

Indigenous Mentorship Program for Indigenous Undergraduate Students Pursuing Medicine

Authors: Kelsey Shea ¹, Cathie Moran ¹, Lisa Abel ¹, Tareyn Johnson ², Darlene Kitty ^{1,3}



Affiliations ¹University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine ² University of Ottawa Indigenous Affairs ³ Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

INTRODUCTION

Like many individuals, Indigenous undergraduate students considering medicine as a career may feel uncertain or lack confidence with regard to the application process and may benefit from support or mentorship. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of Indigenous undergraduate students considering a career in medicine as they participated in an Indigenous mentorship program designed to assist them prior to applying to medical school. Specifically, the research team sought to determine if the mentorship program helped to increase awareness of medicine as a career option, impacted self-perceived knowledge, confidence, stress/anxiety levels and preparedness regarding applying to medical school, as well as overall utility of the program. Furthermore, it sought to identify barriers and enablers to implementing and maintaining such a mentorship program.

METHODS

The mentorship program consisted of:

- one-to-one mentee and mentor pairing
- six group sessions

Baseline and follow-up surveys completed Ten participants: 6 mentees (Indigenous undergraduate students at the University of Ottawa) and 4 mentors (Indigenous medical students and medical residents at the University of Ottawa.

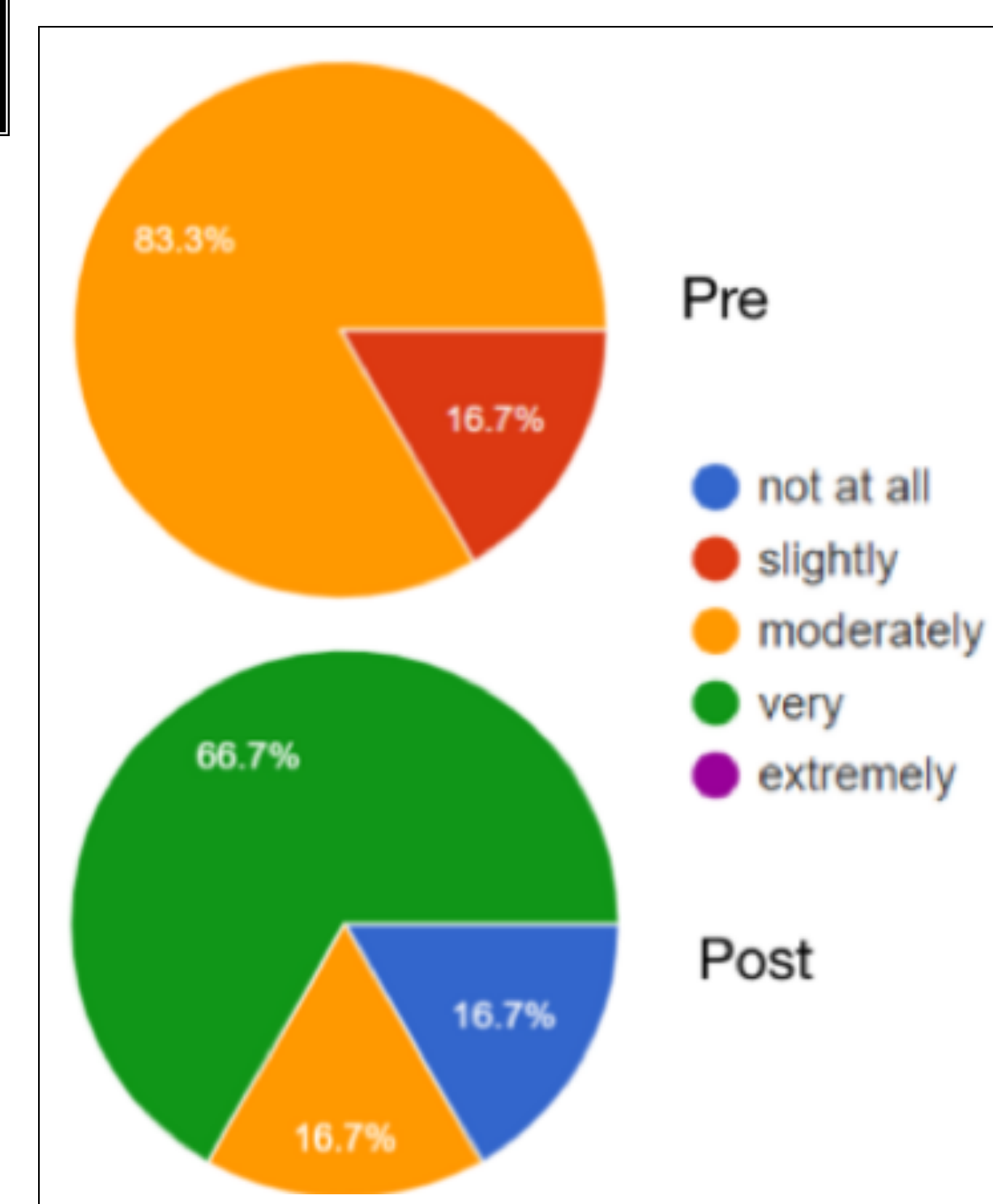
Demographic information and surveys were analyzed using using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

RESULTS

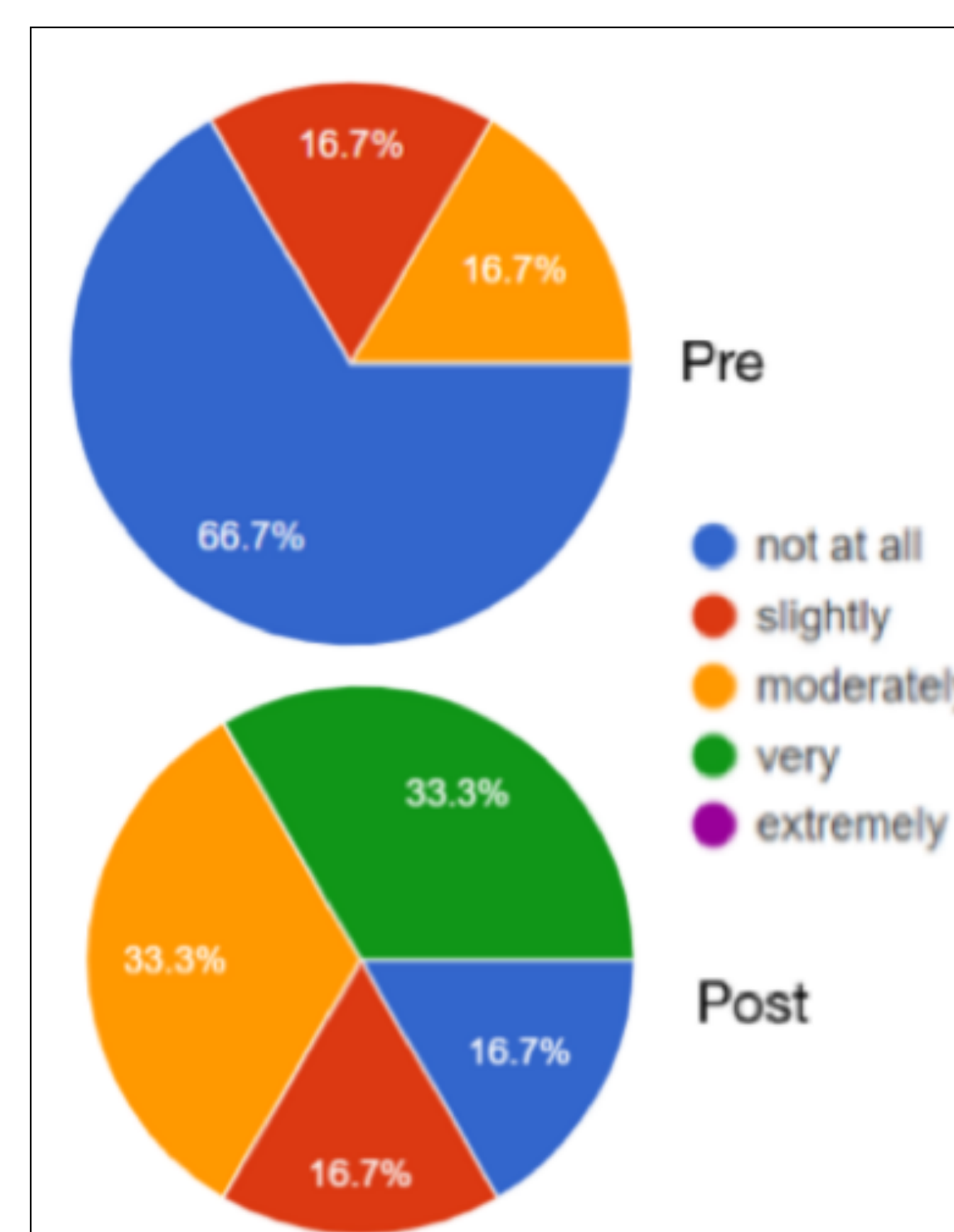
Of the 6 mentee participants, three reported interacting with their one-to-one mentor between 1-4 times, two interacted 5-8 times, and one interacted 17-19 times. One mentee attended all 6 group sessions, three mentees attended 4/6 group sessions, one mentee attended 3/6 sessions, and one mentee attended 1/6 sessions.

Preliminary study results indicate that the mentorship program helped to:

- Increase awareness of medicine as a career option with 4/6 participants indicating that it significantly or very significantly improved awareness
- Decrease stress and/or anxiety levels related to applying , with 4/6 reporting that their stress/anxiety was lower or much lower after participating
- Increase self-perceived confidence, knowledge and preparedness with regards to applying to medical school (see charts)



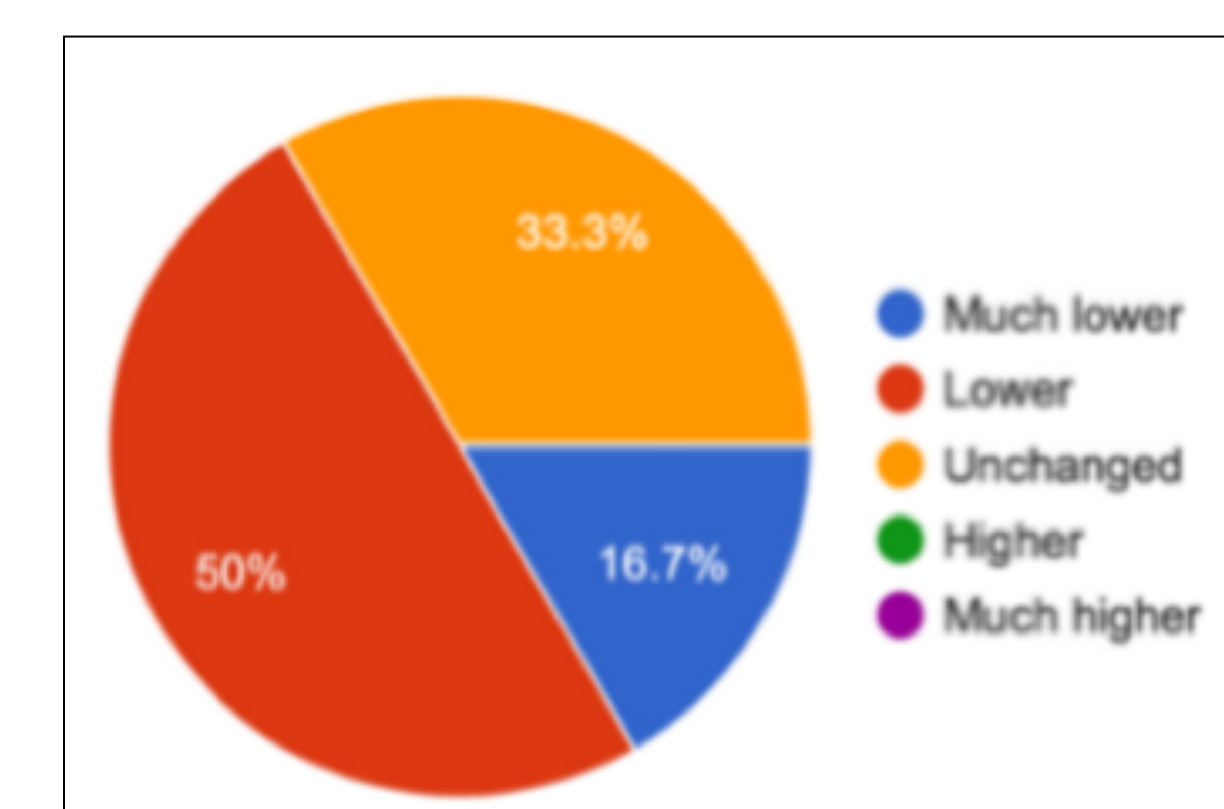
How knowledgeable mentees felt with respect to understanding what is required for a strong medical school application before and after participating: 5/6 felt more knowledgeable. Notably, the individual who did not feel prepared attended 1/6 group sessions



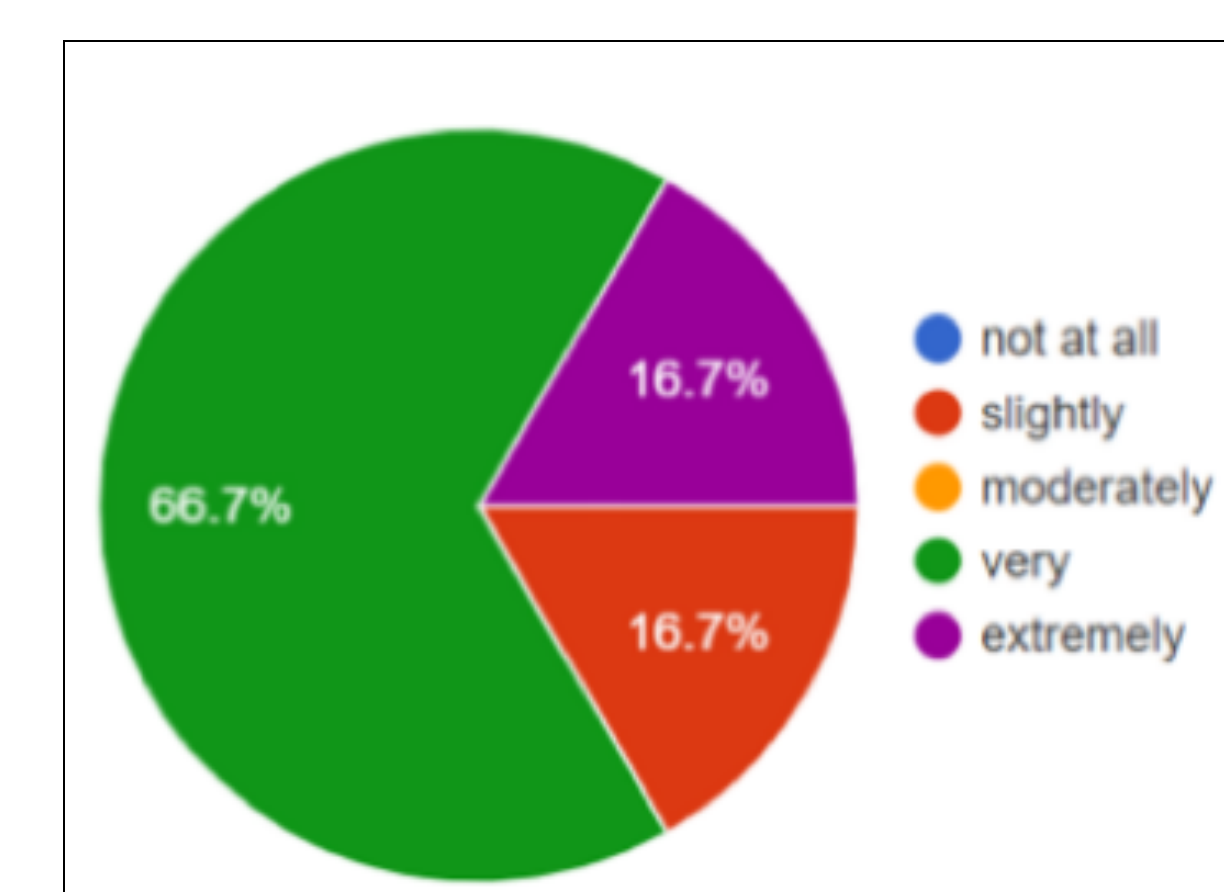
Self-perceived preparedness to apply to medical school before and after participating in the mentorship program: 5/6 Mentees felt more prepared to apply to medical school after participating in the mentorship program.

Identified strengths/enablers to programming included interacting with Indigenous mentors at different levels of medical training, convenient locations for group sessions, funding, engaging social activities, strong mentee-mentor relationships, and level of knowledge of mentors with respect to medicine and the application process.

Identified barriers to programming included scheduling conflicts/logistical challenges, as well as one mentee and two mentors identifying poor mentee-mentor relationship as a barrier. Participants reported that including teaching on traditional Indigenous medicine, and more group sessions would also enhance programming. Furthermore, it was suggested that an initial meeting explaining the intention of the program, providing more opportunities for group socials, as well as facilitating mentor-mentee meetings and regular check-ins with mentors and mentees would be beneficial.



Self-reported stress/anxiety related to applying to medical school at the end of the program in comparison to before starting the program



Mentee ratings of how useful they found the mentorship program

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest that an Indigenous mentorship program for Indigenous undergraduate students considering applying to medical school is perceived as beneficial by mentee participants.

Given the lack of Indigenous representation in the field of medicine, and the fact that mentorship programs have been shown to increase the number of applications to medical schools from under-represented groups, it is crucial to provide mentorship opportunities to Indigenous undergraduate students. This has the potential to help increase the number of Indigenous peoples in the field of medicine as well as positively impact patient care because Indigenous healthcare providers have been shown to be better equipped to provide more culturally competent care to Indigenous individuals and communities.

Future mentorship programs may seek to incorporate traditional Indigenous medicine teachings, facilitate mentor-mentee meetings and check-ins, as well as collect data and conduct research for the purposes of program improvement.

TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to respectfully acknowledge and pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of the land on which this research project took place.

Please email Kelsey.Shea@uottawa.ca for a reference list.