

Impact of Homelessness, Crime, Addictions, and Mental Health on Businesses and Organizations

Arranged by

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Introduction

The North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce recognizes the growing concerns surrounding homelessness, crime, addictions, and mental health in our community. As part of our commitment to fostering a safe and prosperous environment for all residents and businesses, we conducted a comprehensive survey to gather feedback from Chamber members, business owners, organizations, and stakeholders. The goal of this survey was to better understand the business community's perspectives on these pressing issues and to identify potential solutions that could be implemented at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

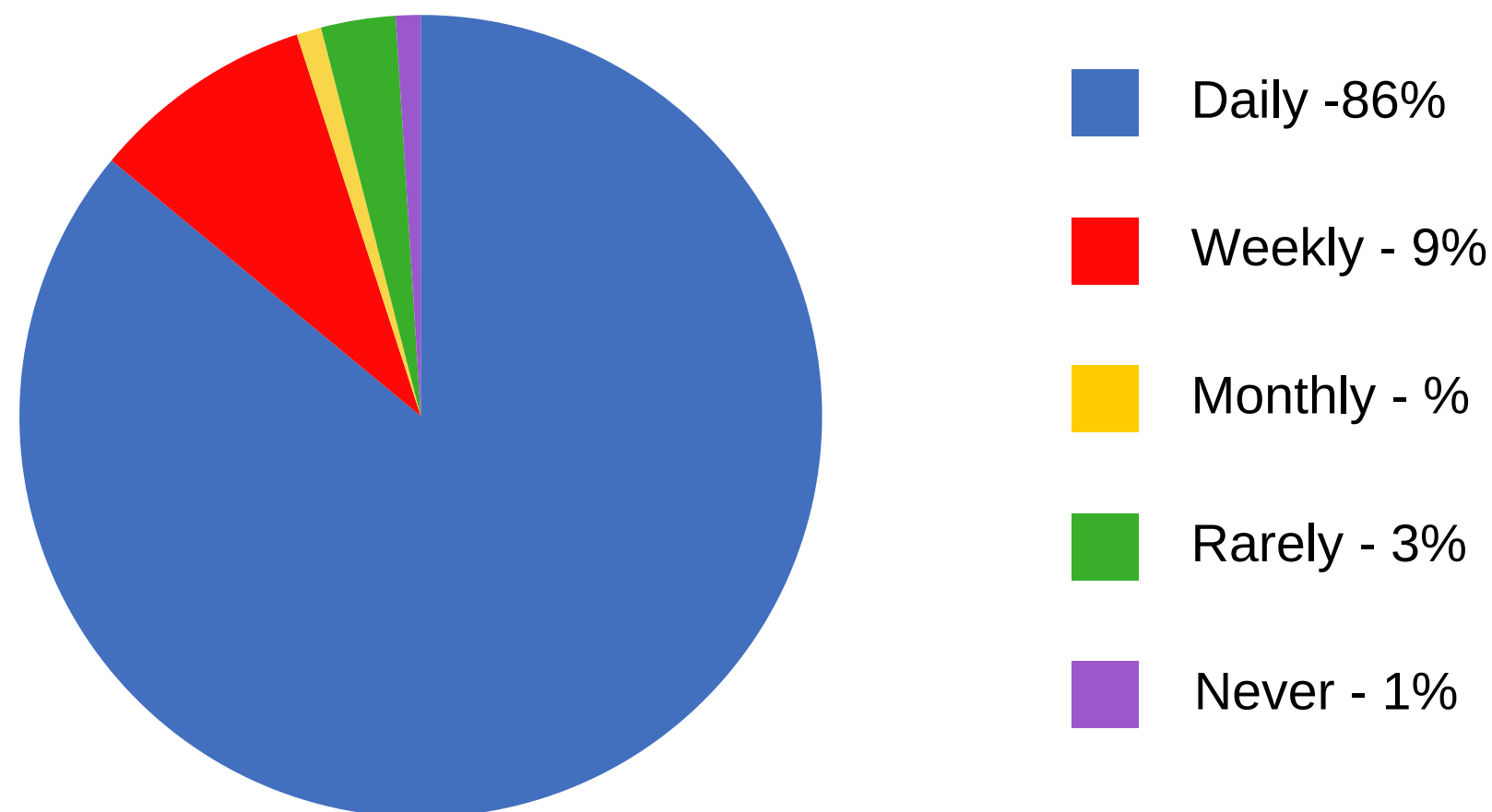
This report provide an in-depth analysis of the survey findings, highlight the key areas where support and resources are most needed, according to the participants of this survey. It also outlines actionable recommendations based on the feedback received, which aim to address the root causes of these issues and improve the overall quality of life in North Bay and the surrounding area. The insights gathered from this survey will inform the Chamber's advocacy efforts and guide our initiatives moving forward, as we work in collaboration with various sectors to create a more supportive and resilient community.

Overview

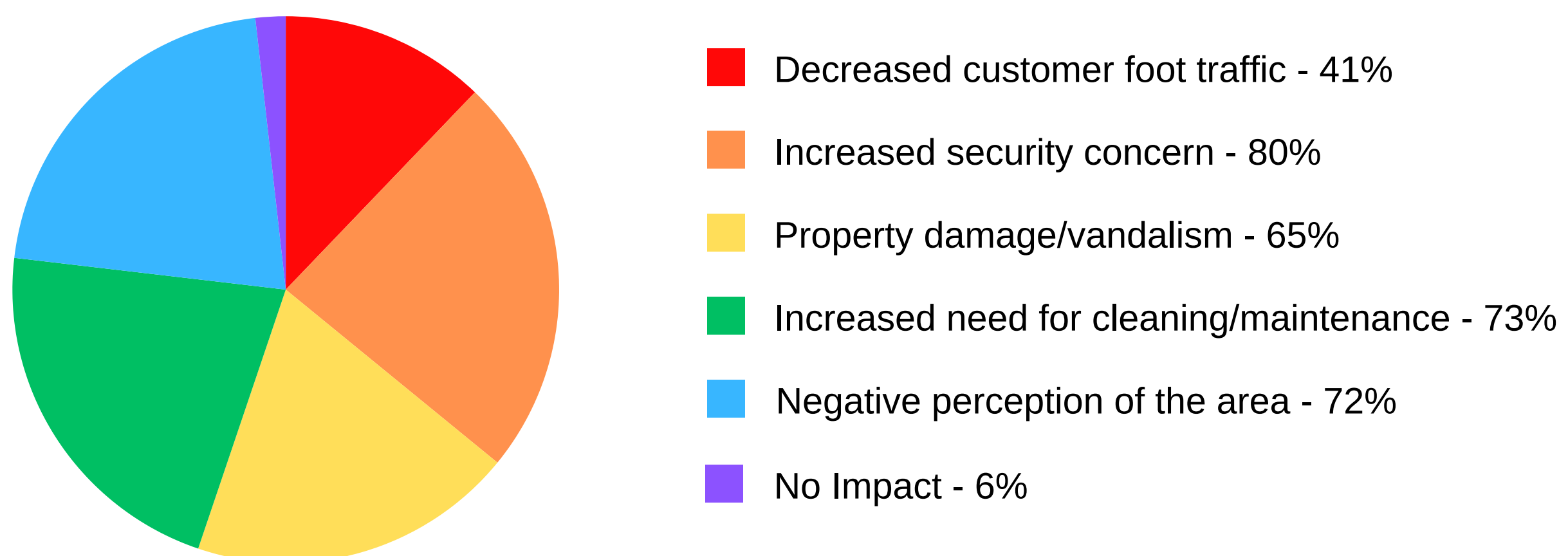
- Surveyed from June 21st - July 10th
- 100 responses
- Retail (21%), Office/Professional Services (19%), Non-profit (18%) Healthcare/Medical Services (6%), Restaurant/Cafe (6%), and Entertainment/Recreation (4%) were the top contributors
- Areas represented by participants: Algonquin, Birchaven, Downtown Thibeault Terrace, Trout Lake Road, West Ferris and Widdifield

IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS

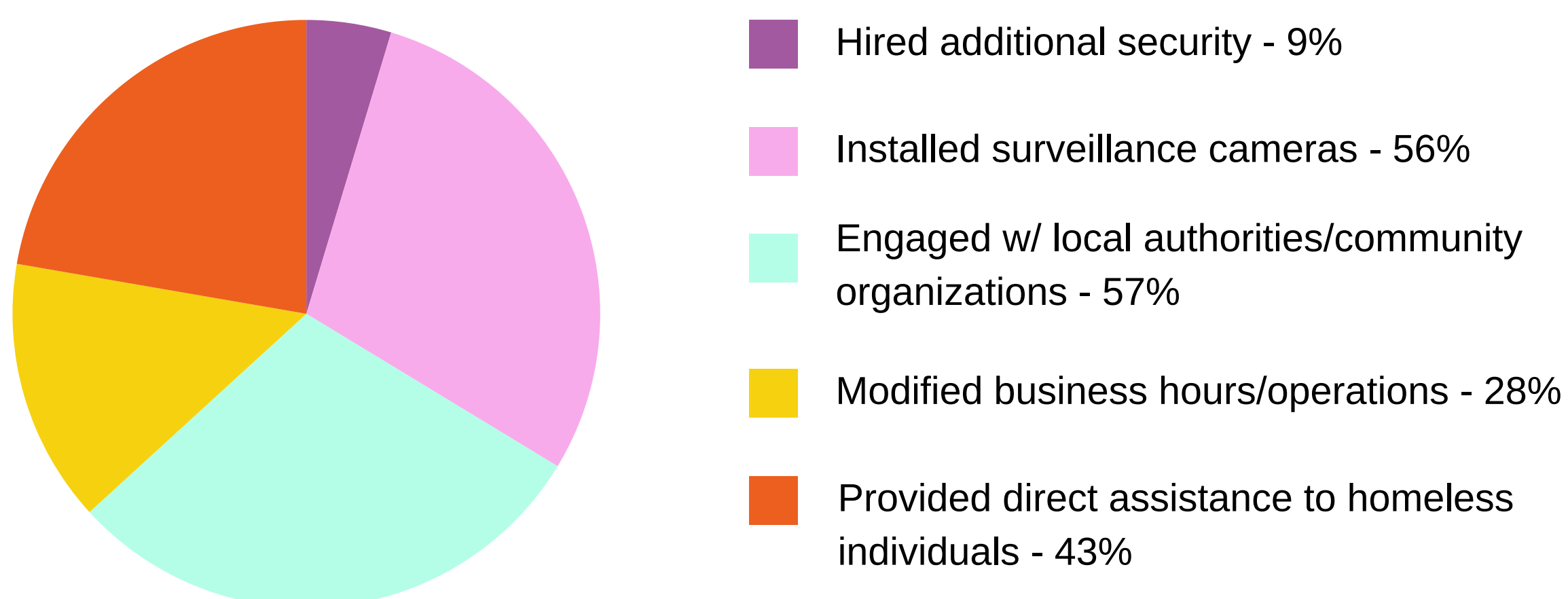
How frequently do you observe homelessness in the vicinity of your business/organization?



What impact do you feel homelessness has had on your business/organization? (Check all that apply)

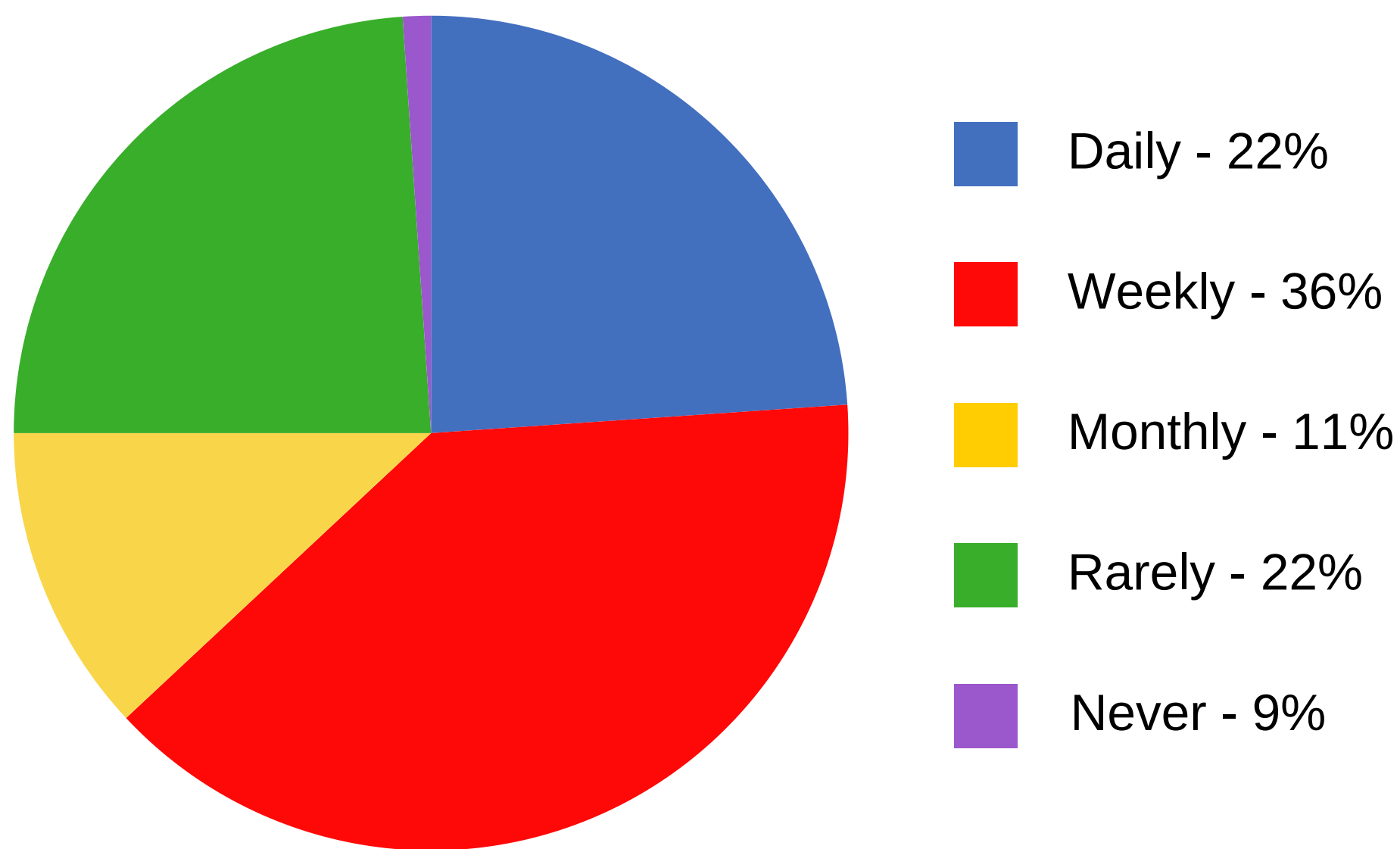


Have you taken any specific actions to address issues related to homelessness? (Check all that apply)

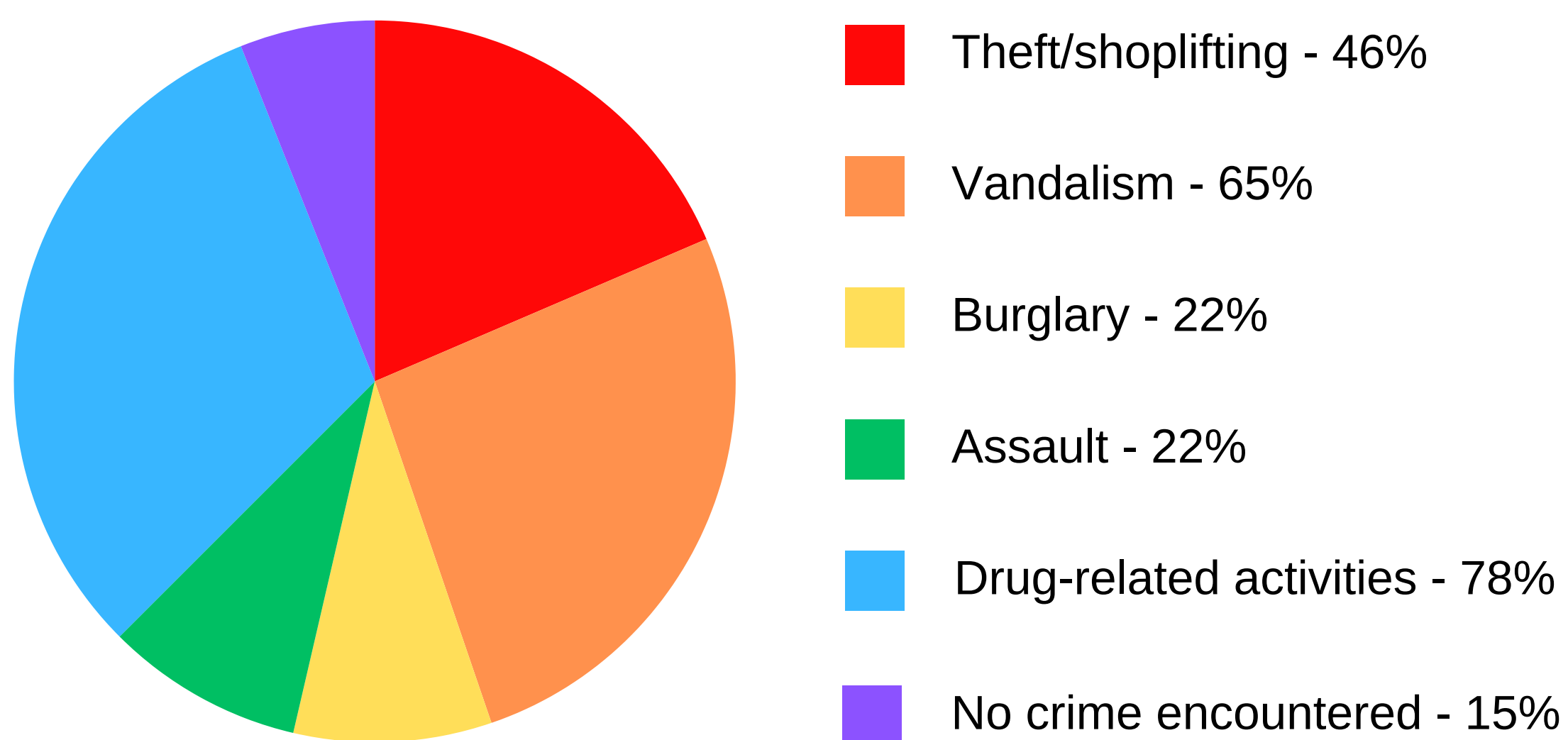


IMPACT OF CRIME

How frequently do you experience crime in the vicinity of your business/organization?

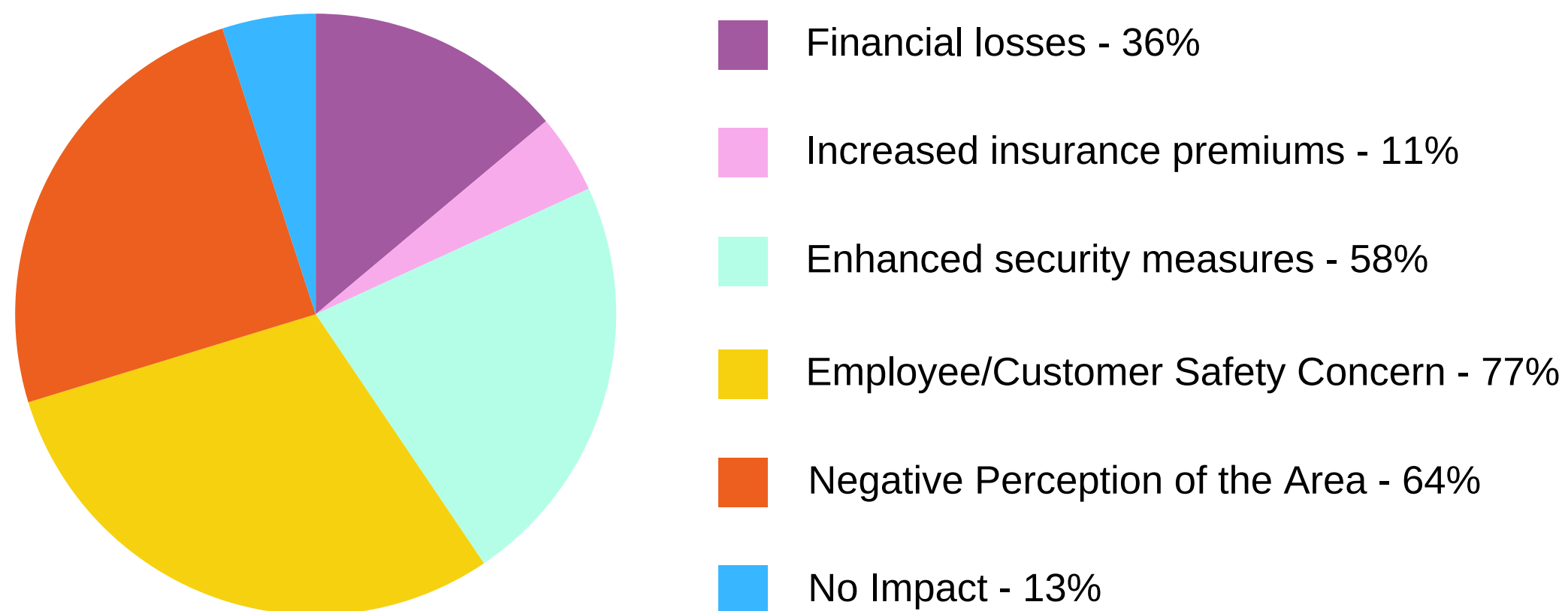


What types of crimes have you encountered? (Check all that apply)



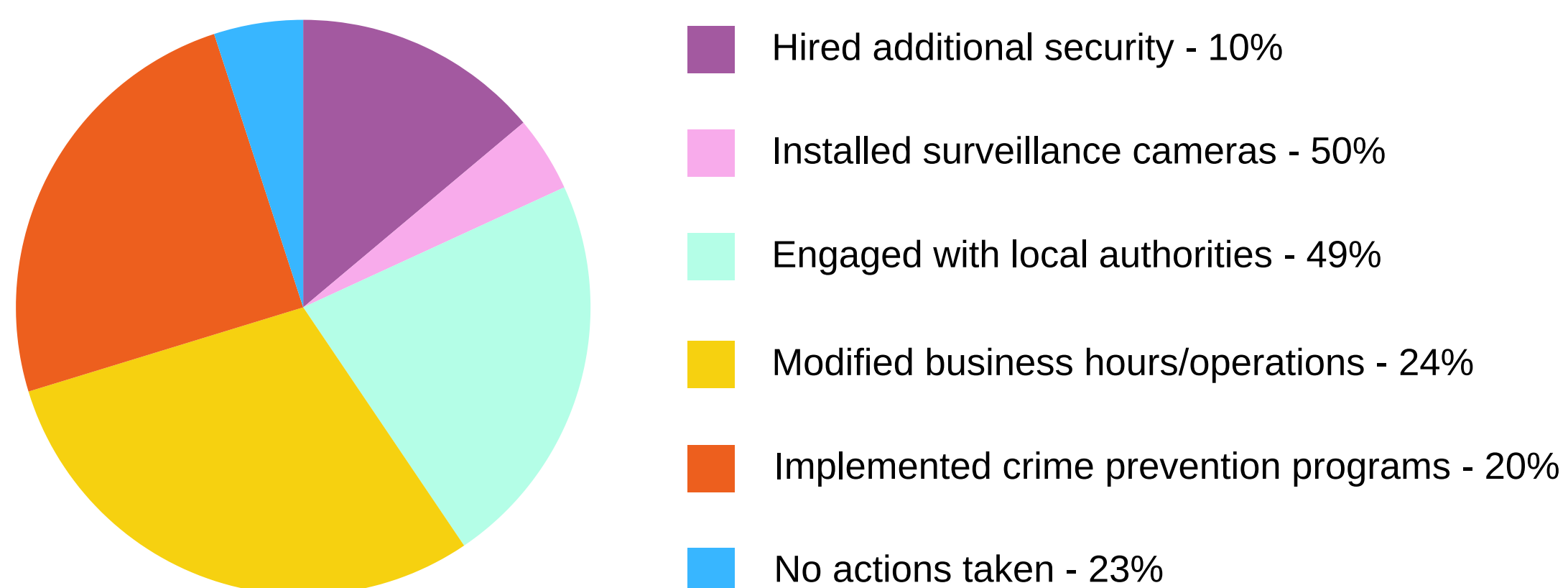
Participants added seeing the following: human trafficking, litter and waste left around parks, parking lots, building vestibules, harassment, leaving needles and garbage, attempted break ins, and starting fires

What impact has crime had on your business/organization? (Check all that apply)



Participants also mentioned crime being a significant factor of moving their business to another location, having increased crime in the downtown area, building repairs due to crime, and health and safety of staff suffering greatly due to being previously robbed within work or on the way to/from work.

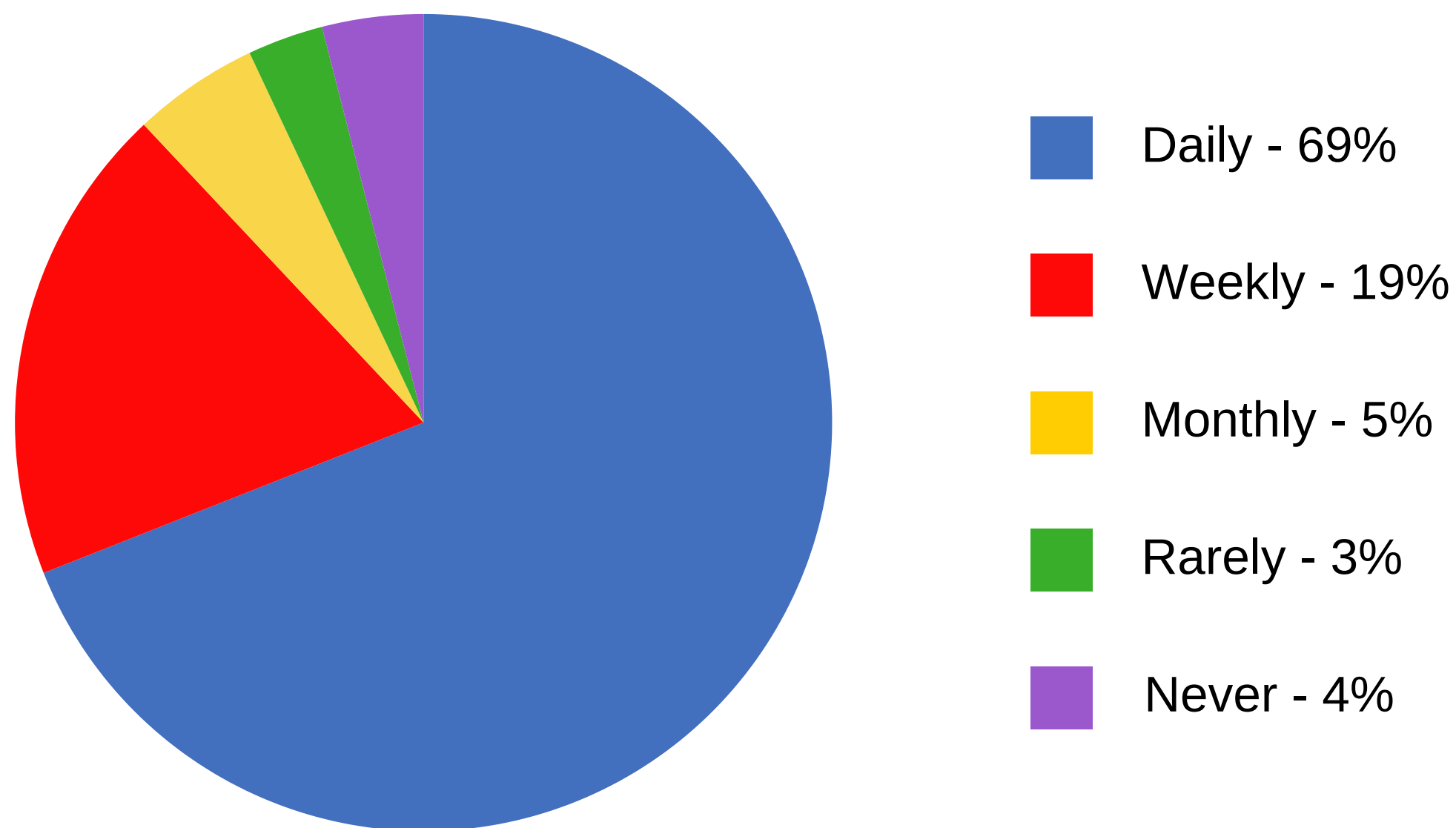
Have you taken any specific actions to address issues related to crime? (Check all that apply)



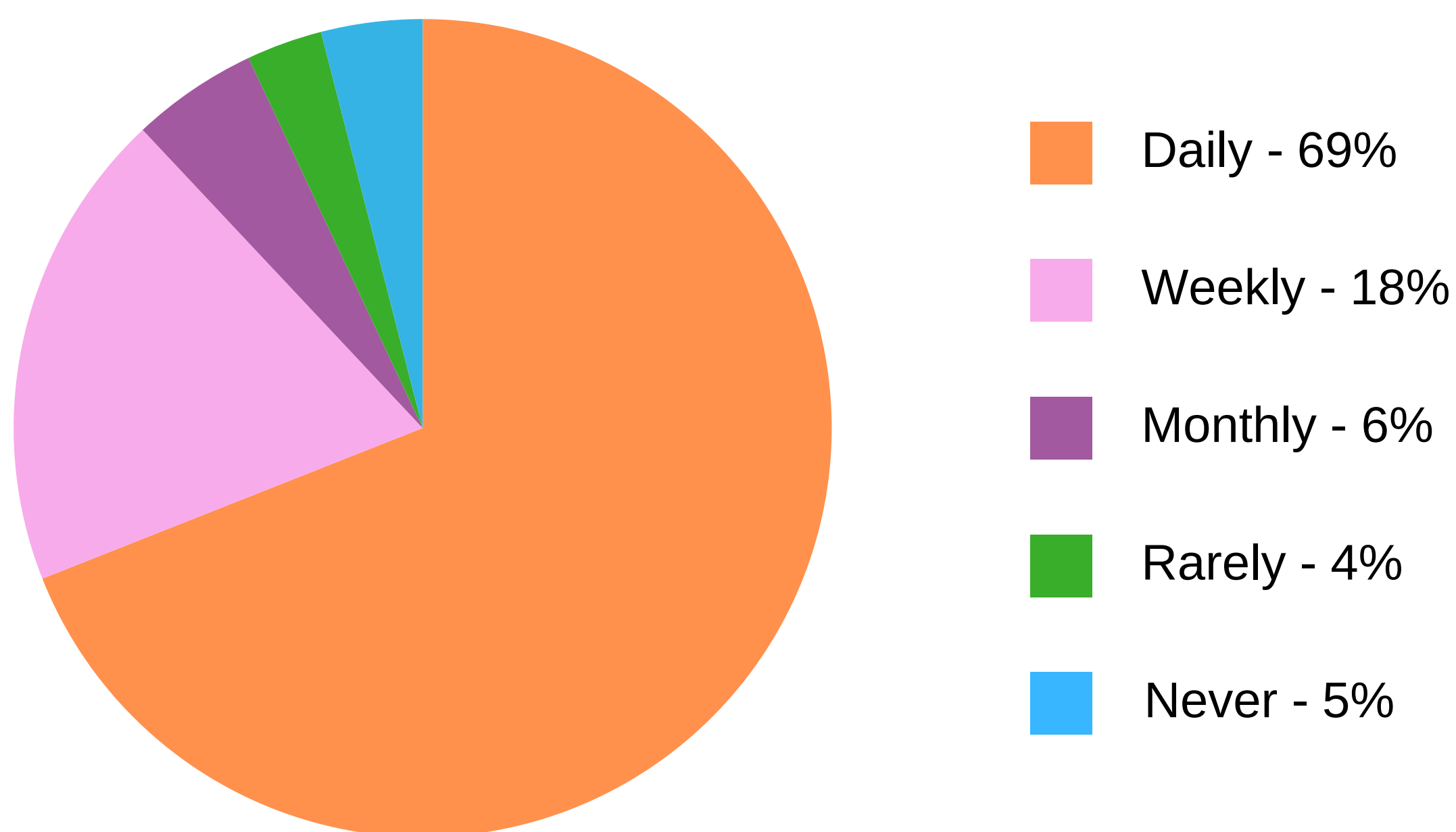
Participants mentioned relocating their business, staff have taken narcan training, doors needing to be locked during business hours, appointment only (no walk ins), moved from ground floor to upper floor for safety, offered employees walking assistance to cars parked in the garage if needed, installed security gates, personal alarms (carrying), increased visibility at night, and created a safety plan for employees.

IMPACT OF ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH

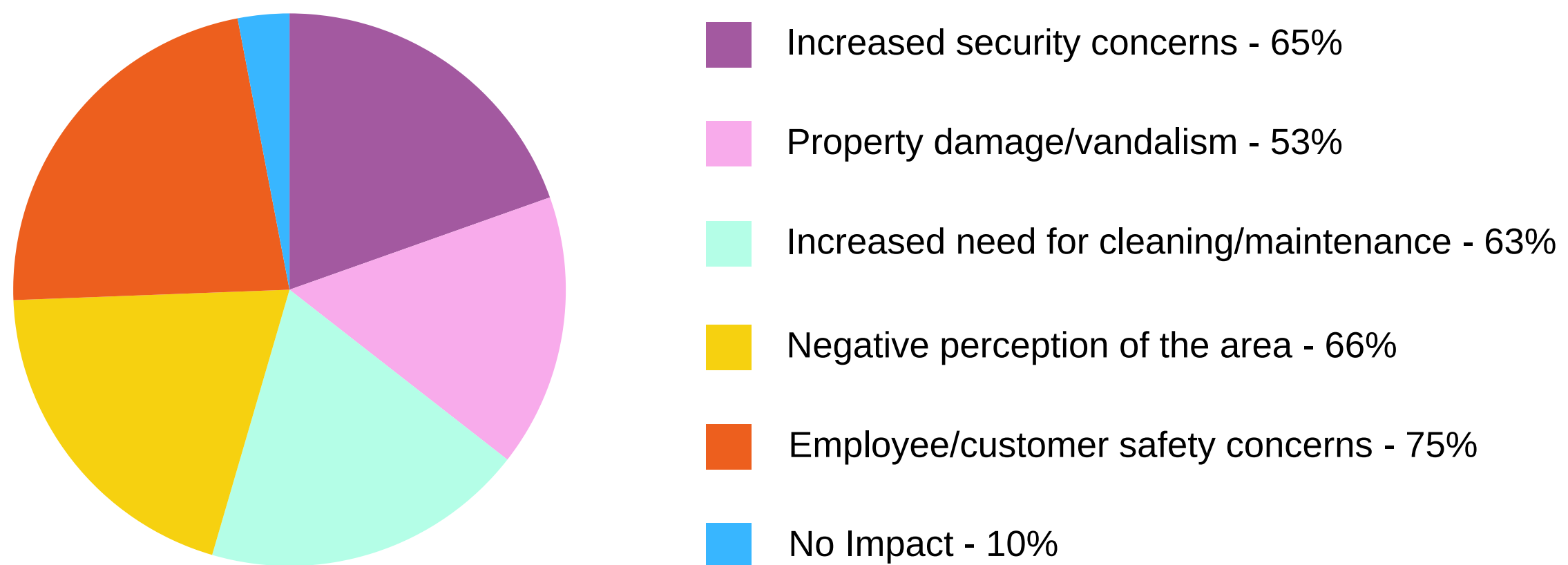
How frequently do you observe issues related to addictions (e.g., substance abuse) in the vicinity of your business/organization?



How frequently do you observe issues related to mental health (e.g., individuals showing signs of mental illness) in the vicinity of your business/organization?

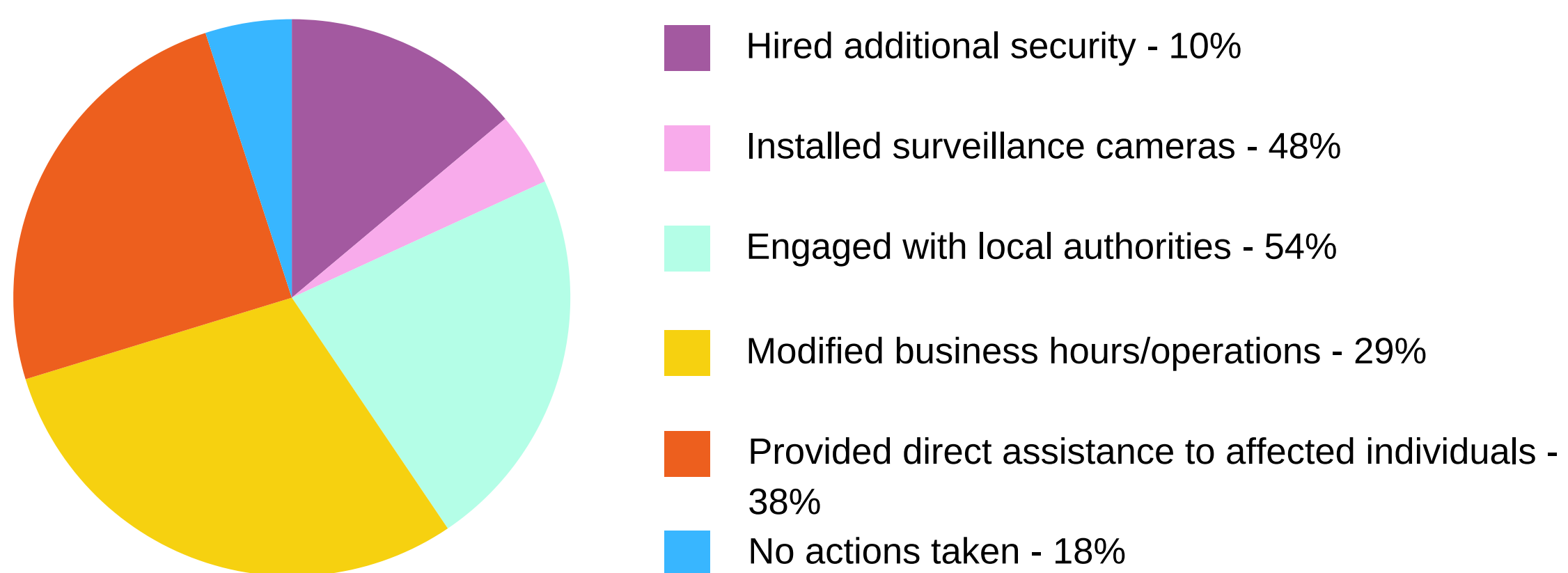


What impact have addictions and mental health issues had on your business/organization? (Check all that apply)



Participants mentioned landlords of their business (or beside) having to deal with multiple issues, human biohazard waste, garbage being left around business (despite picking it up multiple times a day), and people taking shelter behind the business building.

Have you taken any specific actions to address issues related to addictions and mental health (Check all that apply)



Participants mentioned needing increased cleaning and SHARPS boxes for discarded needles left on the property, contacted True Self for assistance, and reaching out to services to help the individuals needing support.

Feedback and Suggestions

From the feedback we received there were 7 distinct themes throughout.

Note: Our use of the word “centralization” is in regard to keeping services together and does not necessarily refer to a specific location of the community.

All quotes within this report has come directly from the respondents of this survey.



Inadequate Housing and Institutional Support

- **Need for more affordable and accessible housing options:** including low-income rental units, tiny home structures, and Pallet Shelters
- **Proposition to reopen or build new mental health institutions**
- **Addressing seasonal housing needs:** Recognizing the different housing and support needs based on seasonal changes
- **Expand temporary and emergency shelter capacity:** Calls for more temporary shelters, particularly during crises like extreme weather events
- **Connecting vulnerable populations with better-equipped support systems:** Some suggestions emphasized the importance of ensuring individuals have access to cities or regions that offer more comprehensive services and resources, to better meet their needs, but also that they have connections in such as family as extra support.

“More out-reach programs, more facilities to help with addiction and mental health with long-term transitional supports to help them transition back into the community.”

“Build low-income rental units, similar to college resident buildings or hostels to house people”

“There are some individuals that are not able to integrate or function in public places - these people need to be housed and have round-the-clock care.”

“Has anyone spoken with the homeless folks to ask what they would need? Seasons would change those answers I am sure.”

“Temporary shelters should be expanded to accommodate more people during emergencies like cold snaps or heatwaves.”

“Connecting individuals with family and better-equipped support systems in other regions might provide the stability they need.”

Coordinated and Comprehensive Services

- **Establishment of integrated service hubs or centres** combining housing, mental health care, addiction treatment, and social services, preferably away from the downtown core.
- **Implementation of a coordinated strategy for mental health and addiction support** across all governmental levels.
- **Collaboration across sectors:** Encouraging collaboration between governmental, non-profit, and private sectors to create a comprehensive support system.
- **Centralization of services for efficiency:** Proposals for creating centralized locations where individuals can access multiple services without needing to travel and increasing accessibility (centralized meaning together).
- **Audits conducted on social service providers** to ensure finances are being used for the purposes given, and to mitigate unnecessary duplication

“Implement a unified database to ensure that all service providers have access to the same information about clients’ needs and progress.”

“Have ALL resources for homelessness, health, and addictions in one easy-to-access building.”

“A coordinated collaborative Community Safety and Well Being Plan that includes all stakeholders for input.”

“The current disconnect between the judicial system and mental health services perpetuates a cycle where individuals are incarcerated without receiving adequate treatment.”

“Develop mobile outreach programs that bring services directly to individuals who may not be able to access them otherwise.”

“There are a significant number of supports and resources already available. I would like to have data provided that indicate their effectiveness and success.”

Insufficient Funding and Resources

- **Increased funding for mental health and addiction services**, frontline social service providers, and sustainable shelter options
- **Financial support for food security programming** and increased social assistance benefits
- **Resource allocation for long-term solutions:** Advocating for funds to be directed towards sustainable, long-term interventions rather than short-term fixes.
- **Enhanced funding for research and innovation:** Calls for dedicated funds to support research into effective intervention strategies and innovative approaches to solving these issues.
- **Funding support for workforce development:** Increased investment in training programs for social workers, mental health professionals, and other frontline workers to meet the growing demand.

“We need to address the issues at every single level and not just keep going around in circles, spending money that goes nowhere but actually doing something about the problem.”

“Requesting that the Provincial government invest heavily in the mental health and addictions infrastructure at the very least to pre-pandemic level which would mean an additional \$330m (minimum) in funding every year moving forward.”

“Increase income support benefits (OW and ODSP) to be a fair livable monthly amount above \$2000 to ensure that people can afford food and shelter.”

“All parties need to address these issues at the root level and need to stop trying band-aid solutions.”

“Support for research and data collection is crucial to understanding and effectively addressing these social issues.”

“Expand workforce development programs to address shortages in social services and improve the quality of care.”

Law Enforcement and Legal Reforms

- **Stricter law enforcement measures** and accountability for repeat offenders
- **Revision of the catch-and-release justice system**, tougher bail conditions, and mandatory addiction counselling for offenders
- **Enhanced police presence:** Advocating for more consistent and visible law enforcement in high-risk areas to deter crime.
- **Support for businesses impacted by crime:** Proposals for government assistance to help businesses affected by crime and homelessness, including grants and security enhancements.
- **Reform of mental health laws:** Advocating for changes to the mental health act to better address the needs of those who cannot function independently.

“Provide government assistance to businesses affected by crime and homelessness, including grants for security enhancements.”

“Tougher bail conditions. Tired of seeing repeat offenders released on bail for serious crimes.”

“Sentencing or mandatory addictions counselling when drug crime or drug abuse occurs.”

“More social workers and individuals trained to assist our vulnerable population 7 days a week, paid security for the downtown, police dedicated to the downtown area.”

“There needs to be more support for businesses regarding security and facilities grants to help them cope with the challenges.”

“Changes to the Mental Health Act are necessary; the current system is broken and does not adequately address the needs of those who cannot function independently.”

Enhanced Community Safety Measures

- **More security presence** and increased police patrols, particularly in downtown areas and on Lakeshore.
- **Creation of safer environments** through better lighting, surveillance, and by-law enforcement.
- **Development of safer communal spaces:** Calls for creating designated areas where homeless individuals can safely access services without impacting the broader community.
- **Increased collaboration between law enforcement and social services:** Advocating for closer cooperation between police, social workers, and community organizations to better address the root causes of crime and homelessness.
- **Community-based crime prevention initiatives:** Encouraging the development of community-led programs focused on preventing crime through neighbourhood watch programs, youth engagement, and local involvement.

“There is a strong need for more security presence, especially in downtown areas and on Lakeshore, to deter crime and ensure public safety.”

“Increased police presence, lighting, and activation in affected areas, by-laws regulating locations and the number of non-commercial pharmacies.”

“With the pressure on the police, 7 day a week/24 hours a day security is needed.”

“There is a need for a location that will offer drop-in assistance 24 hours a day/365 days a year, separate from residential and business areas.”

“Implement programs that bring together police, social workers, and community groups to create a unified approach to crime prevention and social support.”

“Community involvement is key to preventing crime; we need more grassroots initiatives that focus on local engagement and proactive measures.”

Public Health and Harm Reduction

- **Mixed opinions on harm reduction programs:** some call for better management of needle distribution, while other demand the cessation of such programs.
- **Emphasis on longer-term detox programs** and treatment facilities for addiction recovery.
- **Public health campaigns:** Suggestions for public awareness initiatives to educate the community about the complexities of addiction and mental health.
- **Enhanced access to mental health services:** Expanding mental health services to provide earlier intervention and ongoing support for individuals at risk of addiction or homelessness. If banned from a space, figure out a way to still provide the service.
- **Harm reduction education programs:** Implementing education programs to inform both the public and vulnerable populations about harm reduction strategies and the importance of safe practices.

“A public health approach to addiction must include harm reduction as a core component, alongside prevention and treatment.”

“I would like to see individuals who are utilizing the safe injection needles provided to have the needles onsite so they are not thrown in Lake Nipissing causing safety issues for the general population.”

“We need to invest in long-term treatment facilities that focus on rehabilitation rather than just short-term fixes.”

“Initiatives to raise public awareness about the complexities of homelessness, addiction, and mental health, and to foster community support and compassion.”

“Even if someone is banned from a space, it’s essential to figure out a way to still provide the necessary services and support.”

“Education is key to harm reduction.”

Outreach and Job Opportunities

- **Job Training and skill development programs:** Creating targeted job training programs that equip individuals with the skills needed to secure stable employment and rebuild their lives.
- **Supportive employment opportunities:** Developing employment opportunities within supportive environments that understand and accommodate the challenges faced by individuals recovering from homelessness, addiction or mental health
- **Need for increased outreach programs,** employment initiatives, and suggestions to engage homeless individuals in maintaining their living areas to foster self-esteem and community integration.
- **Focus on long-term solutions** that help individuals reintegrate into society.
- **Implementation of mentoring and support programs** to guide individuals through job training and employment.

“We hear political constituents go on and on about homelessness, but they do not address the issues. They make great speeches at conferences and seminars, but nothing is really being done to stop the homelessness. People need a feeling of self-worth, they need self-esteem. They need to feel that they contribute in a valuable way to the world around them versus living in a tent surrounded by feces and disgusting debris.”

“Job training programs should focus on equipping people with the skills they need to find meaningful work and reintegrate into society.”

“Give them jobs to take care of those buildings and the grounds on which they sit. People need a feeling of self-worth, they need self-esteem.”

“Help for the homeless for longer-term solutions to get people off the streets and crack down on the drug behaviour with more arrests, more strictness, and get people off the streets.”

“Mentoring programs can provide the guidance and support individuals needing to navigate the challenges of finding and keeping a job.”

Survey Summary

The findings underscore significant gaps in housing, institutional support, and service coordination to address homelessness, mental health, and addiction issues. As we've seen with our own eyes and heard directly from individuals who are new to North Bay and immediately seeking shelter, there is a clear and urgent need for more affordable and accessible housing options, including low-income rental units and temporary shelters. Additionally, the reopening or construction of mental health institutions is essential to support vulnerable populations effectively. Feedback also highlights the importance of addressing seasonal housing needs and ensuring individuals have access to better-equipped support systems, potentially in other regions where more comprehensive services are available.

To tackle these challenges effectively, a coordinated and comprehensive approach is required. This includes establishing integrated service hubs that combine housing, mental health care, addiction treatment, and social services, ideally located away from downtown areas and Lakeshore to minimize their impact on businesses. Collaboration across governmental, non-profit, and private sectors is crucial for creating a robust support system. Moreover, increased funding is needed for mental health and addiction services, frontline social service providers, and sustainable shelter options, with a focus on long-term rather than short-term interventions.

Additionally, law enforcement and legal reforms must be strengthened to ensure accountability for repeat offenders and provide better support for businesses impacted by crime. Enhanced community safety measures are also vital. There is also a need for more targeted outreach and job training programs to help individuals reintegrate into society, supported by mentoring and employment initiatives. Public health campaigns and harm reduction programs should be expanded to address the complexities of addiction and mental health, ensuring that support reaches those in need without exacerbating the issues.

The North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce is committed to playing an active role in addressing the challenges of homelessness, crime, addictions, and mental health in the community. Moving forward, the Chamber plans to advocate for the establishment of integrated service hubs that provide comprehensive support, ensuring these services are centralized and easily accessible. Additionally, the Chamber will continue to work closely with local businesses to enhance community safety by supporting increased police presence and security measures, particularly in the downtown and Lakeshore areas. The Chamber also intends to collaborate with government entities, non-profits, and private sectors to secure increased funding for sustainable long-term solutions, such as affordable housing and job training programs, which are essential for helping individuals reintegrate into society. Advocacy to all levels of government will continue, with proposed action points being provided at all times.

Through these initiatives, the Chamber aims to foster a safer, healthier, and more vibrant community for all residents.