

Making the Invisible Visible

Findings from a national survey of Neurodivergent post-secondary students

Dr Jane Hutchison, Senior Manager, Future Skills Research,

Research Advisory Board



**Wanda
Deschamps**

Principal,
Liberty Co
Consulting



**Radha
MacCulloch**

CEO,
Specialisterne
Canada



**Dr Megan
Ames**

Assistant
Professor,
University of
Victoria



**Dr Carly
McMorris**

Associate
Professor,
University of
Calgary



**Ameera
Azam**

Research &
Engagement
Facilitator,
ESYD



**Andrea
Hoff**

PhD
Candidate,
University of
British
Columbia

Context

- It is estimated that 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent
- Neurodivergent identities and diagnoses include but are not limited to Autistic/autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders.
- Neurodivergent individuals are underrepresented in the Canadian workforce. Contributing factors include lagging graduation rates and limited opportunities for experiential learning in PSE.
- In 2018, the National Education Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) reported significant disparities between experiences of students with disabilities across post-secondary institutions (PSIs). A lack of comprehensive data reinforces siloed approaches to inclusion and accessibility in Canadian PSE.

Gaps in the Literature

To date, published empirical research on neurodivergent students' experiences in PSE is comprised of:

- reviews of existing literature
- non-empirical perspectives on current practice
- small scale (< 40 participants)
- generally qualitative
- include only participants from the same PSI or same PSI type (e.g., only colleges)
- include participants from a smaller subset of the larger neurodivergent population (e.g., only Autistic/have autism or have a learning disability)

Study Aims and Goals

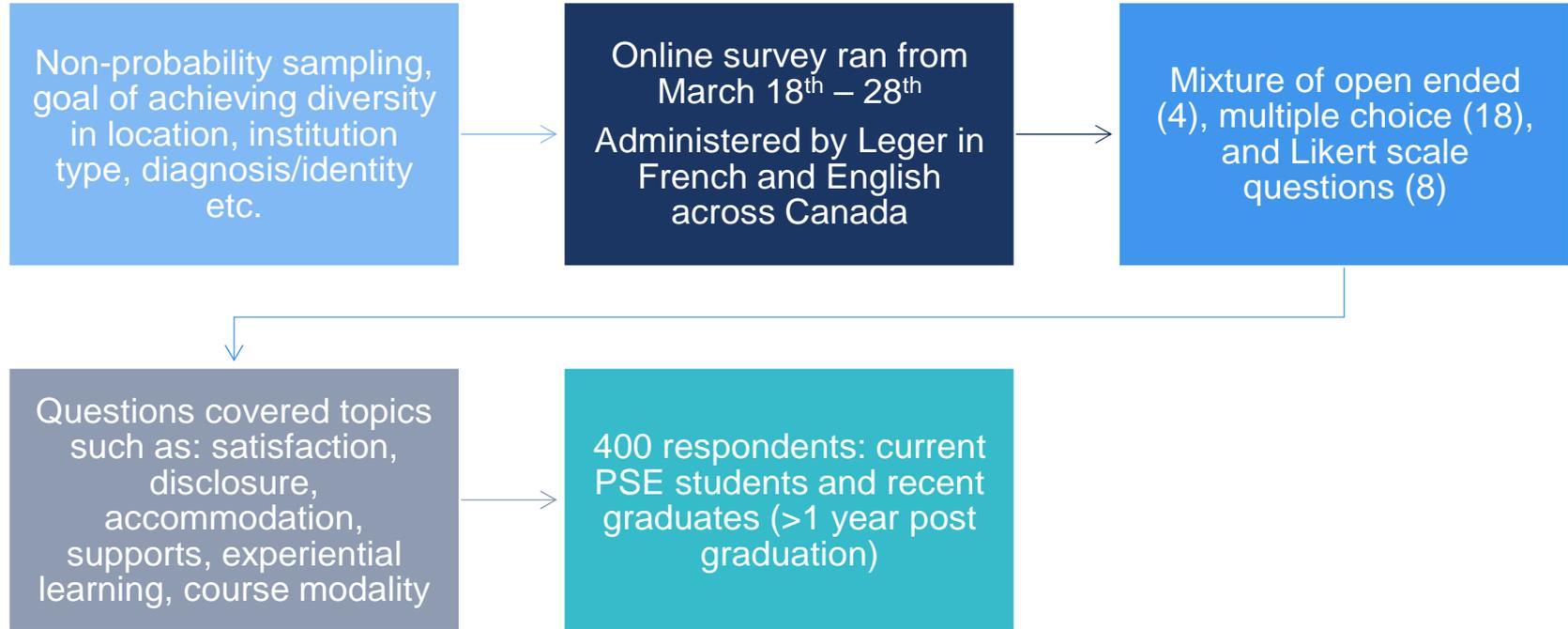


This research is the first Canadian study to apply a mixed-methods approach to investigating neuroinclusive practices and policies nationally from a multi-stakeholder perspective.



Our goal is to provide actionable recommendations and guidance for PSIs to enhance the neuroinclusion of post-secondary education

Quantitative Survey

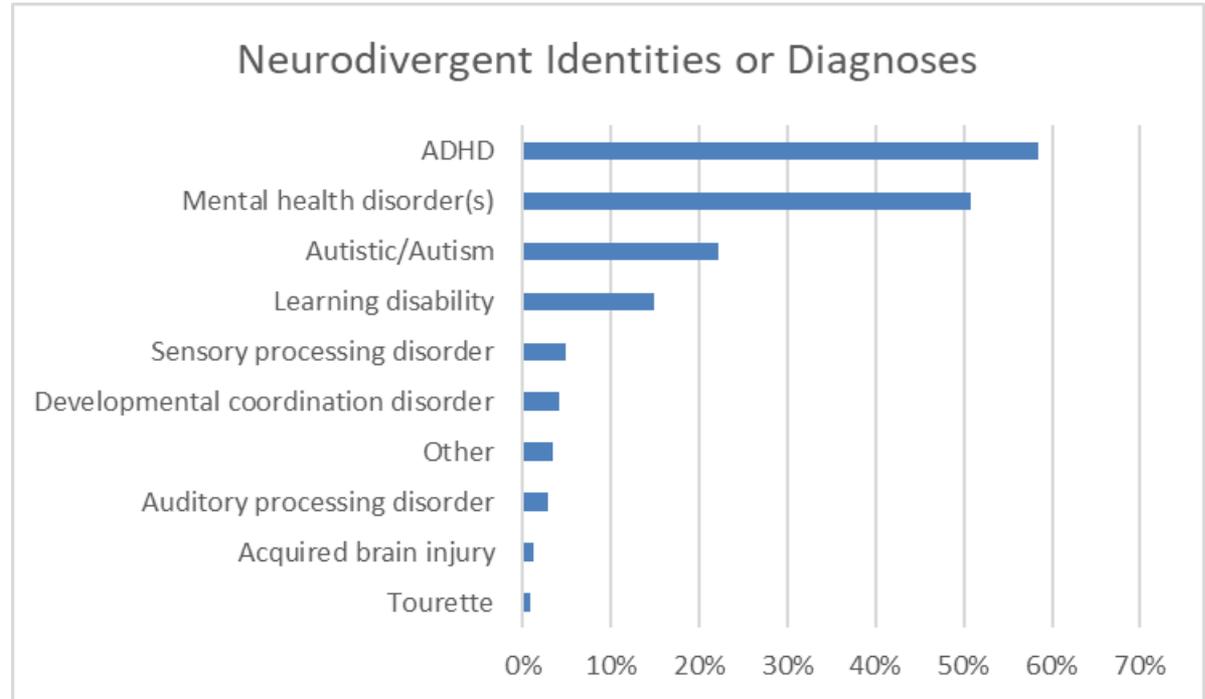




Who are the neurodivergent student population in Canadian post-secondary education?

Prevalence and Co-occurrences

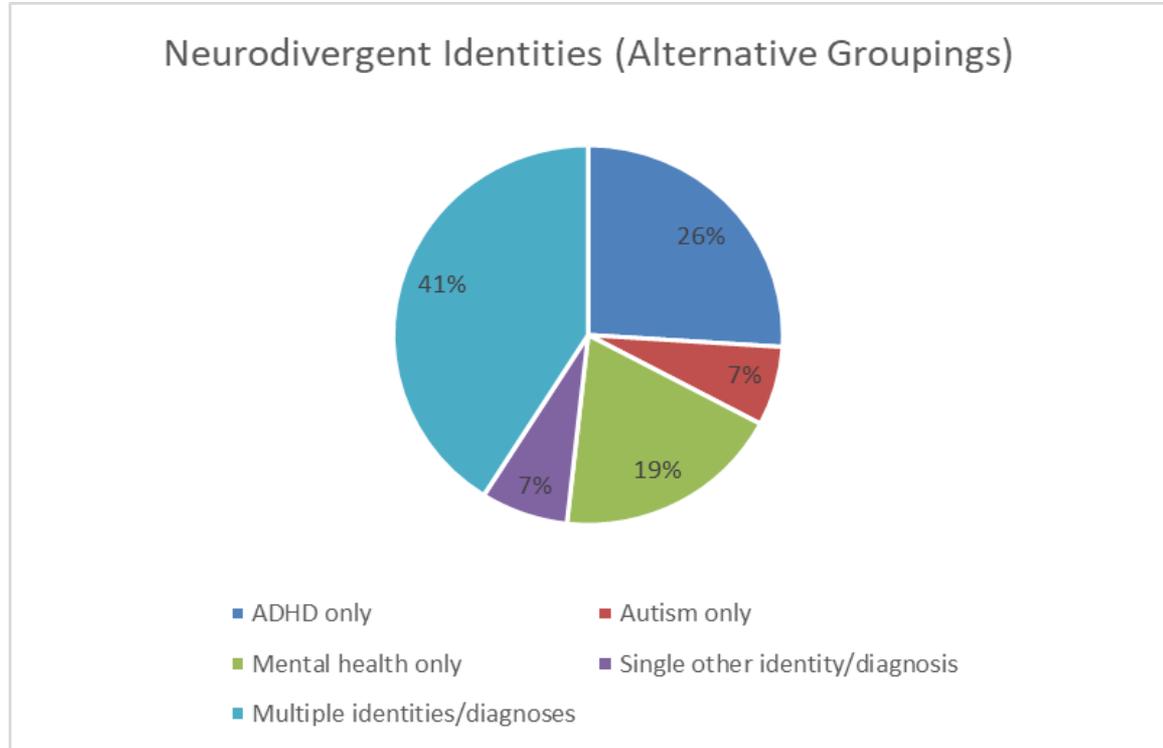
- Almost 60% of neurodivergent students identify as/have an ADHD diagnosis
- Over 50% of neurodivergent students report having a mental health disorder



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

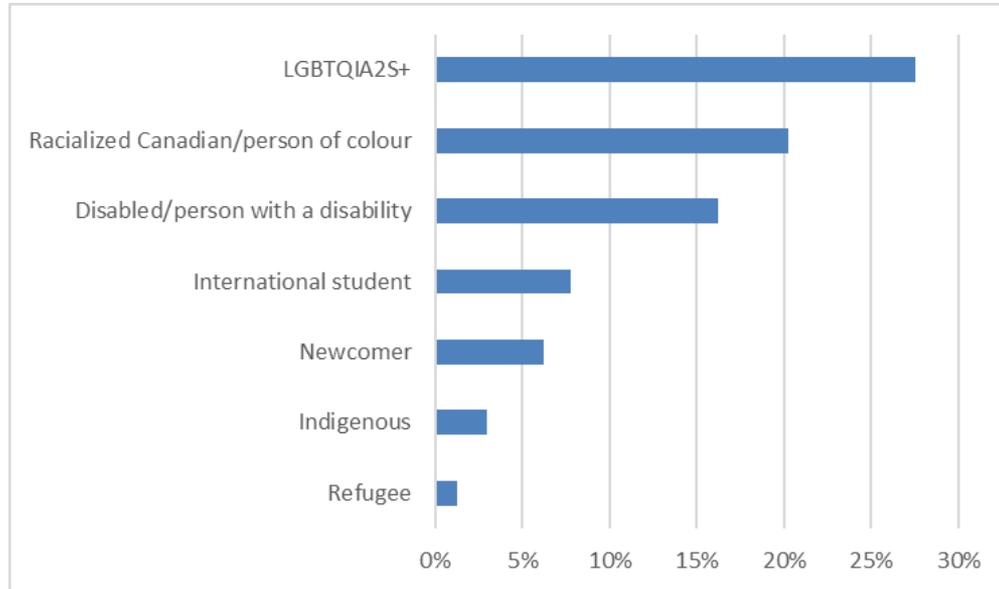
Prevalence and Co-occurrences

Over 40% of neurodivergent students have co-occurring neurodivergent identities/diagnoses



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Intersectional identities

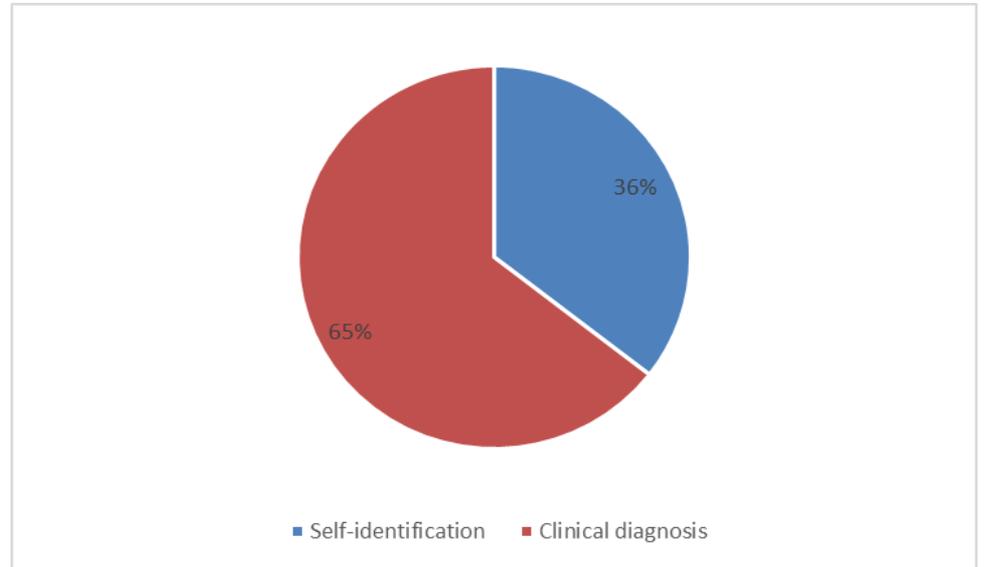


Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

- Many neurodivergent students have additional intersecting identities that impact their experiences of inclusion and accessibility.

Diagnosis and self-identification

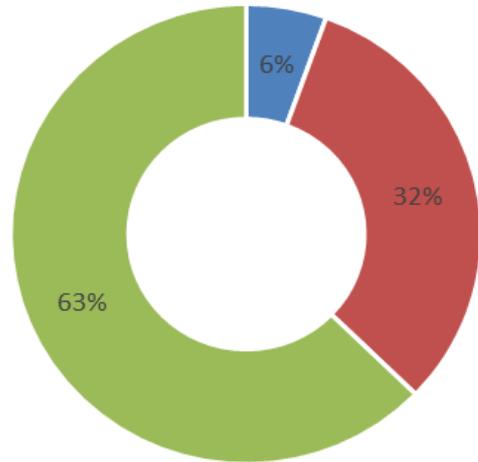
- Approximately 2/3 of the neurodivergent student population have a clinical diagnosis, with approximately 1/3 self-identified.



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Institution and program enrollment

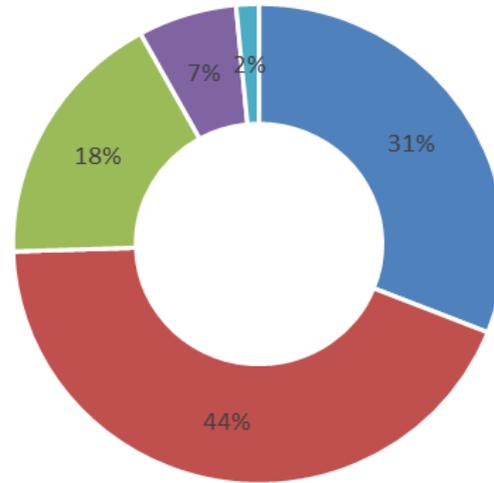
Institution Type



■ Polytechnic ■ College ■ University

Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Program

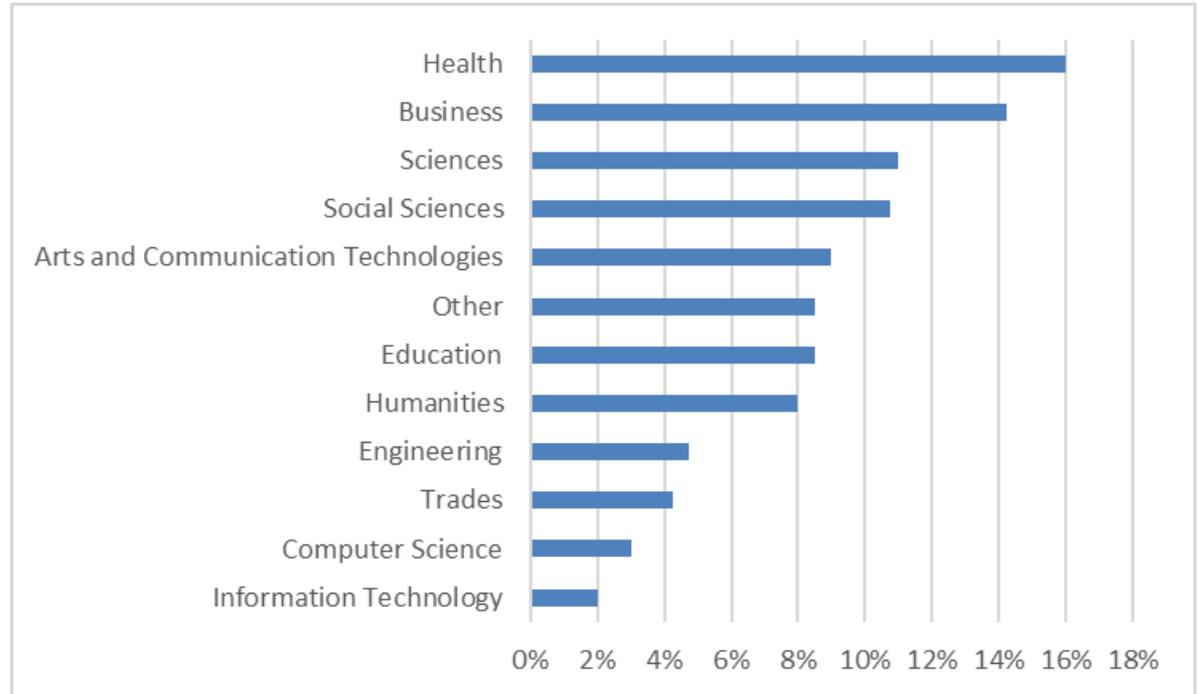


■ Diploma or certificate ■ Undergraduate ■ Graduate ■ Professional ■ Other

Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Area of study

The areas with the lowest neurodivergent student enrollment are computer science and information technology



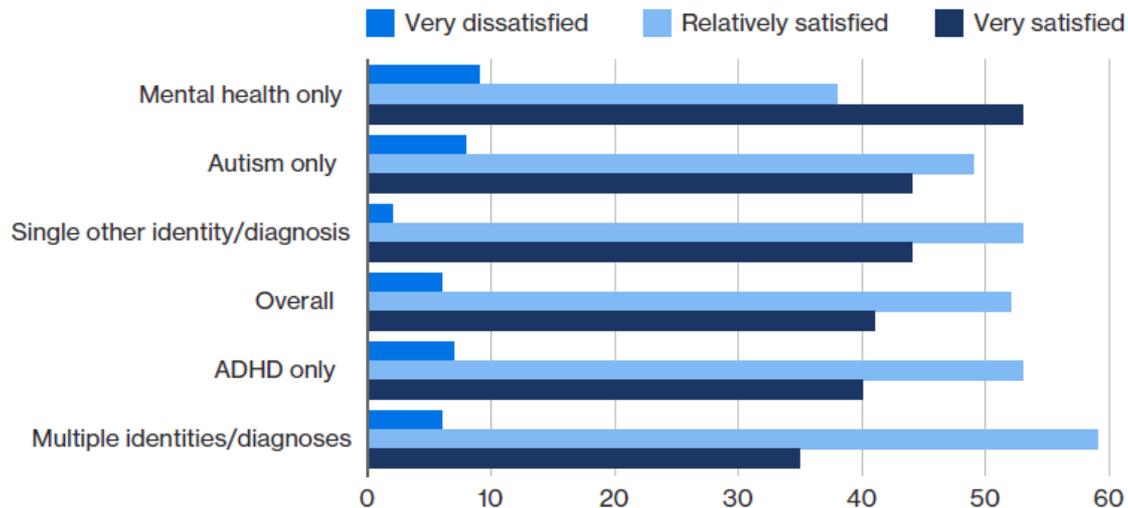
Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)



Student satisfaction with post-secondary institution

Student satisfaction and diagnosis/identity

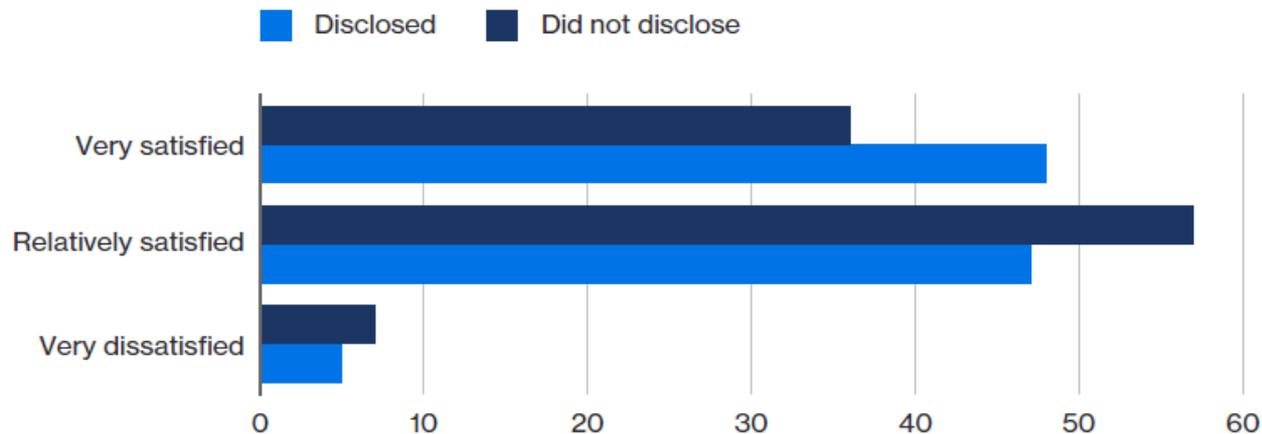
Q: On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), indicate your level of overall satisfaction with your post-secondary institution?



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Student satisfaction and disclosure

Q: On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), indicate your level of overall satisfaction with your post-secondary institution?



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)



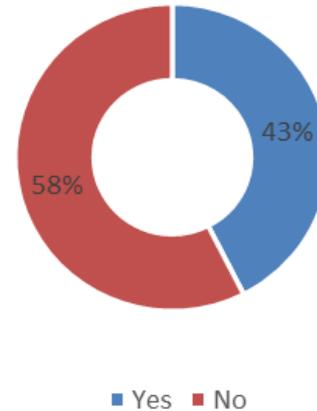
Experiences of disclosure & receiving accommodations

Disclosure to institution

Q: Disclosure is the process of explaining the impact of your diagnosis or disability and usually happens due to the need for an accommodation for learning or participation.

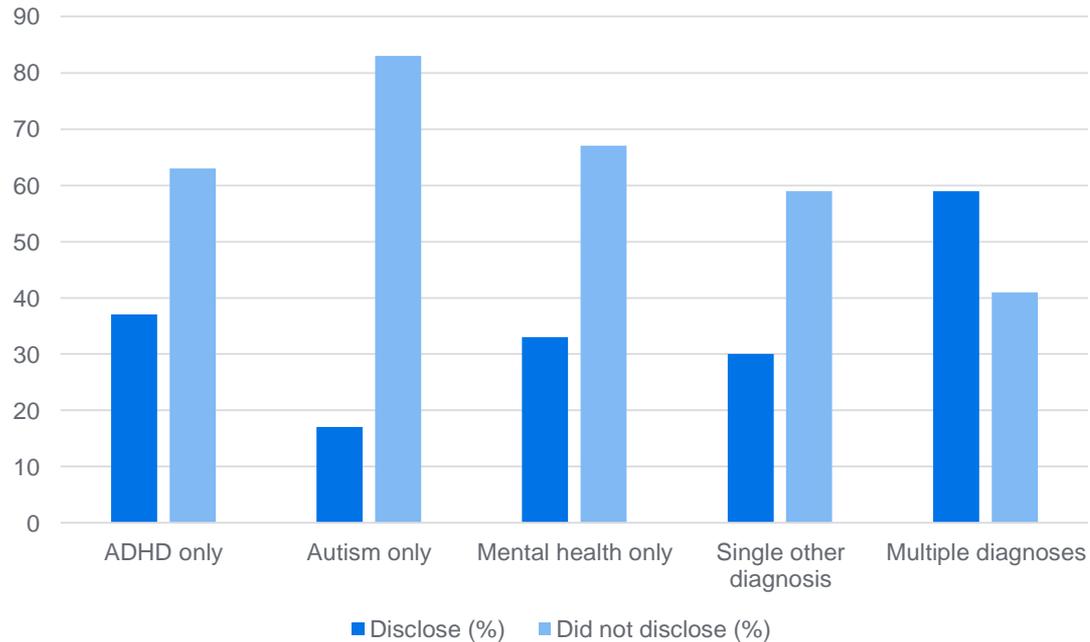
Have you disclosed to your institution that you are neurodivergent?

Disclosed neurodivergence to institution?



Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Disclosure Rates by Identity/Diagnosis Type



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=400

Less than half of neurodivergent students choose to disclose their neurodivergent status

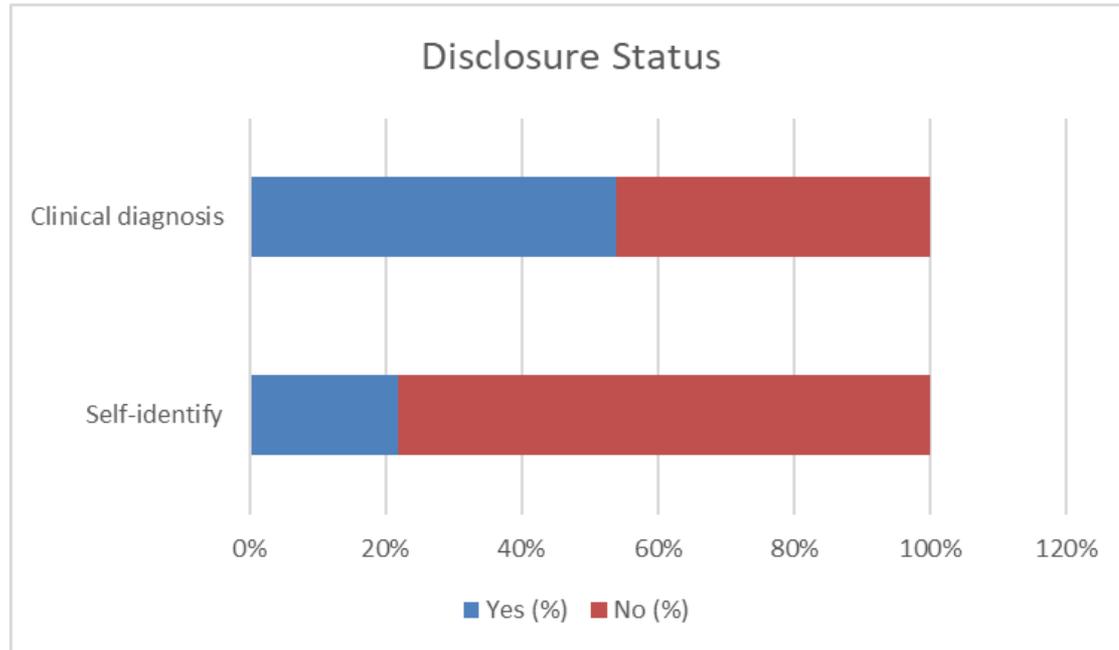
Q. Why did you choose not to disclose? Check all that apply:



While less than half disclose, 73% of those who did not disclose identified at least one barrier to disclosure

Source: The Conference Board of Canada. n=230

Disclosure rates for clinical vs self diagnosis

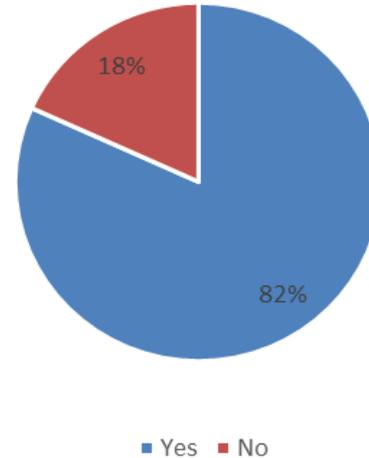


Source: Conference Board of Canada (n = 400)

Disclosure continued

Q: Were you able to receive accommodations for learning through the accessibility/disability centre at your institution?

Were you able to receive accommodations?



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. n=170

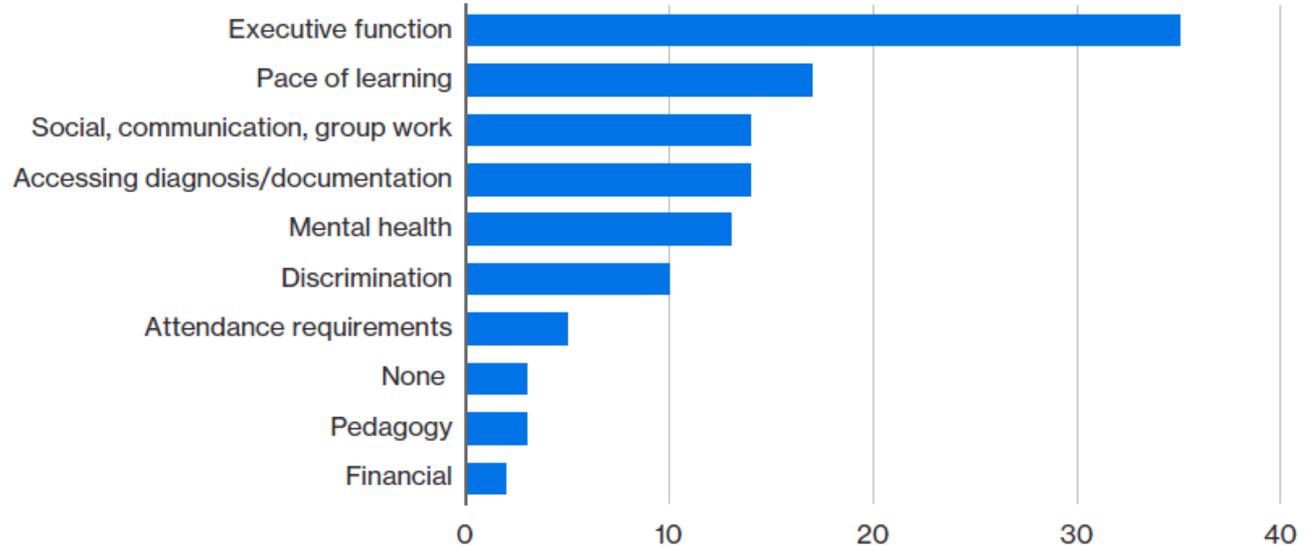
What are the challenges neurodivergent students experiencing?



Challenges reported by students

Q: In just a few words, what are the biggest barriers (challenges) you've faced as a neurodivergent student in post-secondary education?

(thematically coded responses)



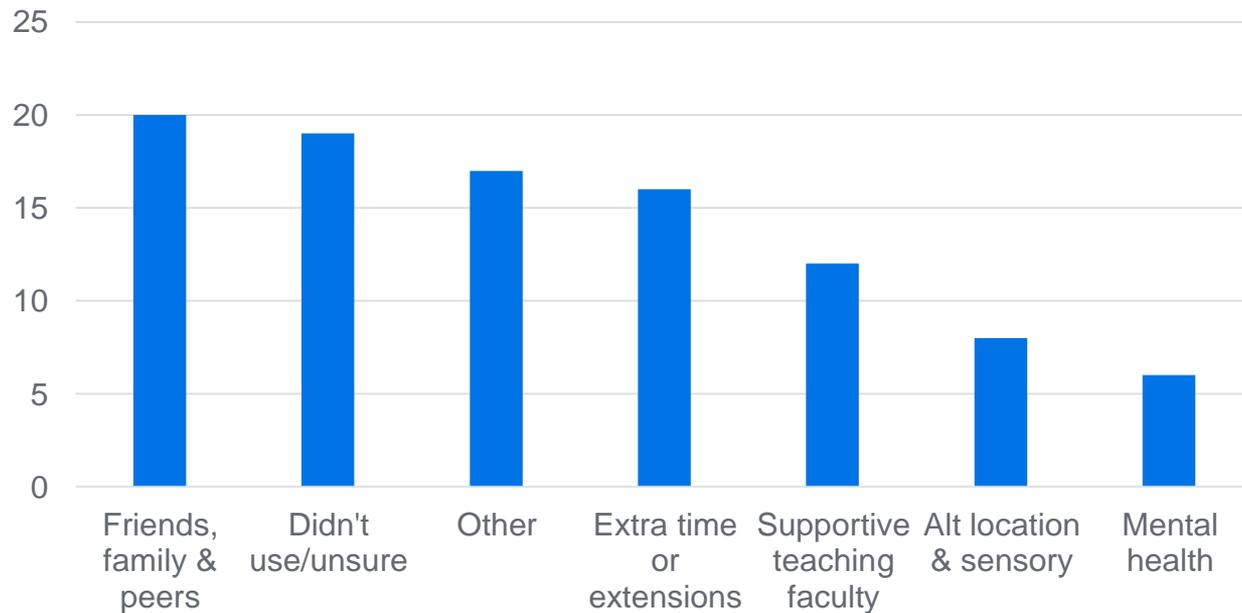
Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=370



What are neurodivergent students finding helpful?

Impactful supports reported by neurodivergent students

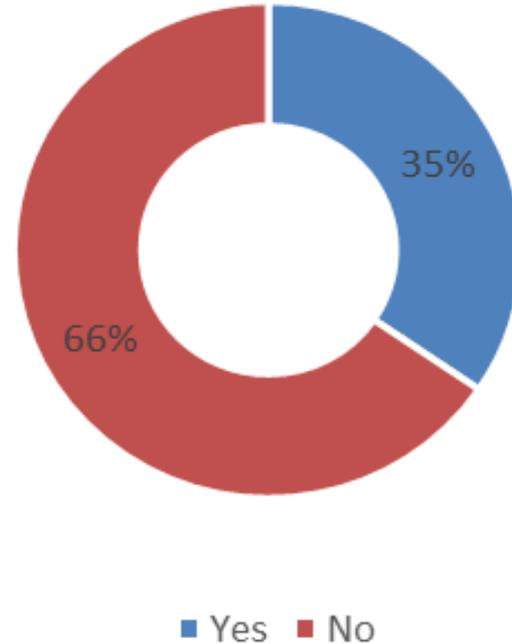
Q: In just a few words, what are the most impactful supports you've received, as a neurodivergent student, in post-secondary education?"



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=370

Accessing supports

Q: Have you accessed supports or opportunities specifically for neurodivergent students at your institution?"

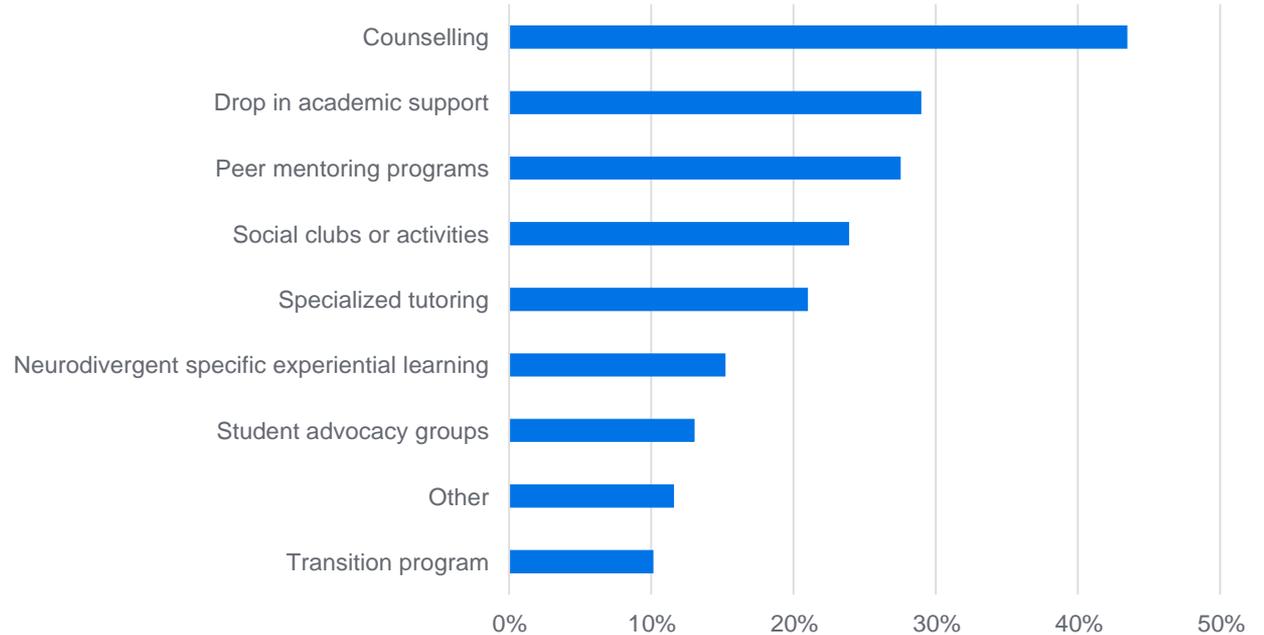


Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=400

Supports Accessed

Q: Which of the following types of supports or opportunities have you accessed at your institution?

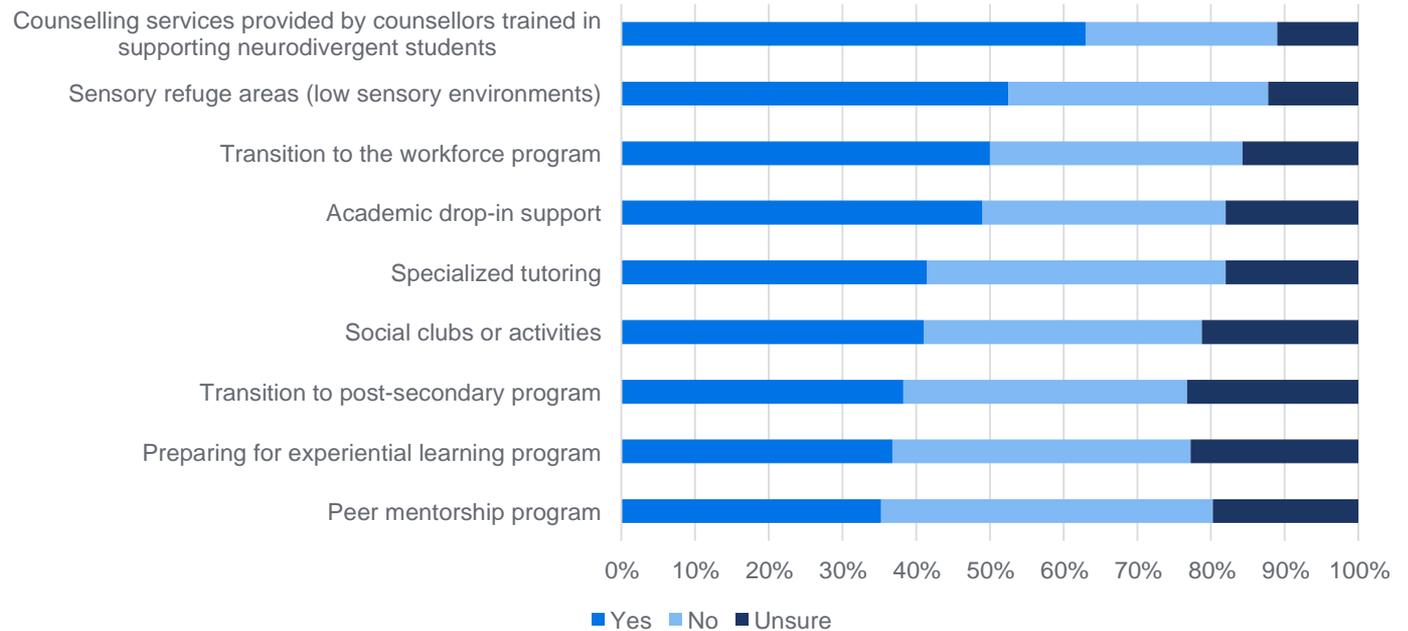
Check all that apply:



Source: The Conference Board of Canada. N=400

Desired Supports

Q: Would you use or participate in the following supports?”

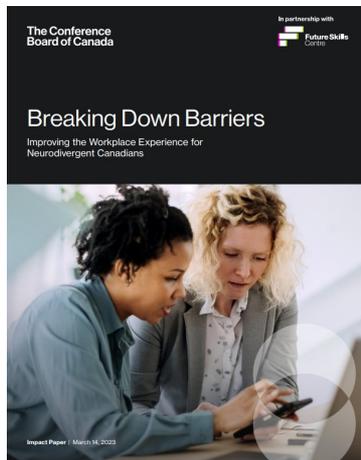


Interested in learning more?

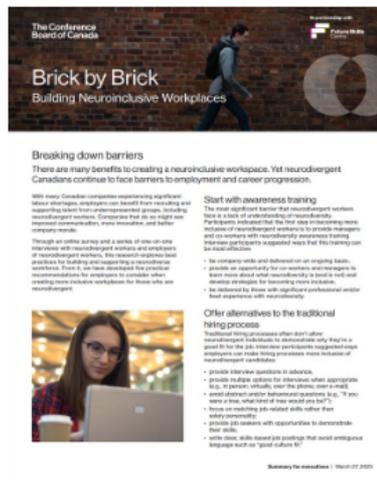
Upcoming presentation on qualitative study data and insights for post-secondary institutions, leaders, and professionals on creating neuroinclusive campuses:

Insert second session info

Interested in other CBoC research on neurodiversity?



[Breaking Down Barriers: Improving the Workplace Experience for Neurodivergent Canadians](#)



[Brick by Brick: Building Neuroinclusive Workplaces](#)



Where insights
meet impact

The Conference
Board of Canada

[conferenceboard.ca](https://www.conferenceboard.ca)