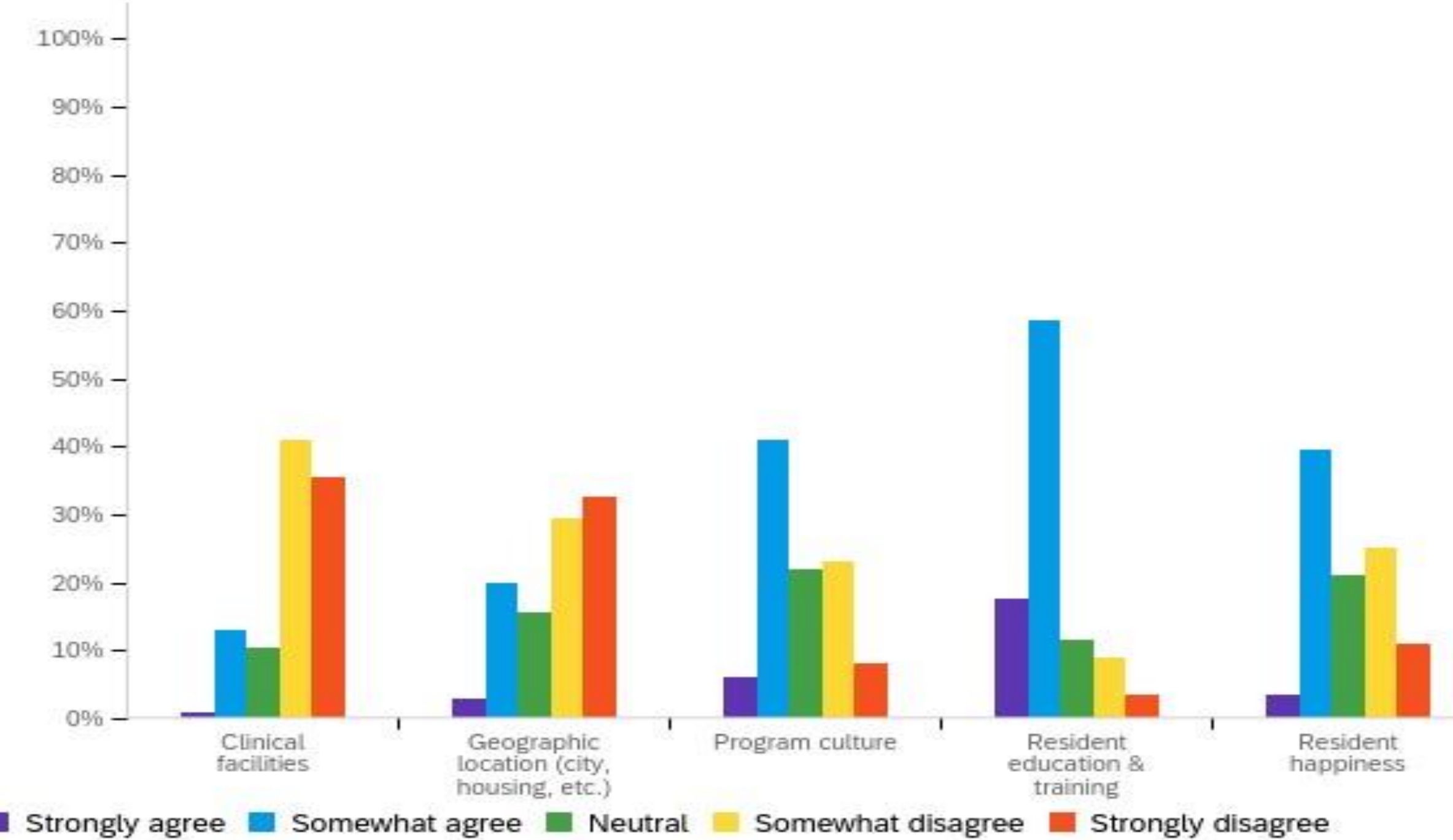


Figure 3: Applicant self-rated ability to assess various components of residency programs via the virtual format (n=147)

### Virtual Interviews are a Satisfactory Medium for

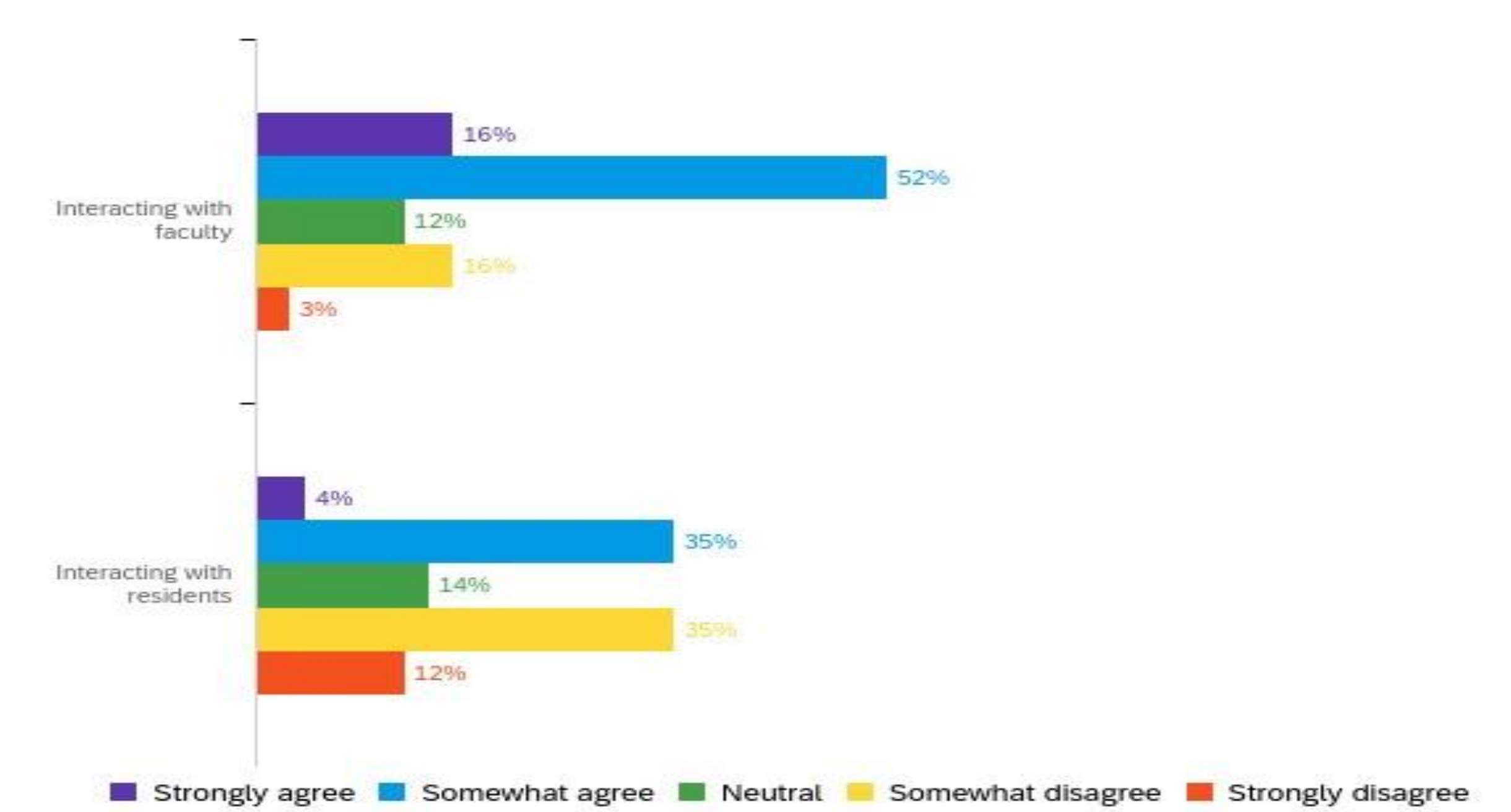


Figure 4: Applicant satisfaction with the virtual format as a medium for interacting with faculty vs. interacting with residents (n=147)

First-time applicants reported a higher mean number of interview offers than reapplicants (15.8 vs 7.0;  $p < 0.00001$ ) and a higher number of interviews attended (13.67 vs 6.70;  $p < 0.00001$ ).

There was no relationship between dedicating a year to research and number of interview offers received ( $p = 0.542$ ). In contrast, dual applicants received fewer otolaryngology interview invitations than applicants to otolaryngology alone (9.03 vs. 16.06;  $p < 0.00001$ ).

Male students received a mean of 12.5 interview offers, compared to 16.6 for female students ( $p = 0.00473$ ). Male students attended a mean of 11.1 interviews, compared to 14.1 for female students ( $p = 0.00476$ ). Male students reported greater overall level of satisfaction with VIs (2.58 vs 2.22,  $p = 0.0257$ ). There was no significant relationship between gender and number of otolaryngology applications sent out ( $p = 0.219$ ).

One hundred-and-one applicants (68.7%) were "strongly satisfied" or "satisfied" with VIs (Figure 1). Seventy applicants (48%) would have preferred in-person interviews (Figure 2).

## Discussion

It seems that VIs will continue in some form moving forward. However, to address virtual interview shortcomings, we intend to continue the following practices that we have refined over the last 3 years. We share these here to inform other programs considering how best to structure these virtual visits within an imperfect system:

- Pre-application open houses during which interested applicants can interact online with residents and faculty.
- A virtual social dinner for interviewees and residents on interview eve.
- A recorded optional web-based virtual tour of facilities.
- An enhanced web page detailing aspects of the program previously shared during in-person interview days.
- Allow any interviewee to visit for a second look, at his/her initiative, once the rank list has been finalized (with a transparent disclosure that the visit is non-evaluative from the program's perspective).

## Conclusion

The majority of respondents (68%) were satisfied with VIs, which is consistent with 66% in 2021. Still, a significant number (48%) of applicants would have preferred in-person interviews. This represents a call to action for program directors to design better ways to allow applicants to learn about their prospective homes for residency if this format is to continue.

## References

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