

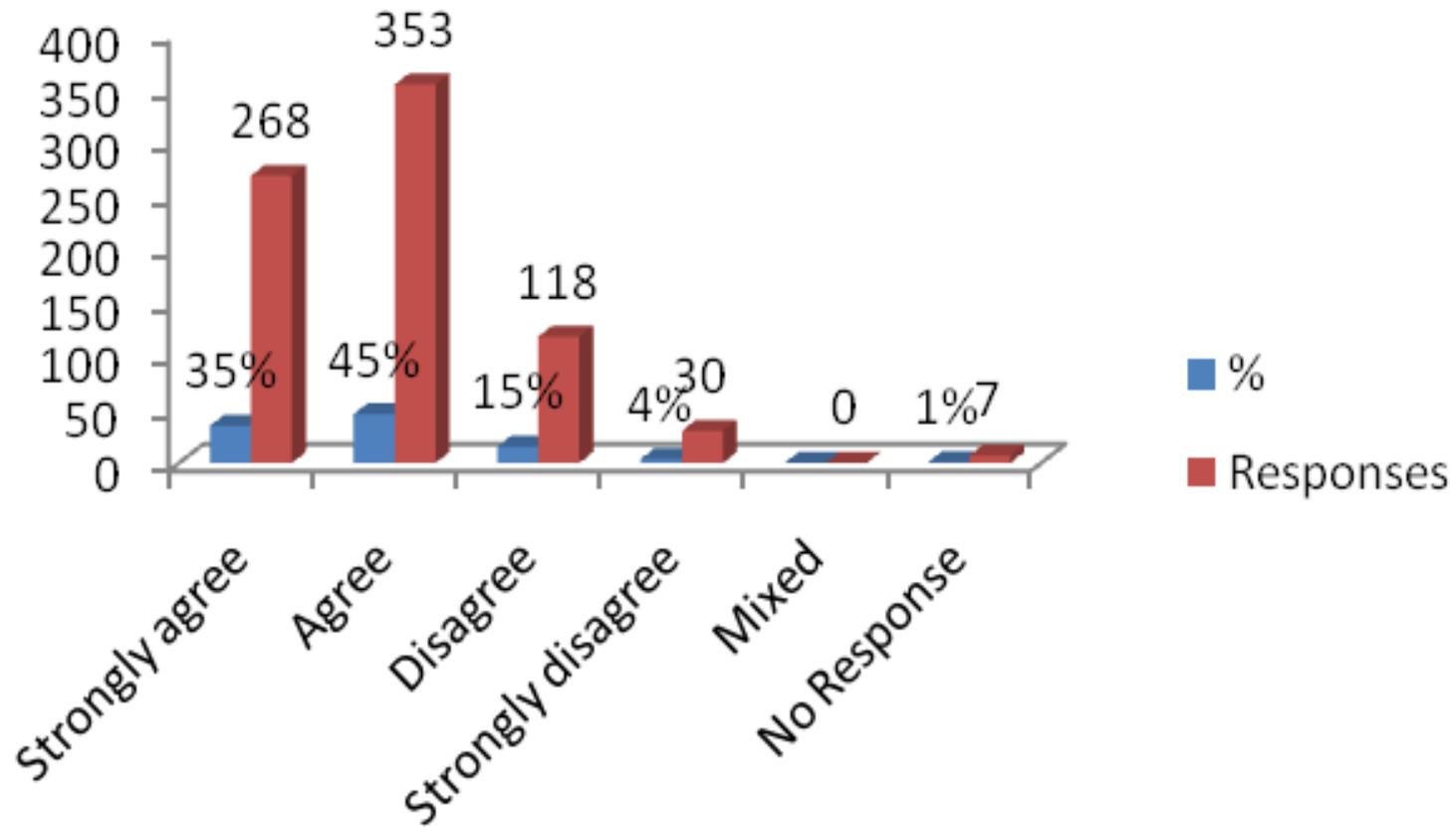


# THE IMAGE OF NURSES AS PERCEIVED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC

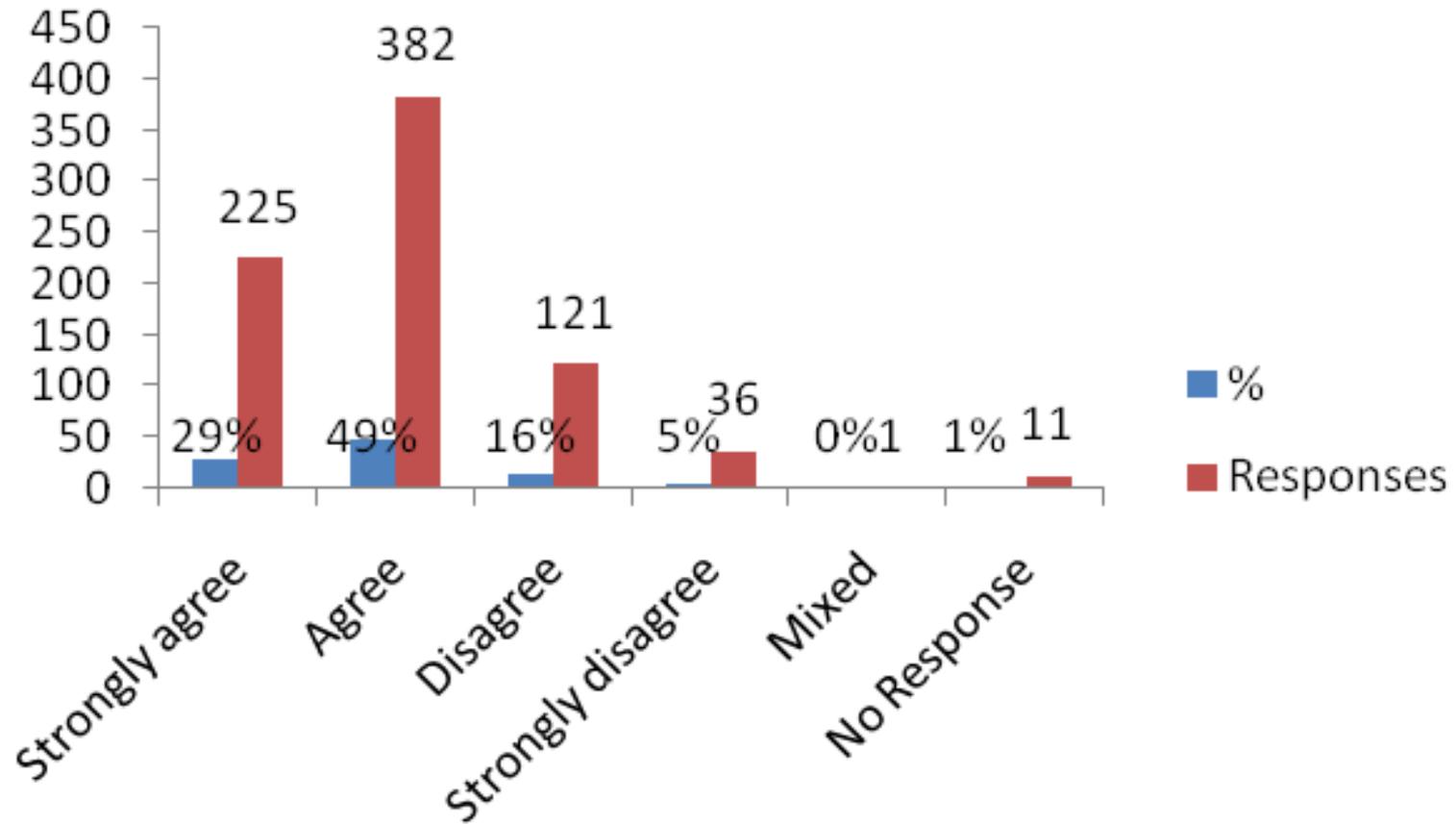
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- The purpose of the research study was to describe the general South African public's perception of the image of nurses.
- The population of the research comprised the 1 000 respondents to whom the questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 776 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires were distributed in five provinces of South Africa, namely Gauteng, the Western Cape, the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga.

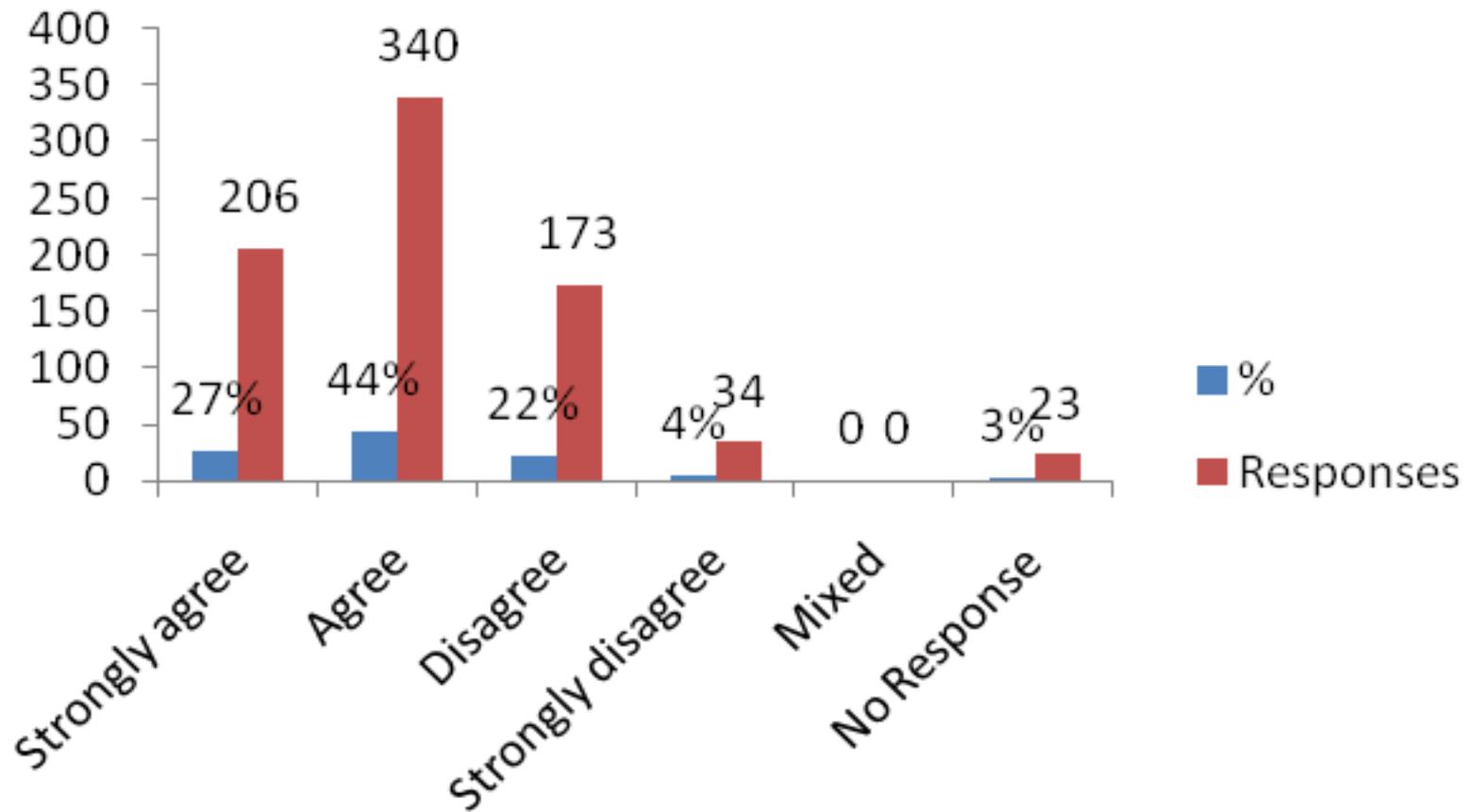
## Nurses are extremely hard working



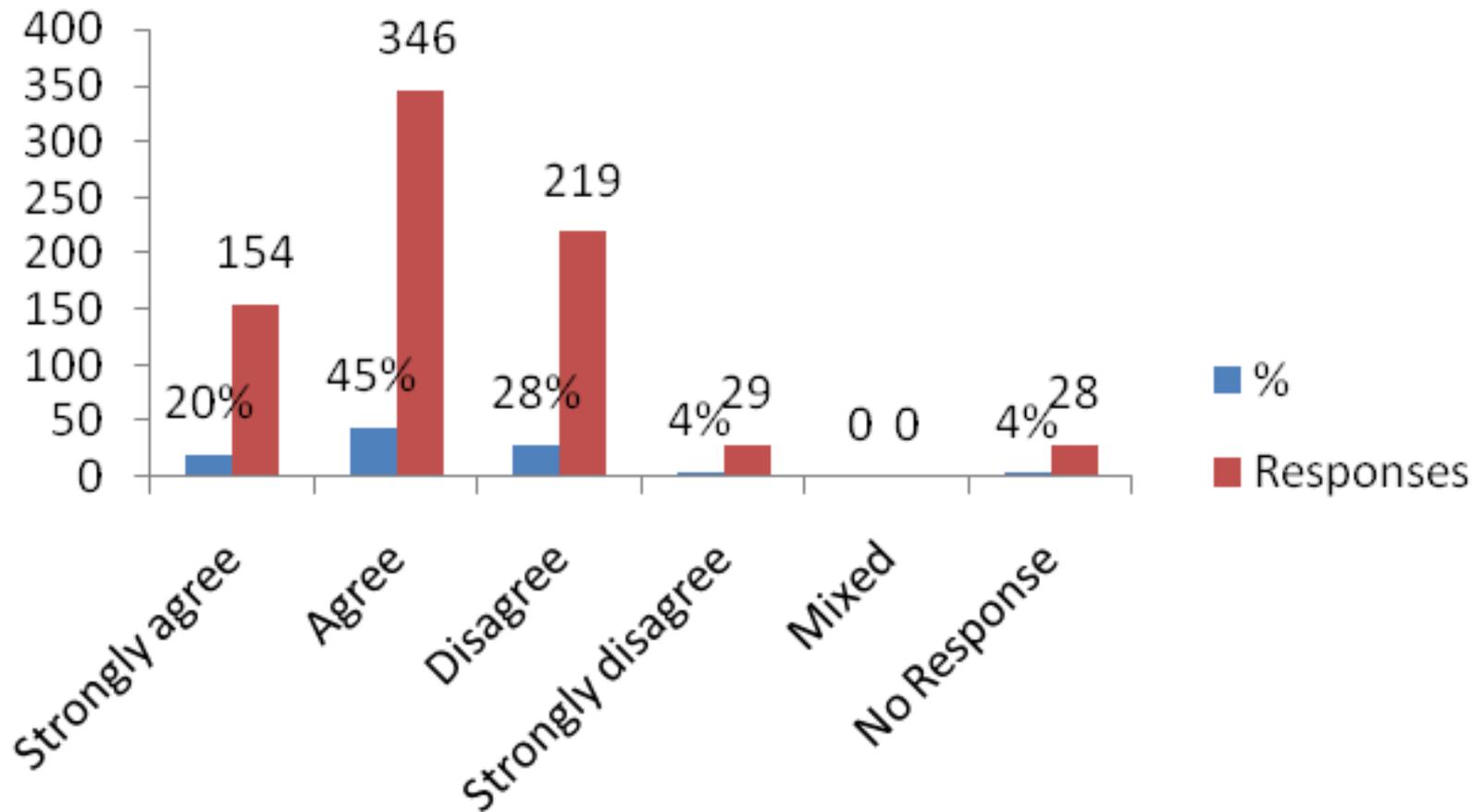
## Nurses are caring and understanding



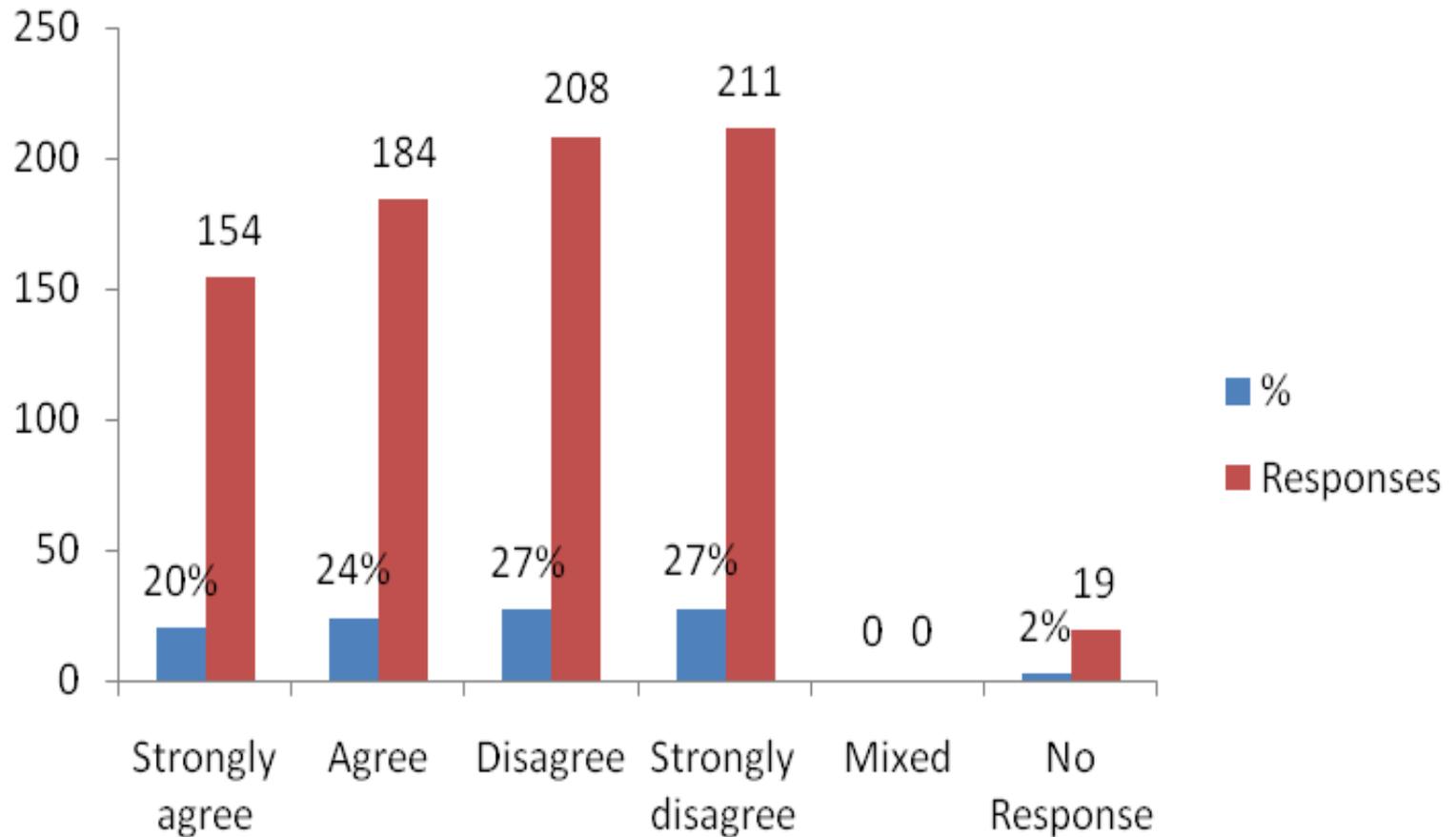
## Nurses are well educated



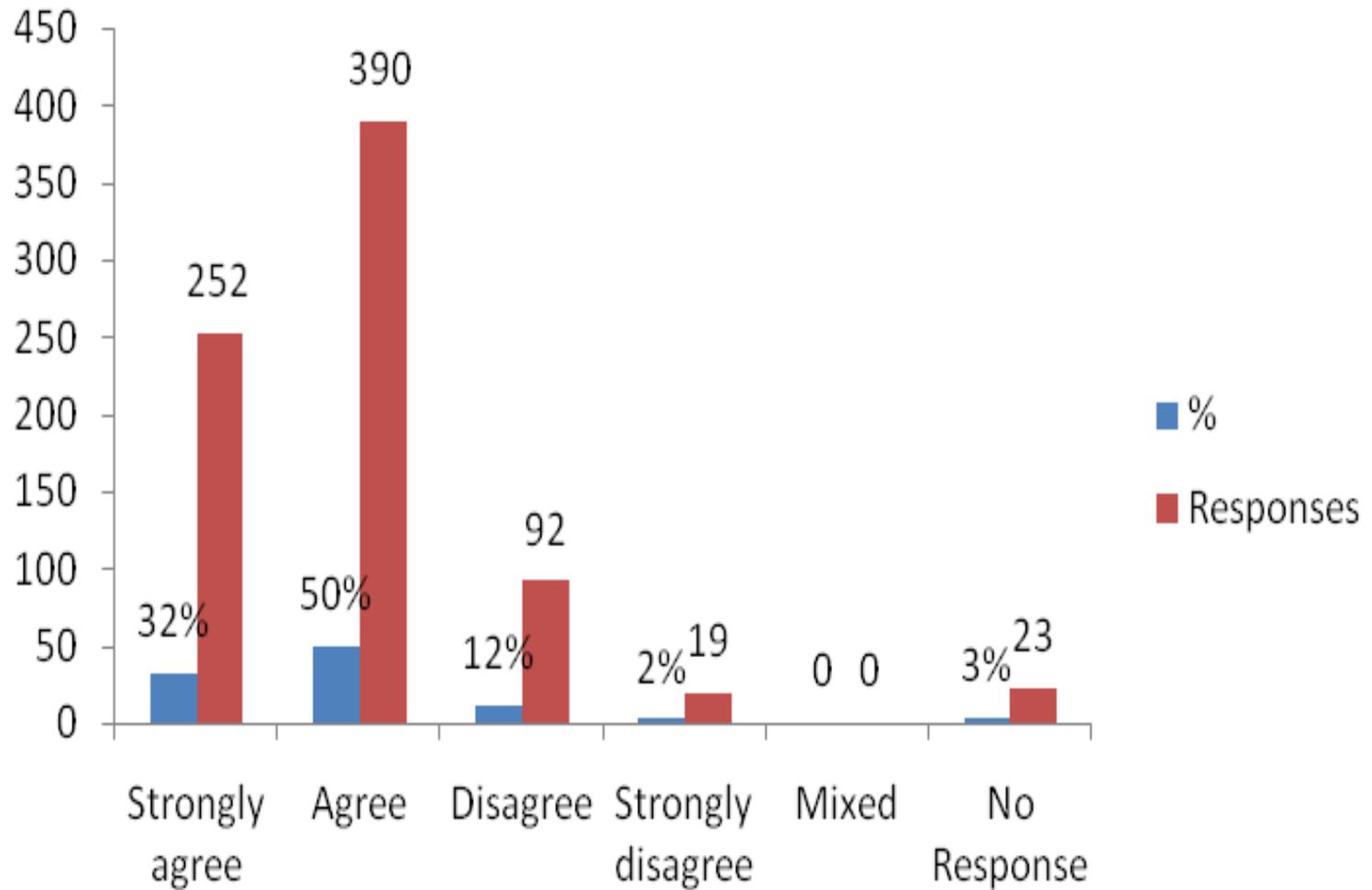
## Nurses obey doctors orders without questioning them



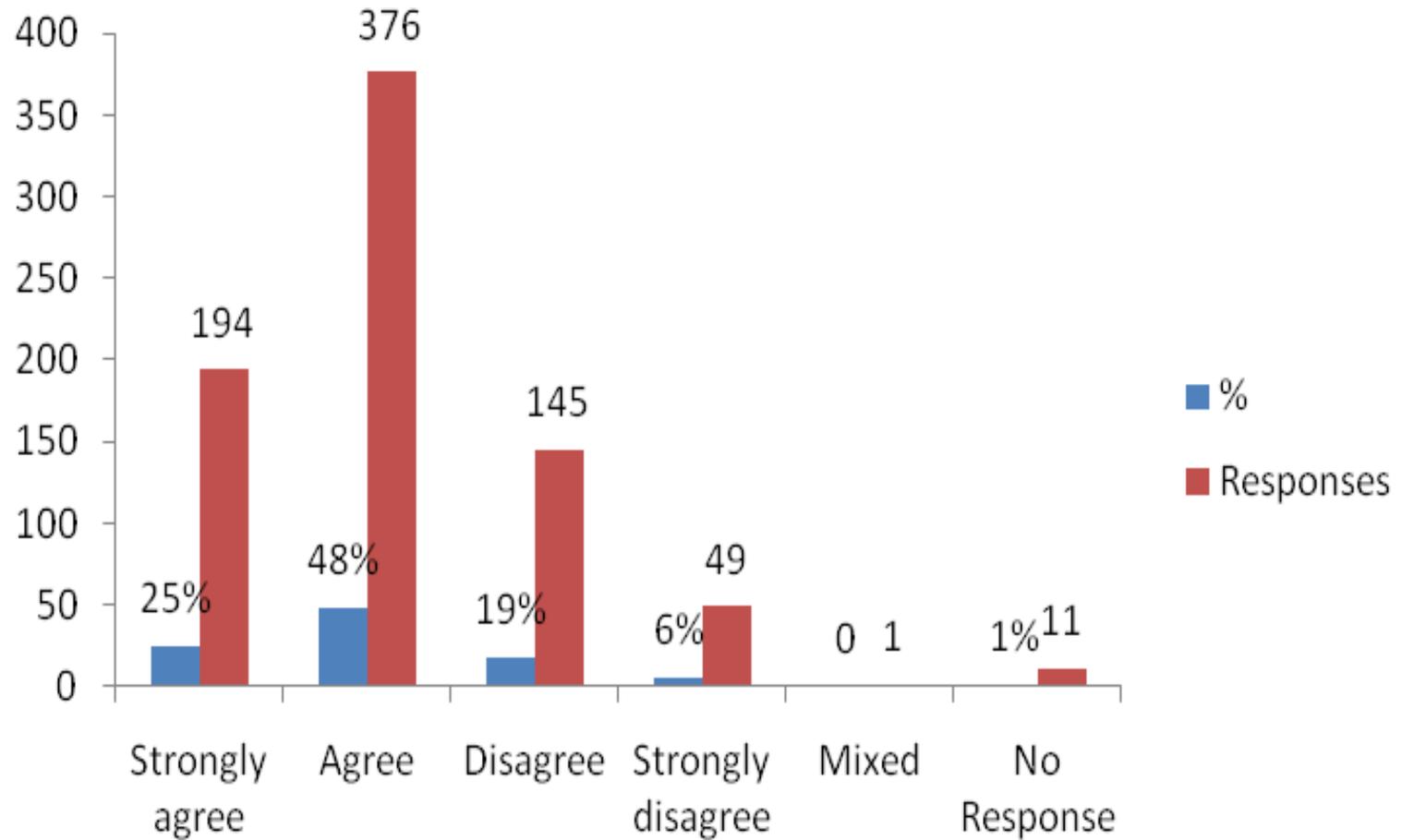
### I would like my child to become a nurse



### Nurses and nursing are central to curing



## Nurses love their profession



# Conclusions

- Contrary to the negative image portrayed by the media this study revealed a generally positive response to the nursing profession, although the response was not overwhelmingly positive.
- A disturbing finding was the fact that nursing is not viewed as a career of choice and that the public does not understand the complexities of nursing as a career.
- Of the total number of participants, 43,6% only would like their children to become nurses. This finding confirmed the relevance of this study within the South African context as there is an alarmingly high number of vacancies for nurses in the health care industry.

- The media should be used to inform the public about the actual career opportunities for nurses, as some of the respondents indicated that they did not, in fact, actually know what nurses did.
- The print and broadcast media are major sources of information and the role that they could play in the improvement of the image of nurses in South African should not be underestimated.
- The economic situation in which most of the members of the South African population find themselves means that factors such as income influence career choices and the fact that nurses earn relatively low salaries will not help to improve the nursing shortage.

- The gap between the public image of nurses and the actual role that nurses play is not narrowing, as studies show that the public still holds a stereotypical view of nurses.
- International campaigns to improve the image of nursing have brought about positive changes in the nursing profession in Britain, the United States of America and Australia and these campaigns must, thus, be used as models on which to base campaigns in South Africa. The successes of these international campaigns, especially as regards the recruitment of new applicants, have inspired other countries to follow suit.

# Recommendations

- A study to determine the specific perceptions of both school children and those individuals younger than eighteen years of age should be conducted to enable these perceptions to be included in the design of campaign suited to the South African situation.
- The responsibility for changing the image of nursing lies in the hands of the nursing profession and nurses should use the findings of this study to re-brand the profession as a knowledge-based career for all genders and all age groups.

- It is recommended that nurse leaders and nurse educators participate actively in the development of school programmes in order to include nurses and nursing in school projects so as to promote an awareness of nursing as a career.
- Nurses must be trained in specific skills on how to communicate their specialised experience and knowledge to their patients, colleagues, family and friends. The art of communication with the media, media relations and assertiveness must be included in the curricula of both basic and postgraduate courses.

- The importance of representative groups/organisations such as the FPNL, NEA and FUNDISA to build relationships with the media, rather than individuals attempting to convey a positive image, must be recognised.
- A South African study on the way in which nurses are shaped by personal experience, media messages and socio-demographic factors would add to the information needed to design a model for the improvement of the professional image of nurses. This change in the self-image of nurses must be brought about through the change in the nurses' own perceptions of the importance of the nursing profession.

- Succession planning for nurse leaders must be in place to ensure that nurse managers are role models who are able to portray a positive image of nursing and become a key factor in both the recruitment of nurses to the profession and their retention in the profession.
- National campaigns must be devised to improve the image of nursing as a career. A re-branding initiative similar to the campaign in the United States in terms of which nurse recruitment was transformed and the nursing profession became the fourth most popular career choice among school leavers should be implemented (Waters, 2005:22).

# Summary

A positive image of nurses is important for the future of the nursing profession in South Africa and it is only the nurses in our country who are able to influence and change the perceptions of, specifically, the younger generations. It is, thus, extremely important to focus both on the communication skills of nurses and the training of nurses to ensure that nursing will be a career option for the young, as nursing is a career for knowledgeable and caring professionals.