

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

Perceived stigma is a barrier to utilizing on-campus food pantries (FPs) as reported by college students in qualitative investigations. This cross-sectional study aimed to compare perceptions of stigma among on-campus FP users and non-users. Students categorized as food insecure by the 10-item USDA Adult Food Security Module (n=141) completed an online survey in Spring 2021. The Food Pantry Stigma Scale (FPSS) was used to measure perceived stigmatization of FP use. Likert scale questions (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) assess feelings of guilt from potentially taking a resource from others, having difficulty others knowing, among other items. Most participants were female (79.9%), White (55.3%), undergraduates (92.9%) with a mean age of 20.7 ± 3.0 years. Non-pantry users reported overall higher perceived social stigma compared to users (M=26.0 ± 7.8 vs. 21.2 ± 8.6, p =0.014). Among non-users, the most endorsed items (% agree/strongly agree) of the FPSS were: wanting to be careful whom to tell if they use the FP (50.5%), potential feelings of guilt (46.2%), and having trouble others knowing (34.5%). Among users, endorsed items included having trouble others knowing that they use the FP (55.5%), being very careful whom to tell they use the FP (36.5%), and feeling guilty (33.3%). Although higher perceived stigma was observed among FP non-users, both food insecure FP users and non-users endorsed similar markers of stigma and feelings of guilt. Interventions are needed to decrease stigmatization of FP use and understand how FP users overcome stigma barriers to use needed resources.

Background

- 14-59% of college students are food insecure based on previous evaluations of individual U.S. college campuses
- Food insecure students report significantly poorer health parameters and lower grade point averages than their food secure peers in cross-sectional studies
- The number of non-profit food pantries (FPs) has grown rapidly, providing a critical safety net and valuable short-term assistance to students. Yet, qualitative studies suggest that perceived social stigma is one of the main barriers to using the campus food pantries.

Objectives

- To compare perceptions of social stigma among campus food pantry users and non-users.
- To describe the main markers of perceived social stigma of food pantry use in the college setting.

METHODS

Study Design

- Cross-sectional design
- Online survey in the spring of 2021

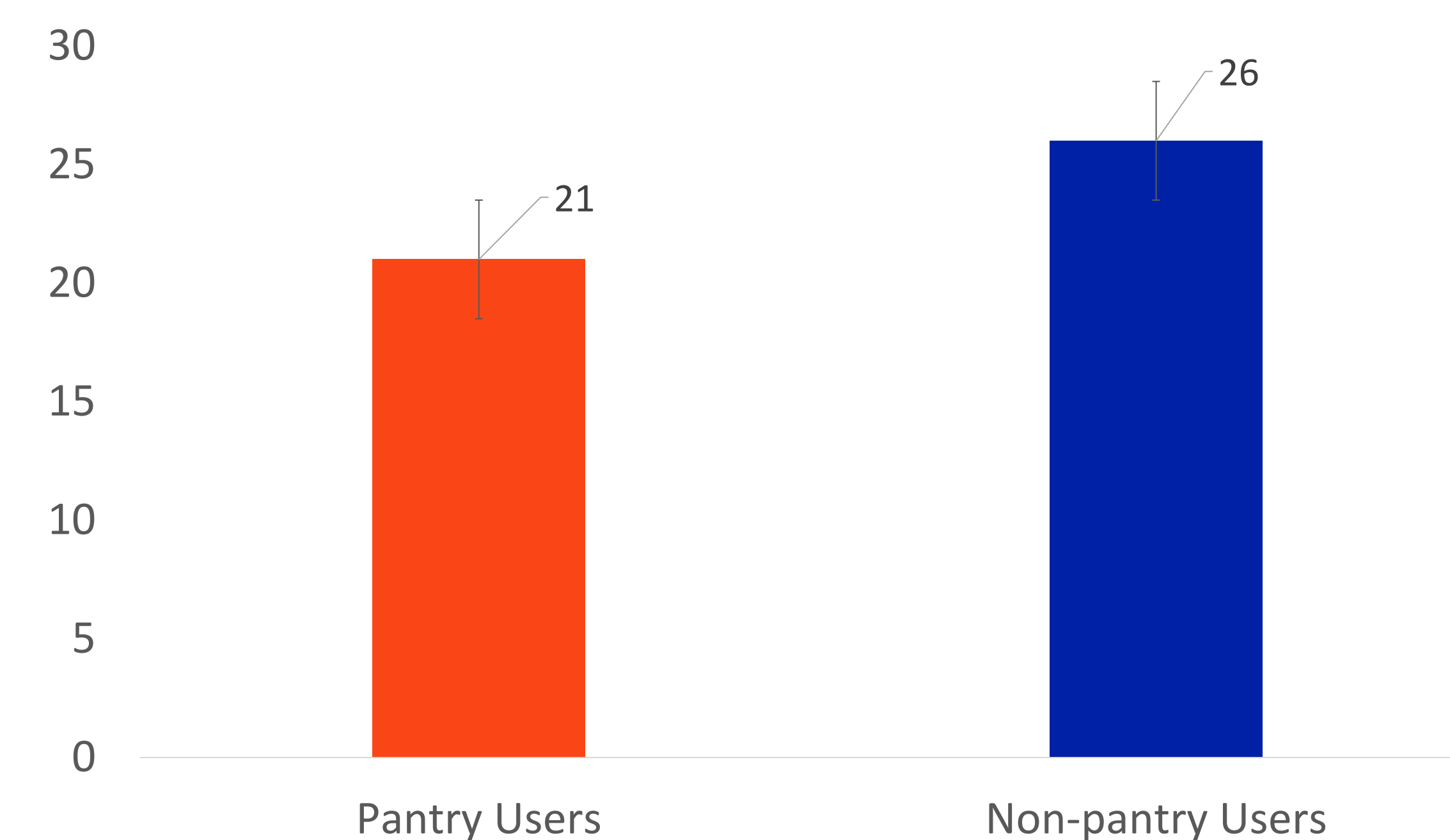
Survey and Tools

- 10-item USDA Adult Food Security Questionnaire
- 10-item Food Pantry Stigma Scale (Likert scale 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)
- Sociodemographic survey

RESULTS

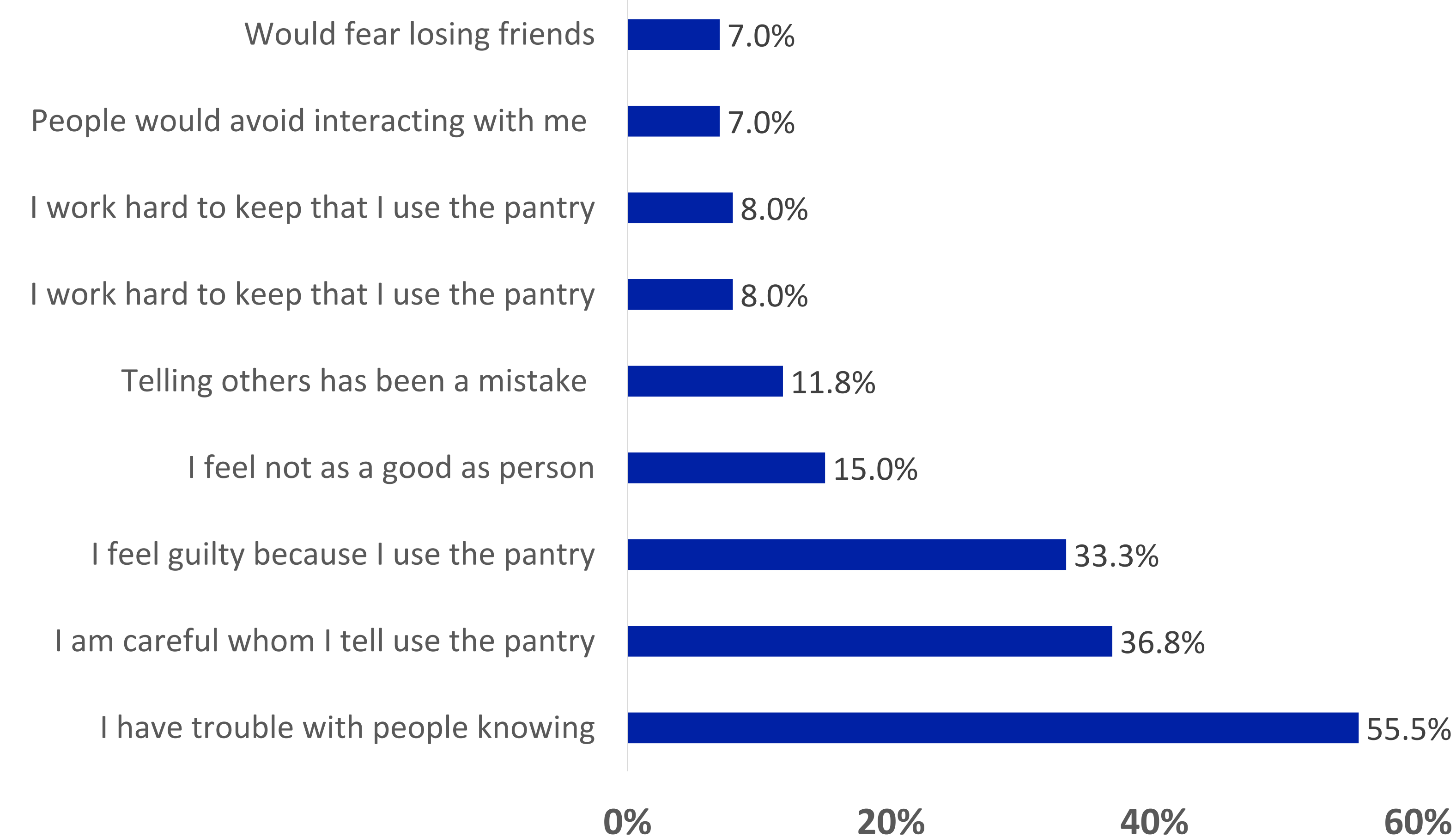
Most participants were female (79.9%), White (55.3%), undergraduates (92.9%) with a mean age of 20.7 ± 3.0 years.

Perceived Stigma in Pantry Users and Non-Users As Measured by the Pantry Stigma Scale



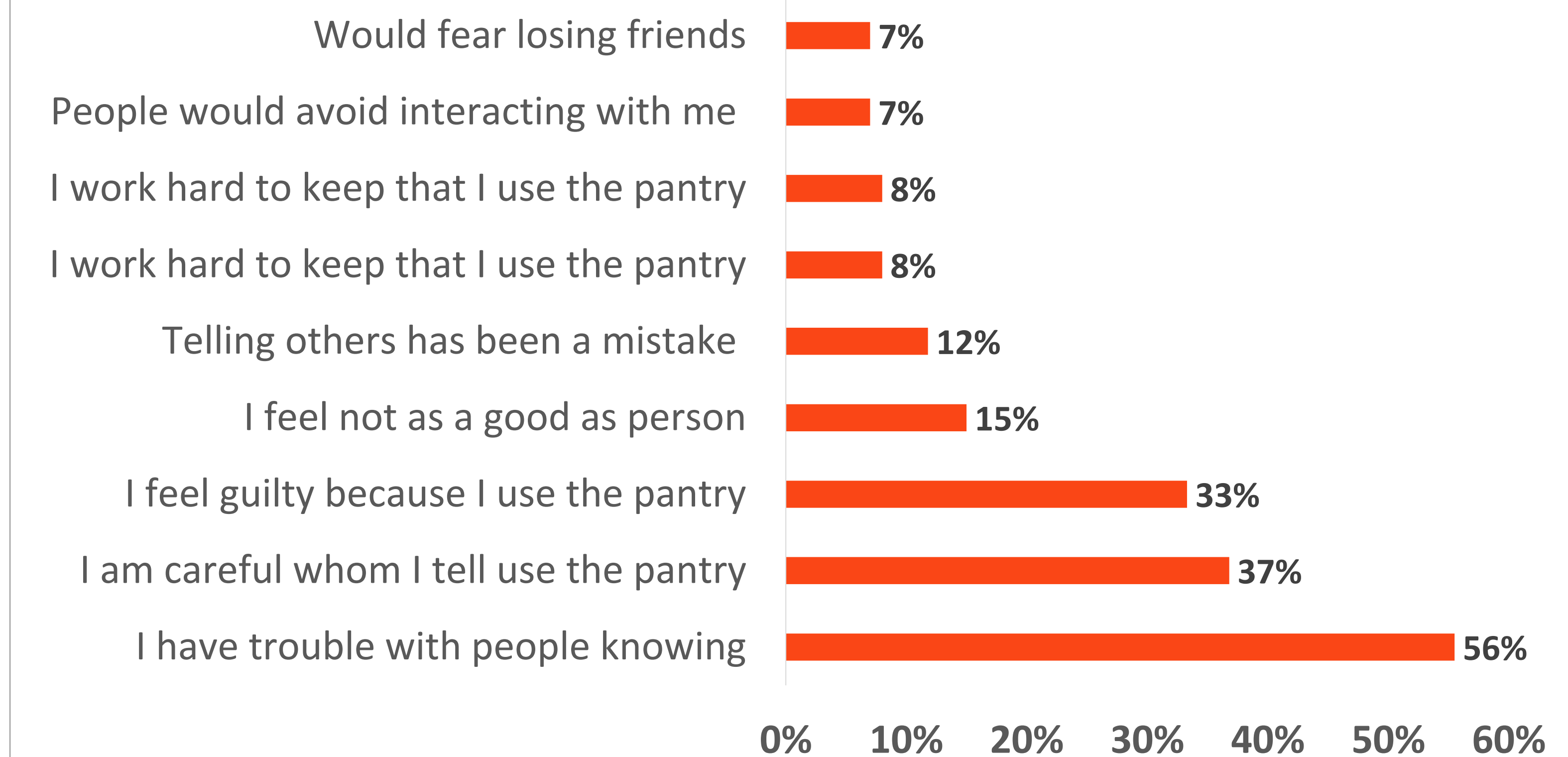
Values are means.
Independent t-test comparison was significant, p < 0.001

Percentage of Non-Users Endorsing the Pantry Stigma Scale Items



RESULTS

Percentage of Pantry Users Endorsing Items of the Food Pantry Stigma Scale



CONCLUSIONS

- Higher perceived stigma was observed among FP non-users than users, suggesting that perceived stigma may be preventing food insecure non-pantry users from accessing the food pantry.
- However, both food insecure FP users and non-users endorsed markers of stigma and feelings of guilt.
- Interventions are needed to decrease stigmatization of FP use and understand how FP users overcome stigma barriers to use needed resources.
- The development of FPs should be accompanied by anti-stigma campaigns, ultimately designed to normalize use of food pantry.

References

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