



Pediatric Feeding Therapists' Knowledge of Children's Oral Health

Habib C.¹, White M.¹, Hsu KLC.¹, Caffrey E.¹

¹Division of Pediatric Dentistry, University of Maryland School of Dentistry, Baltimore, MD

Objective

Children with pediatric feeding disorder (PFD) may have more unmet dental needs compared to healthy children. The goal of this research was to evaluate the oral health knowledge, confidence, and practices among healthcare providers who manage children with PFD.

Materials and Methods

- A survey was emailed to 250 members of the International Association of Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing.
- The survey consisted of 25 questions that assessed oral health-related knowledge, confidence, and practices.
- Participants were grouped together based on their reported occupation into: Group A: occupational therapists / speech-language pathologists / feeding therapists (n=28), Group B: psychologists (n=6), and Group C: physicians / nurse practitioners / registered dietitians (n=17).
- Chi-square and Fischer exact tests were used to determine statistical significance ($P \leq .05$).

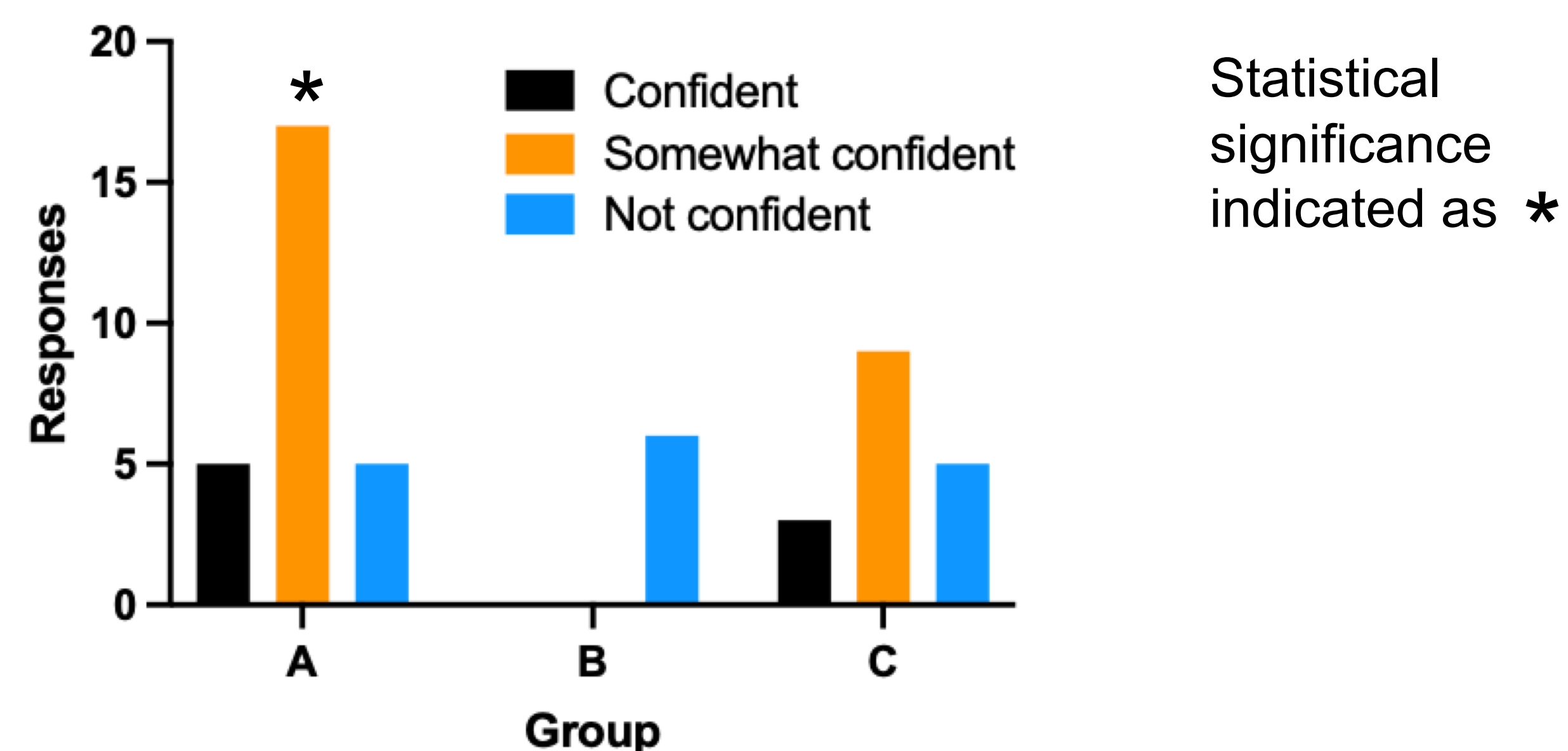


Figure 1: Question assessed provider confidence in advising caregivers regarding oral hygiene in children with PFD.

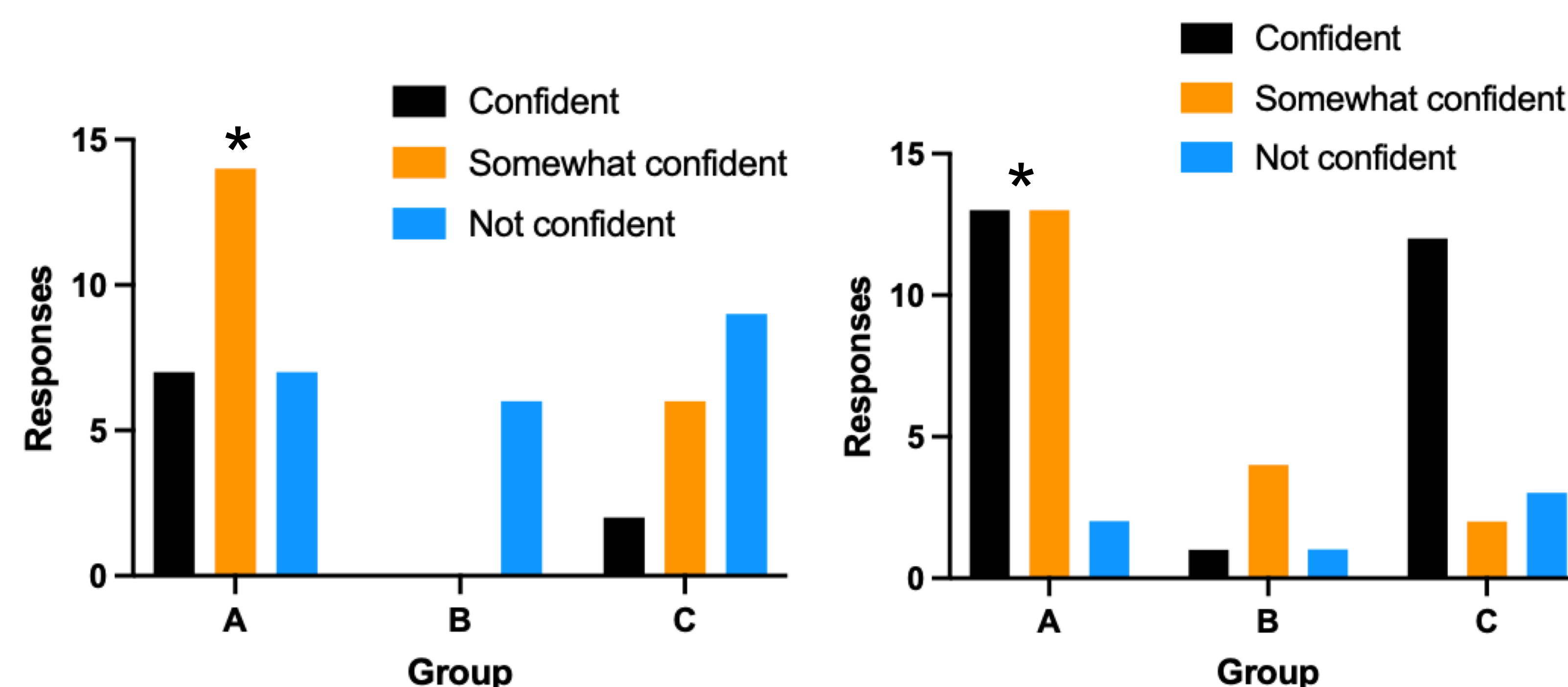


Figure 2: Question assessed provider confidence in performing oral screenings for children with PFD.

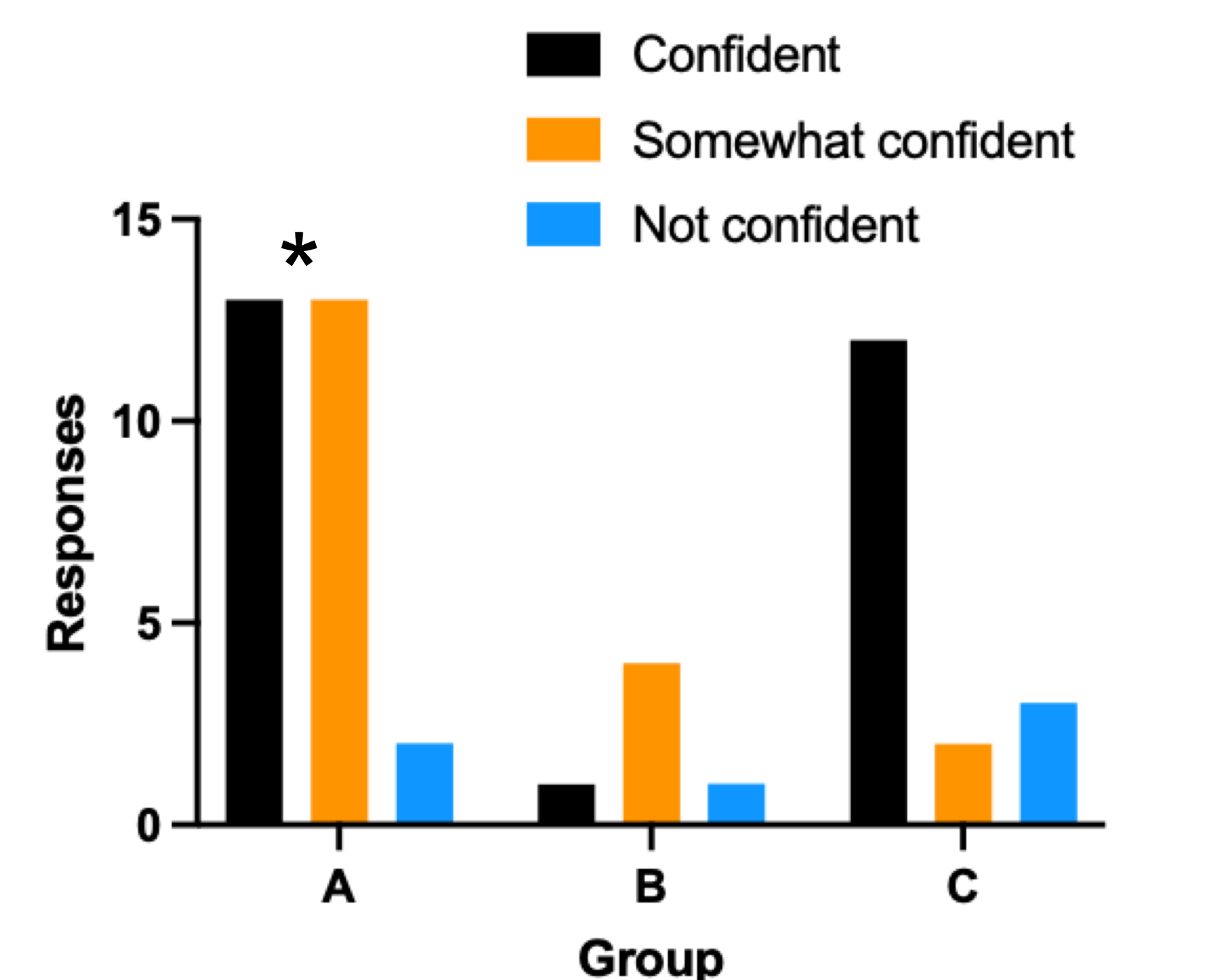


Figure 3: Question assessed provider confidence in suggesting if children with PFD need a referral to a dentist.

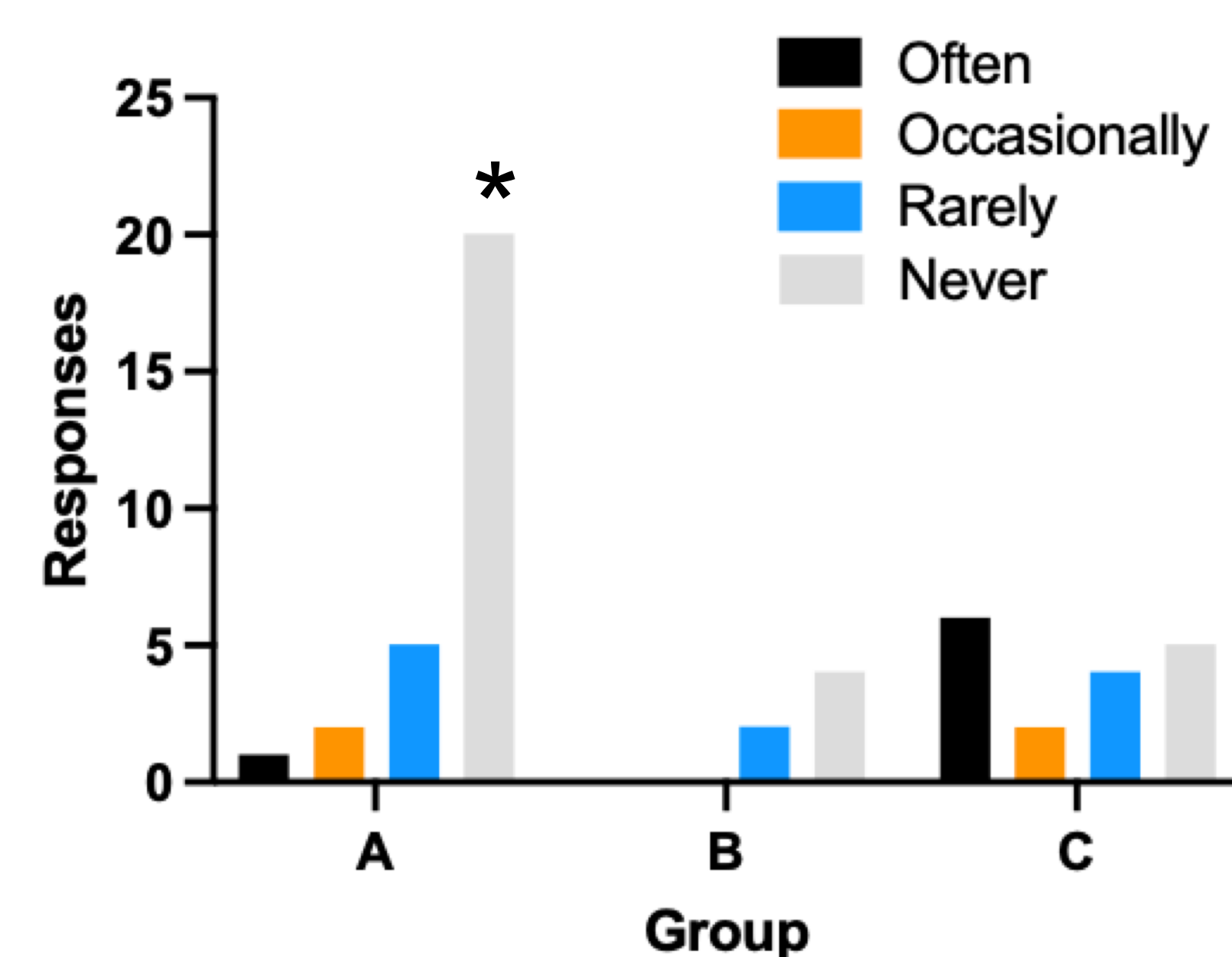


Figure 4: Question assessed frequency that providers assess fluoride intake in children with PFD.

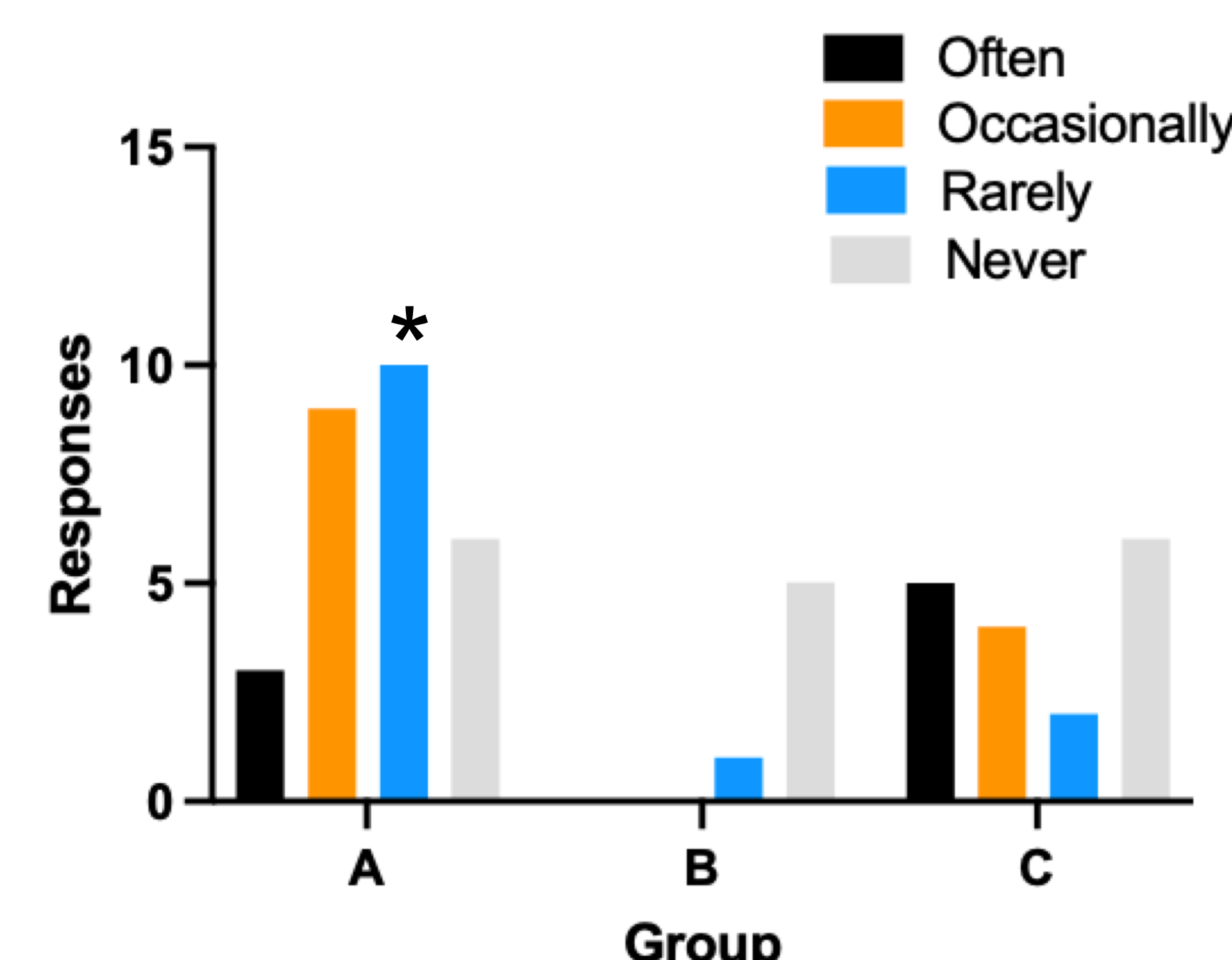


Figure 5: Question assessed frequency that providers assess tooth decay in children with PFD.

Results

- Fifty-one individuals participated in the survey (23% response rate).
- 50% or more of participants correctly answered 6 of the 12 questions evaluating oral health knowledge. No statistical significance was noted between groups in regards to oral health knowledge.
- 50% or more of participants reported “not confident” in 2 of 6 questions evaluating oral health confidence.
- 50% or more of participants reported “often” in 2 of the 6 questions evaluating oral health practices.
- Group A providers had more **confidence** with advising caregivers regarding oral hygiene (Fig. 1), performing oral screenings (Fig. 2), and providing referrals to dentists (Fig. 3) compared to Group B and C providers ($P \leq .05$).
- Group A providers assessed **frequency** of fluoride intake (Fig. 4) and frequency of tooth decay (Fig. 5) less frequently than Group B and C providers ($P \leq .05$).

Conclusions

- There was no statistically significant difference in oral health knowledge among the various professional providers.
- Occupational therapists / speech-language pathologists / feeding therapists had more confidence in oral health practices but less frequently carried out oral health practices in children with PFD compared to psychologists / physicians / nurse practitioners / registered dietitians.
- Healthcare providers require support from oral health professionals to optimize the oral health of children with PFD.