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Empathy and Pre-service Teachers: How Much is Too Much?

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Empathy and pre-service teachers: How much is too much?

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Burnout is a well-known term that is used frequently in the world of education, specifically, when it comes to the teaching of special education. It is described as, “a long-term chronic state of stress which is the direct result of working with people” (Johnson, 2018). This occurs when teachers feel emotionally exhausted, feel they lack personal accomplishment, and feel depersonalized which results in a majority of special educators quitting their jobs (Crosby, Howell & Thomas, 2018). Similar to burnout, compassion fatigue is a difficult challenge that educators face in the workforce that can lead to a plethora of problems for a teacher. While burnout is often caused from a lack of personal accomplishment, compassion fatigue is more directly the result from the emotional exhaustion that occurs after repeatedly being exposed to trauma (Johnson, 2018). Compassion fatigue is a term that is lesser known than burnout, but has just as great an impact on teachers. As Koenig, Rodger and Specht (2018) report, “Individuals suffering from CF often exhibit symptoms similar to diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder.” This is an important aspect of compassion fatigue because it explains the way that teachers may have to deal with secondhand trauma, which affects an individual teacher immensely. This can cause emotional strife and internal grief that can affect that individual teacher for years. Although this term may not be as familiarized as burnout, it has been documented that roughly 75% of educators experience high levels of compassion fatigue, in accordance with the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Koenig Rodger, & Specht, 2018). This information is vital to the awareness educators must have on compassion fatigue because it is such a prominent struggle in the workforce.

In our research, we are wondering if educating future teachers or pre-service teachers about compassion fatigue, including what it is, how it impacts teachers, and how to prevent it are all questions that need to be addressed in order to better teachers in the field. In fact, could compassion fatigue start showing up in pre-service teachers while completing a college or university studies in education?

RESEARCH QUESTION

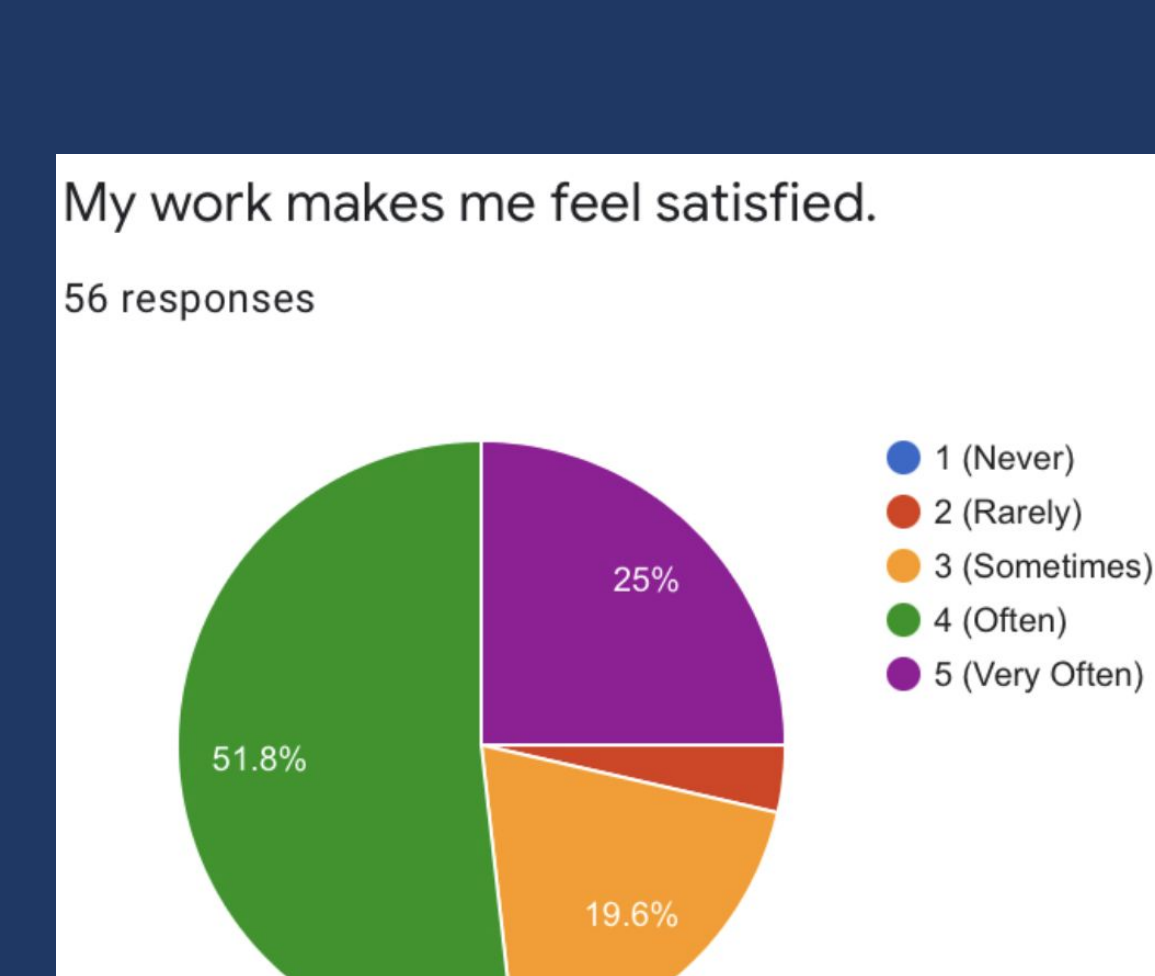
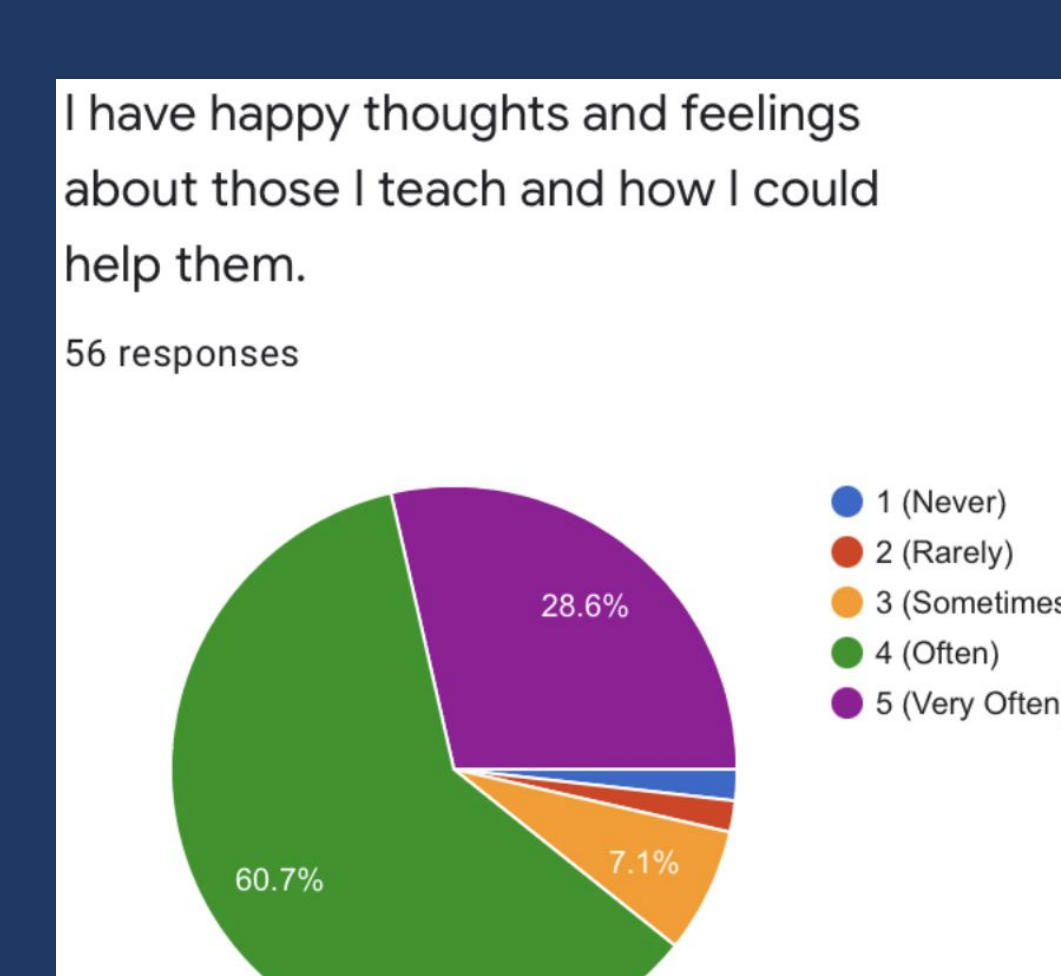
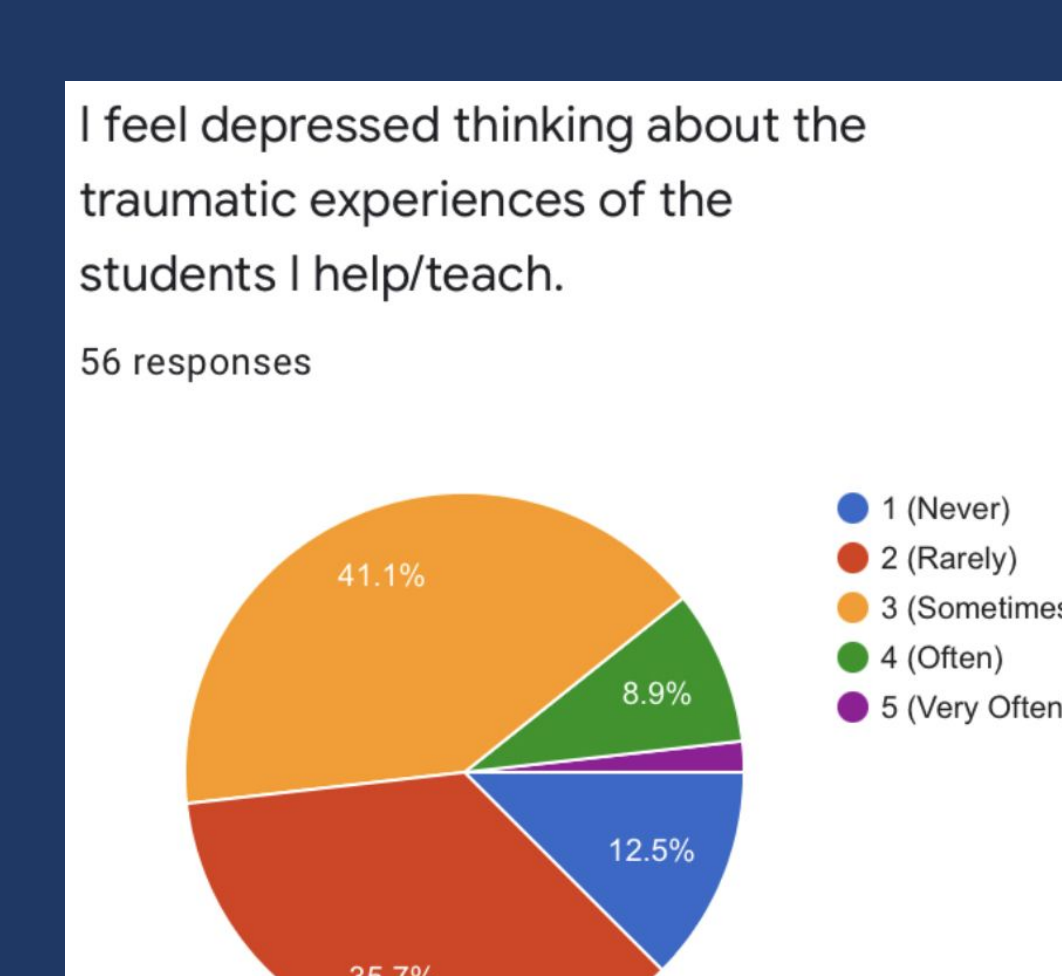
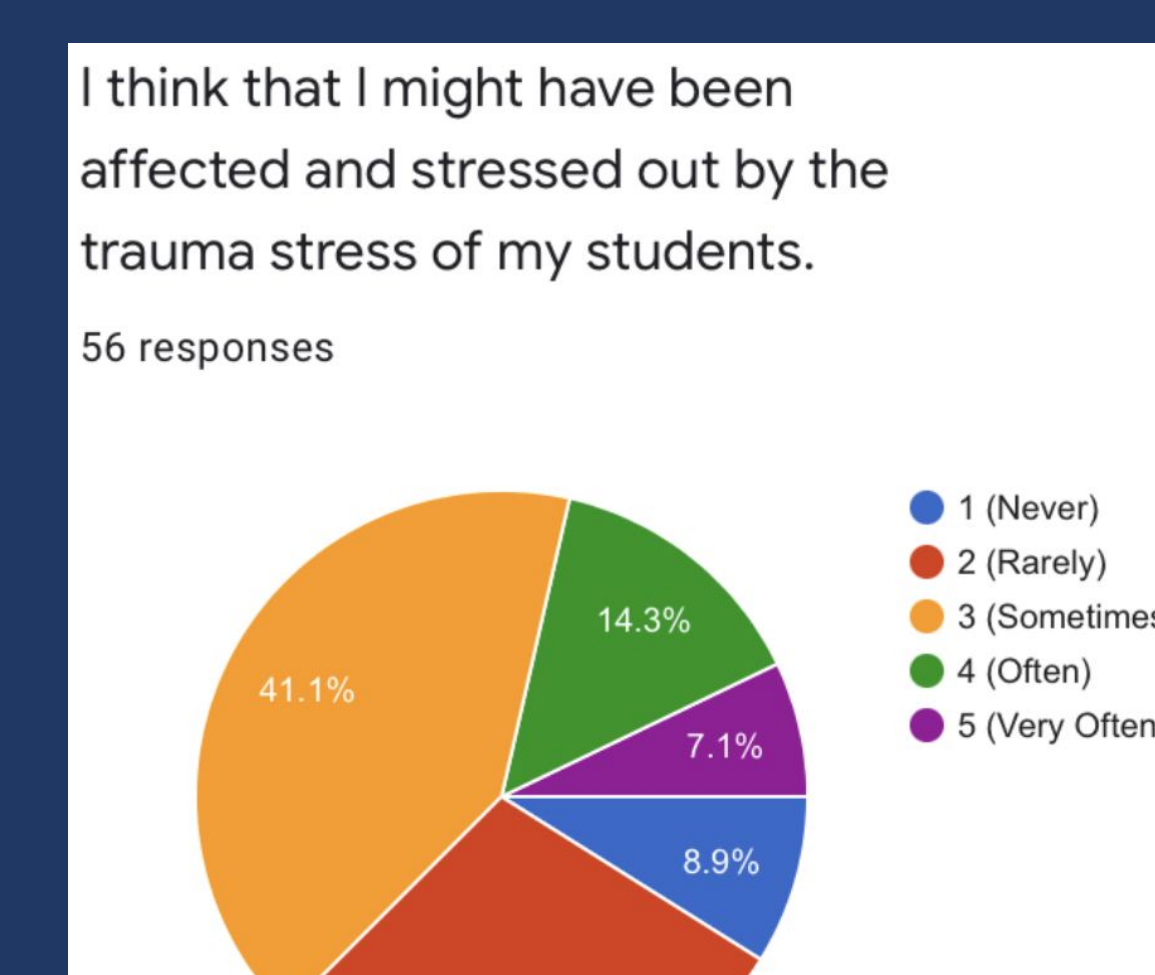
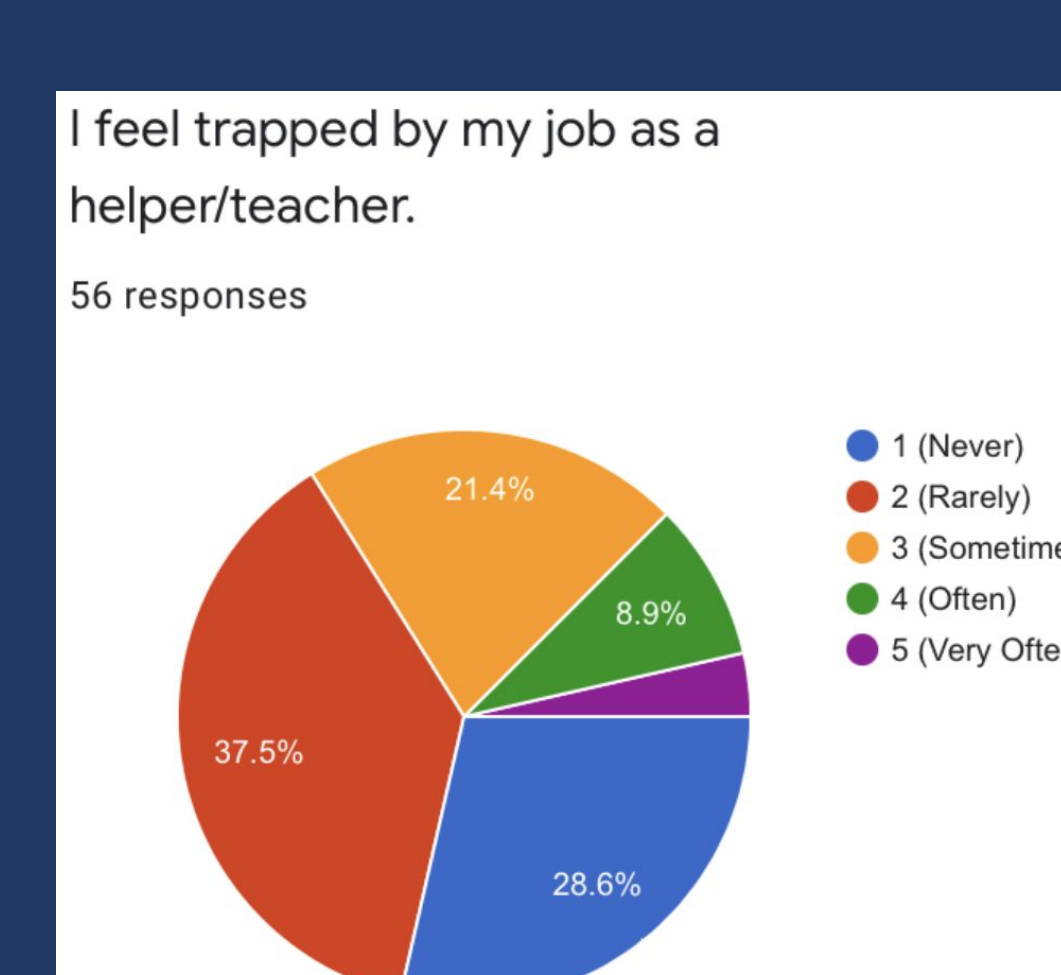
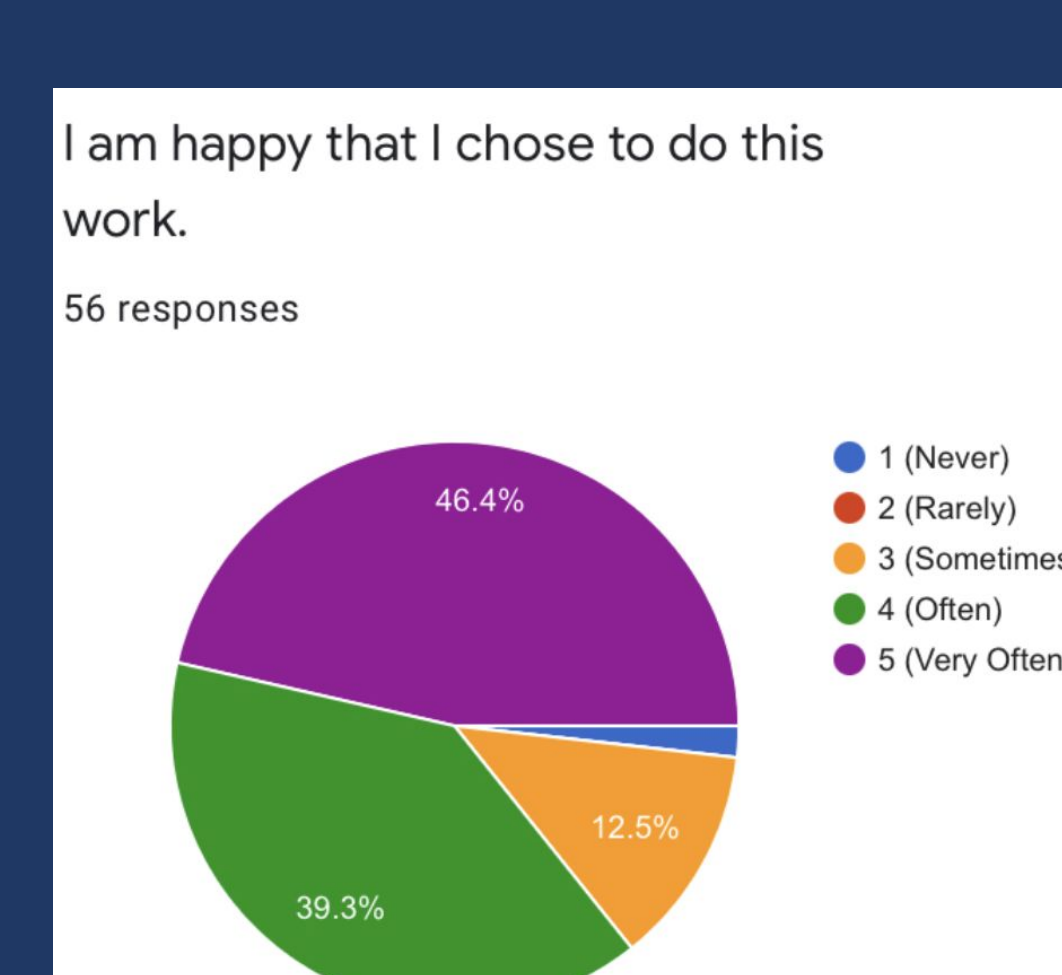
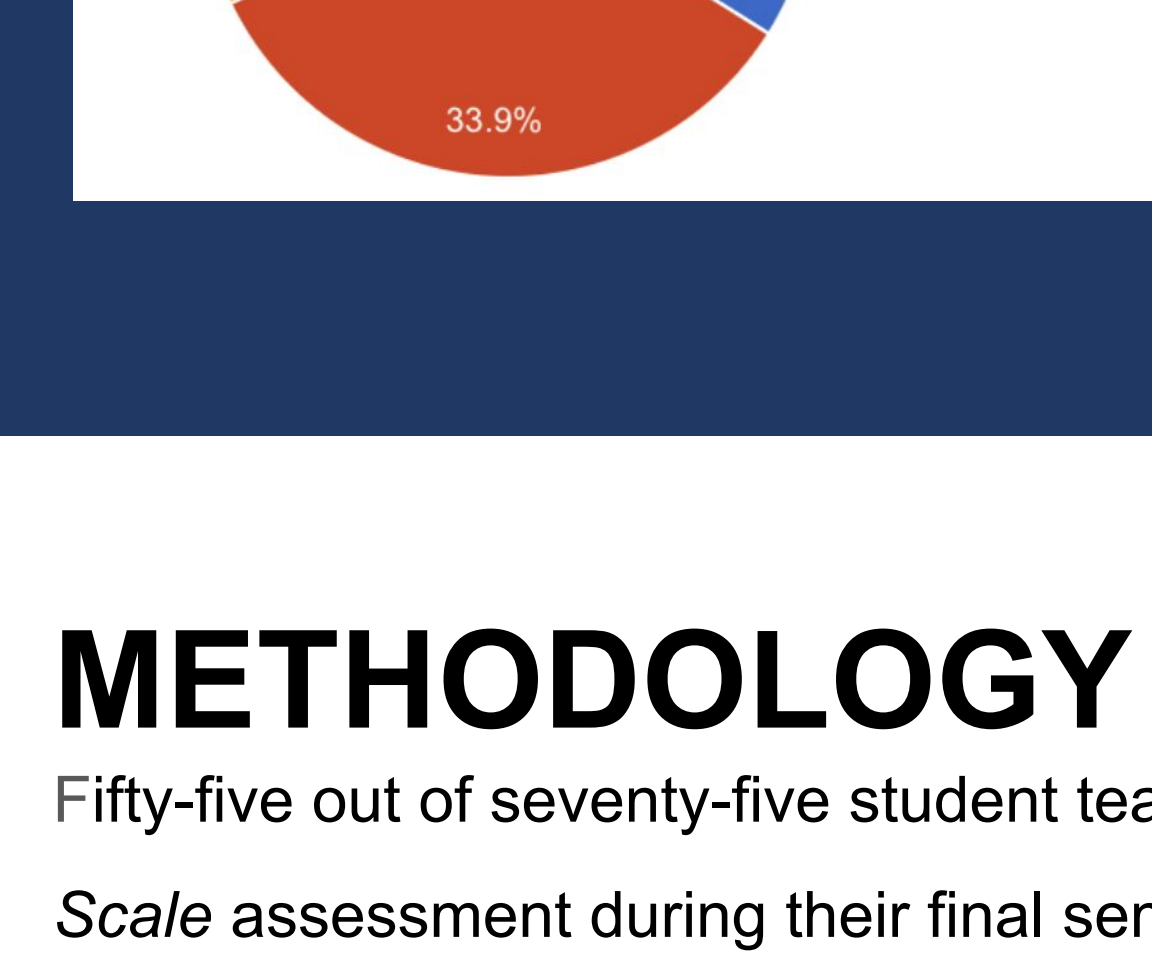
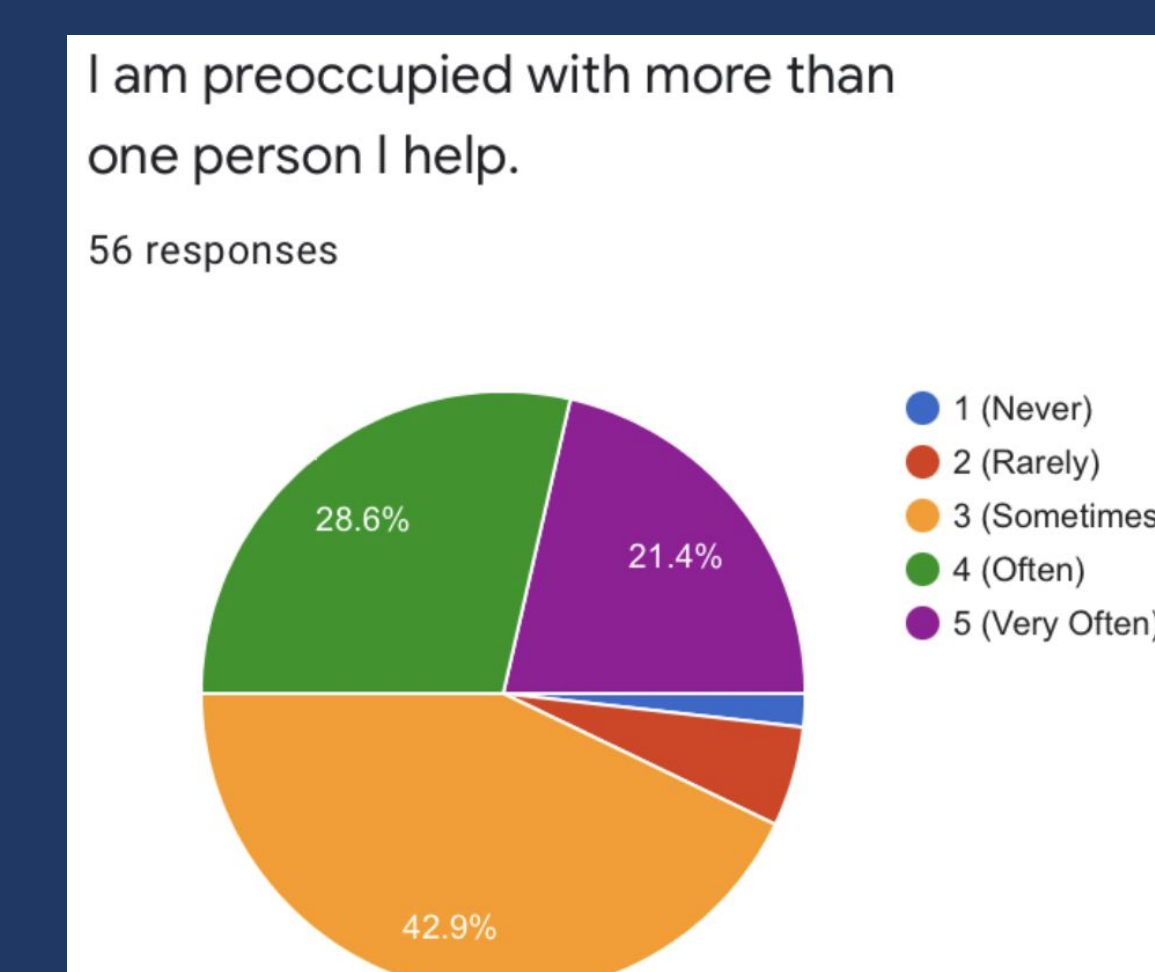
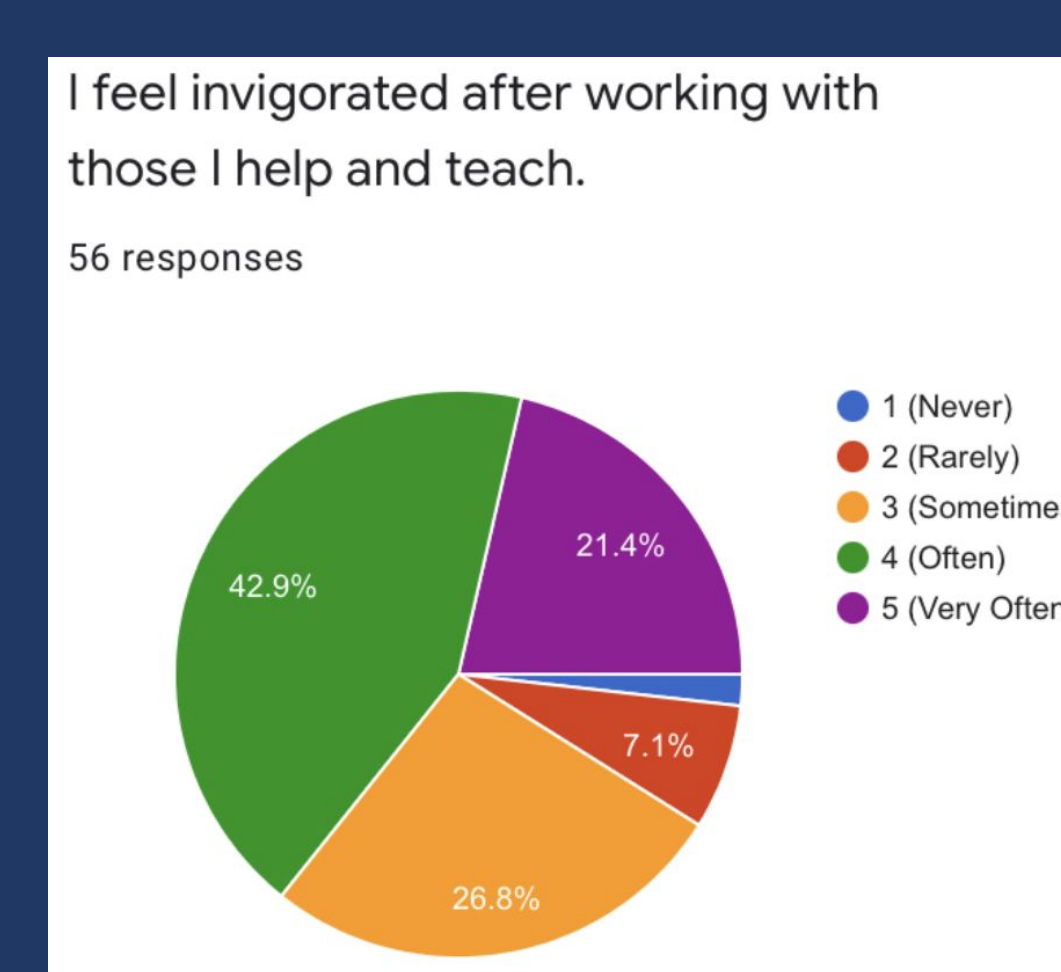
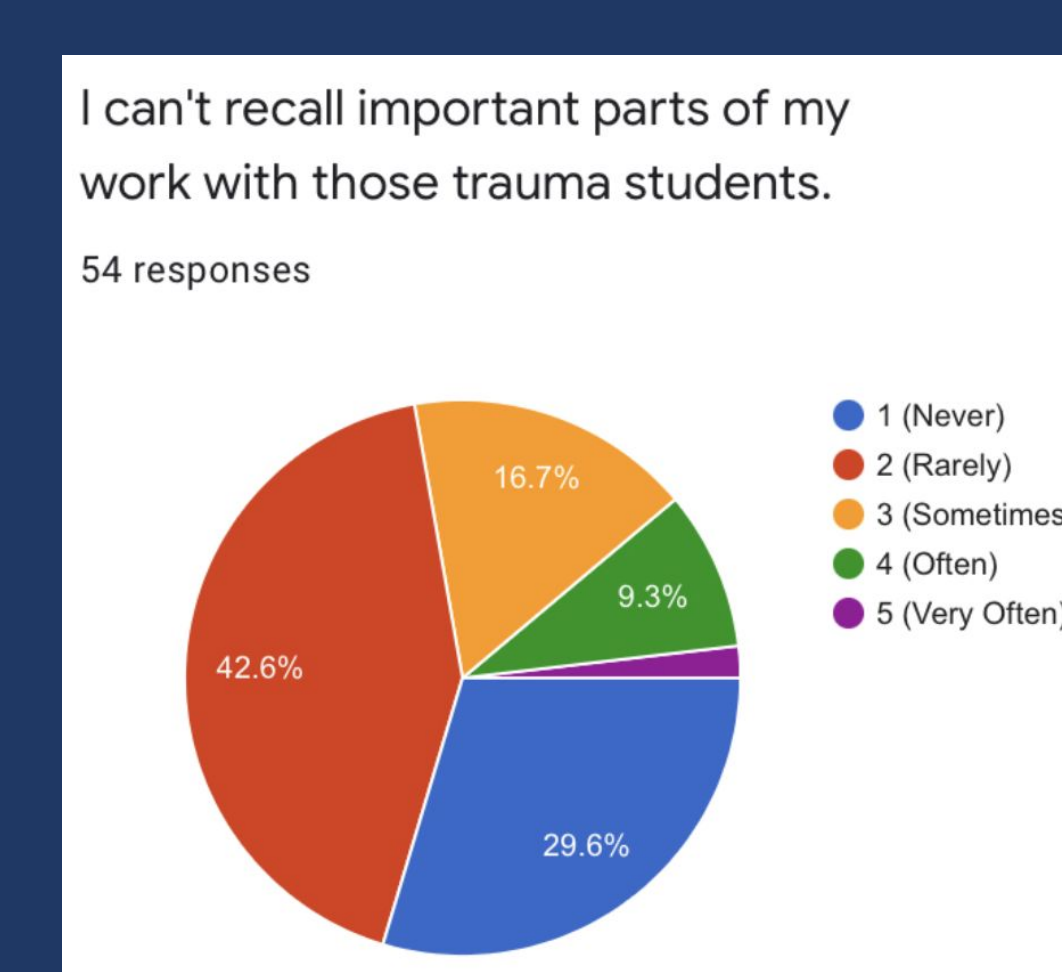
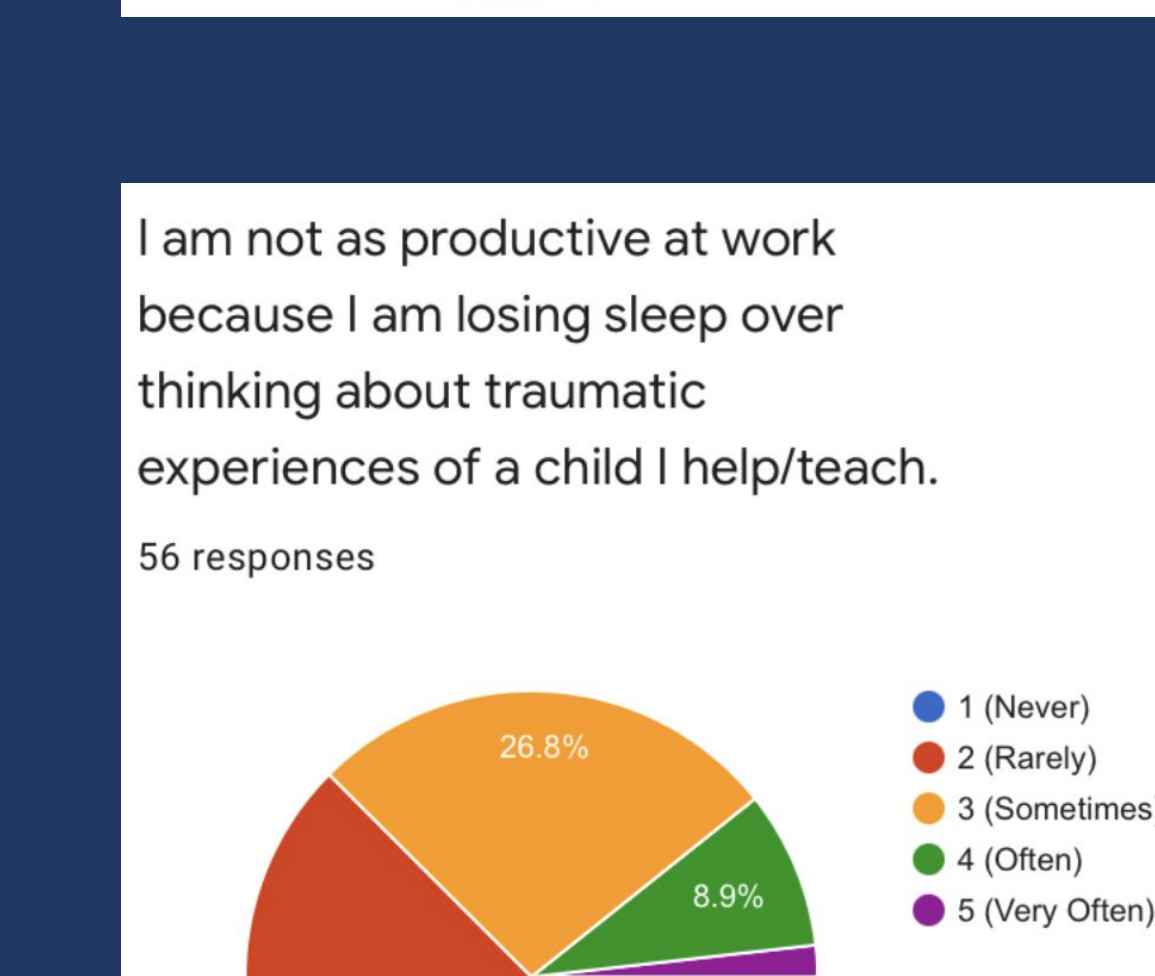
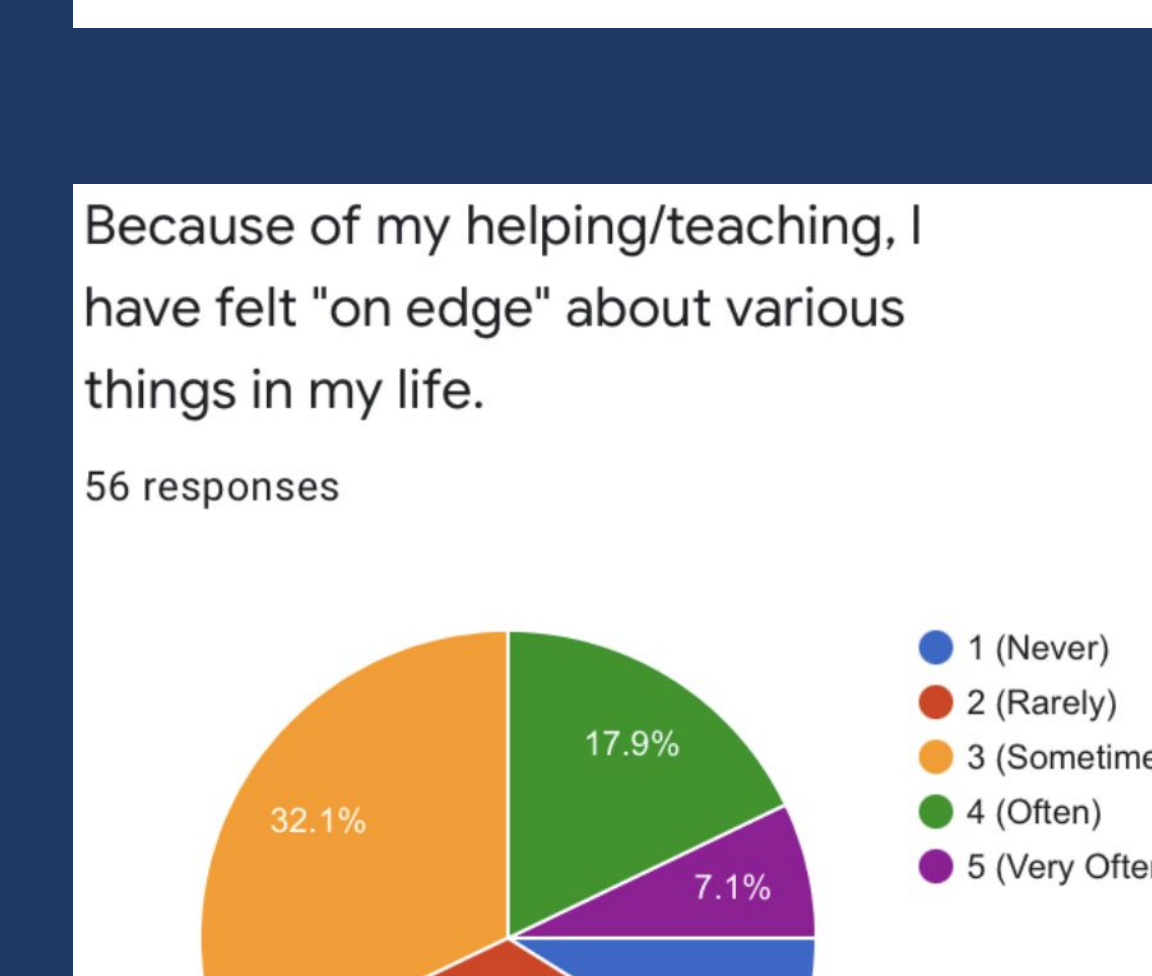
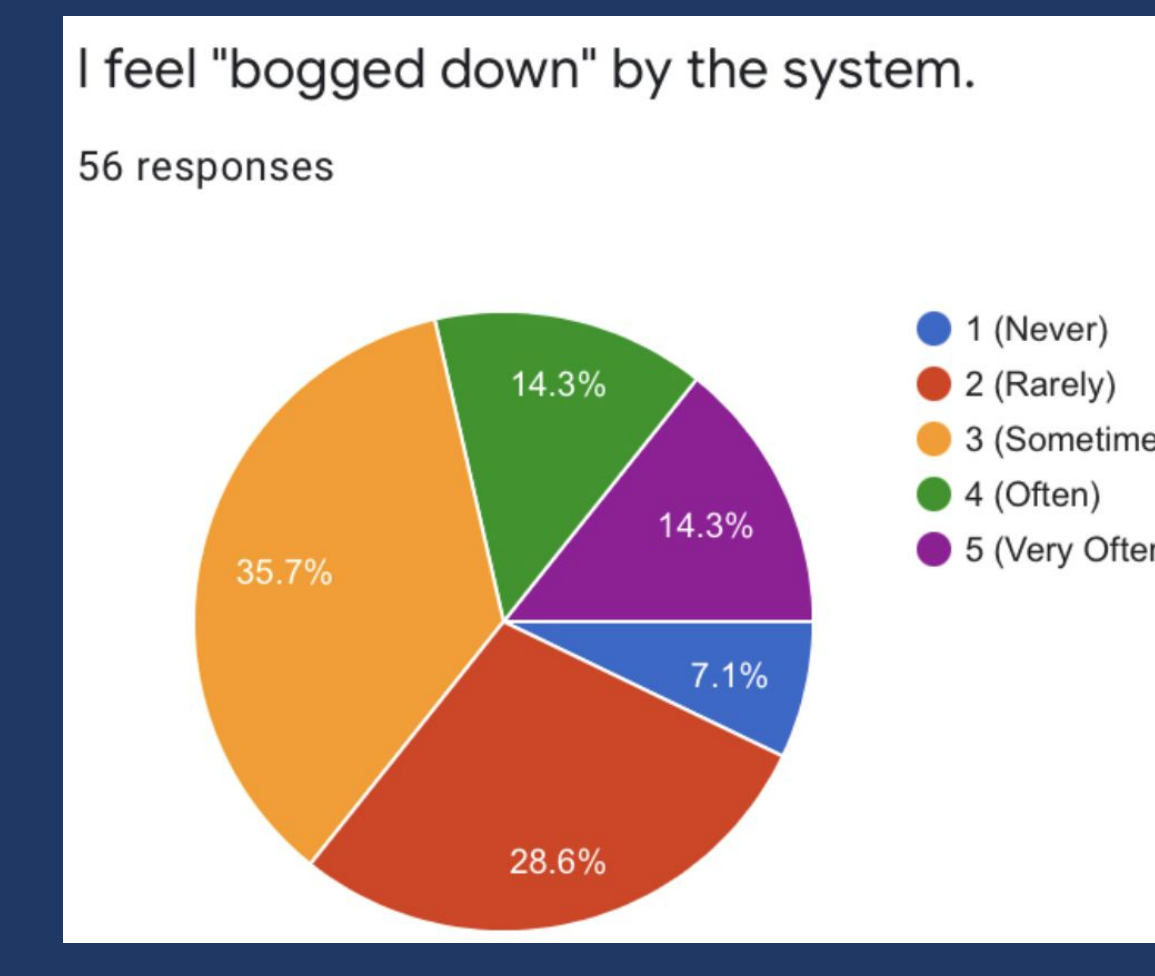
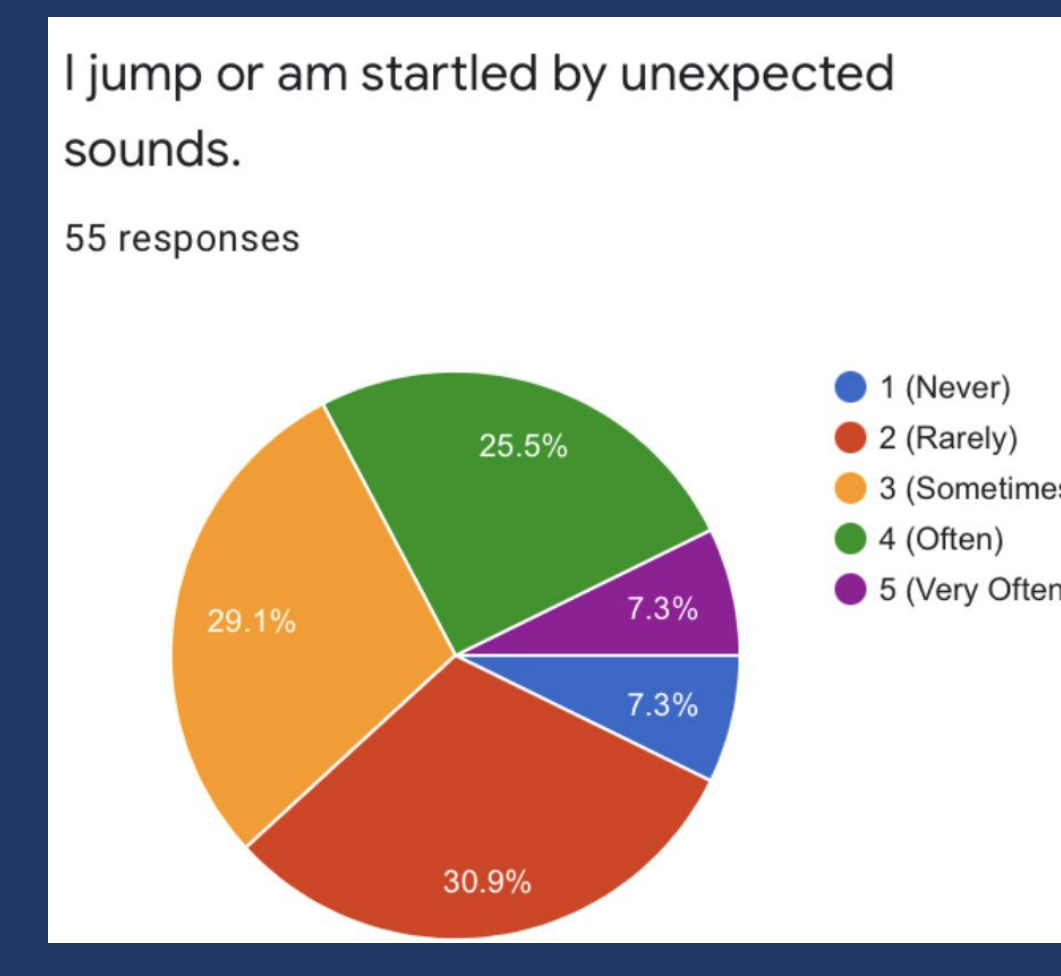
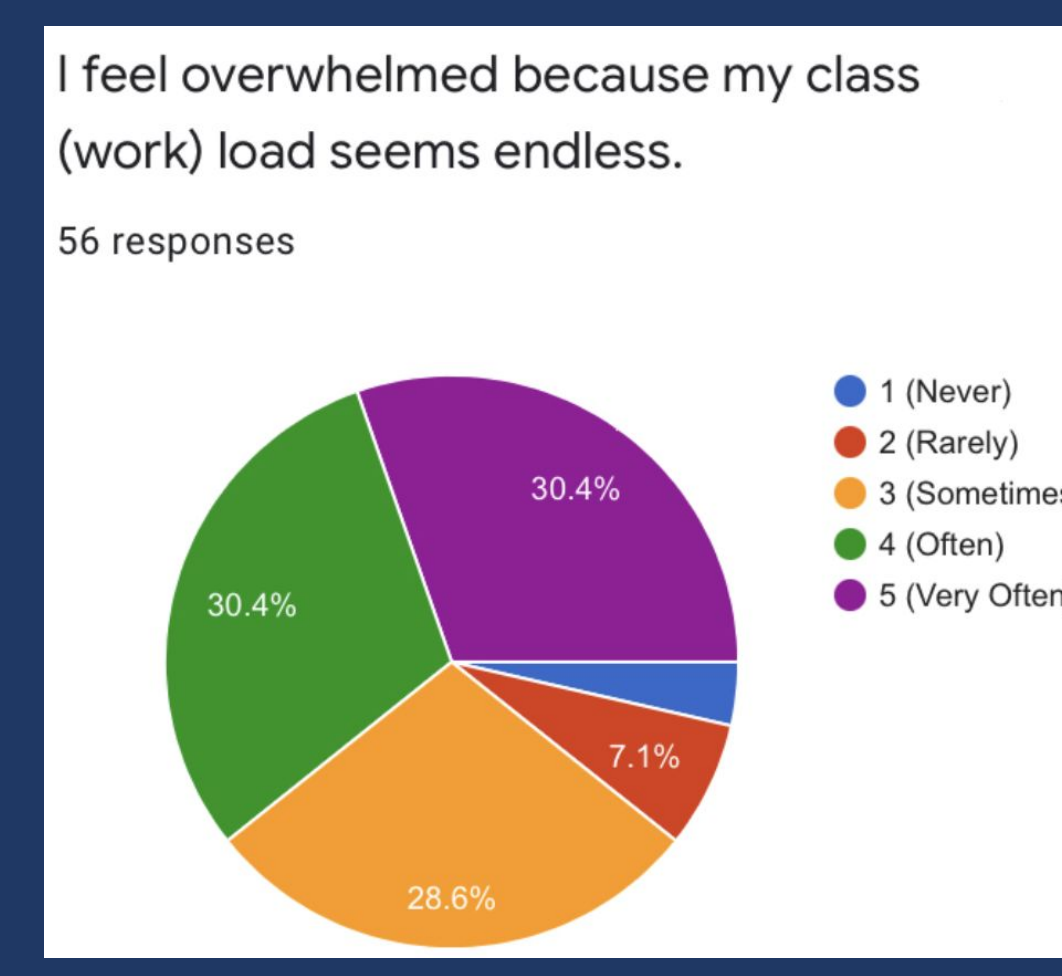
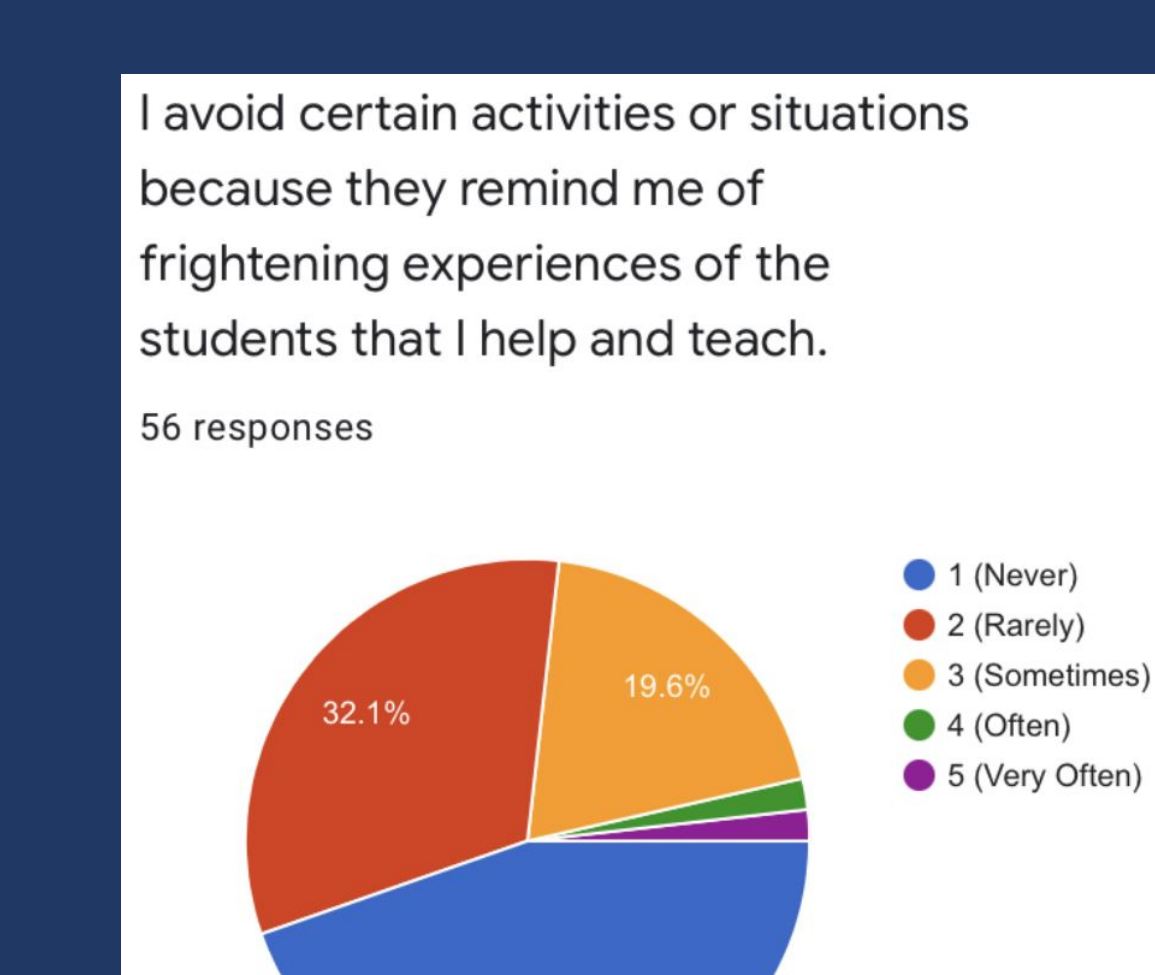
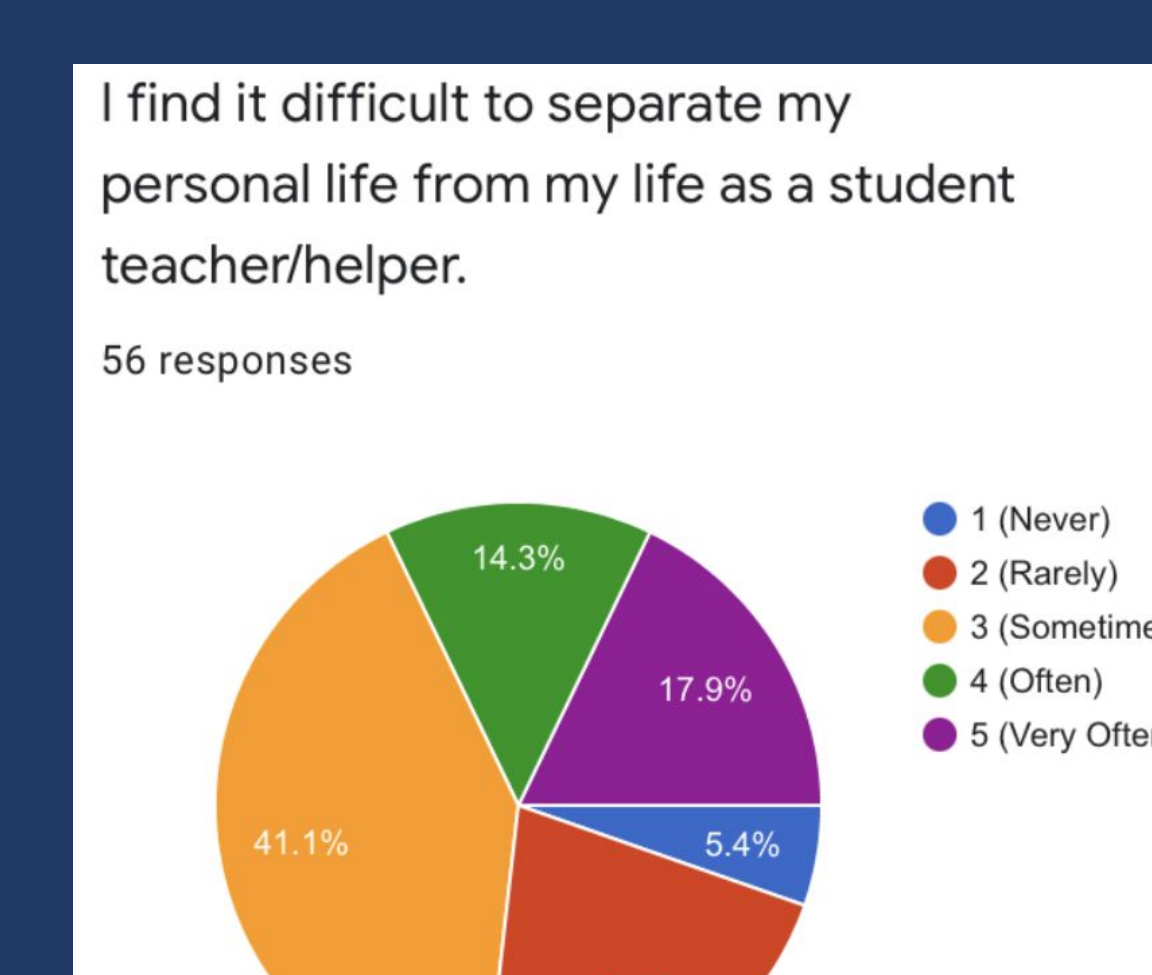
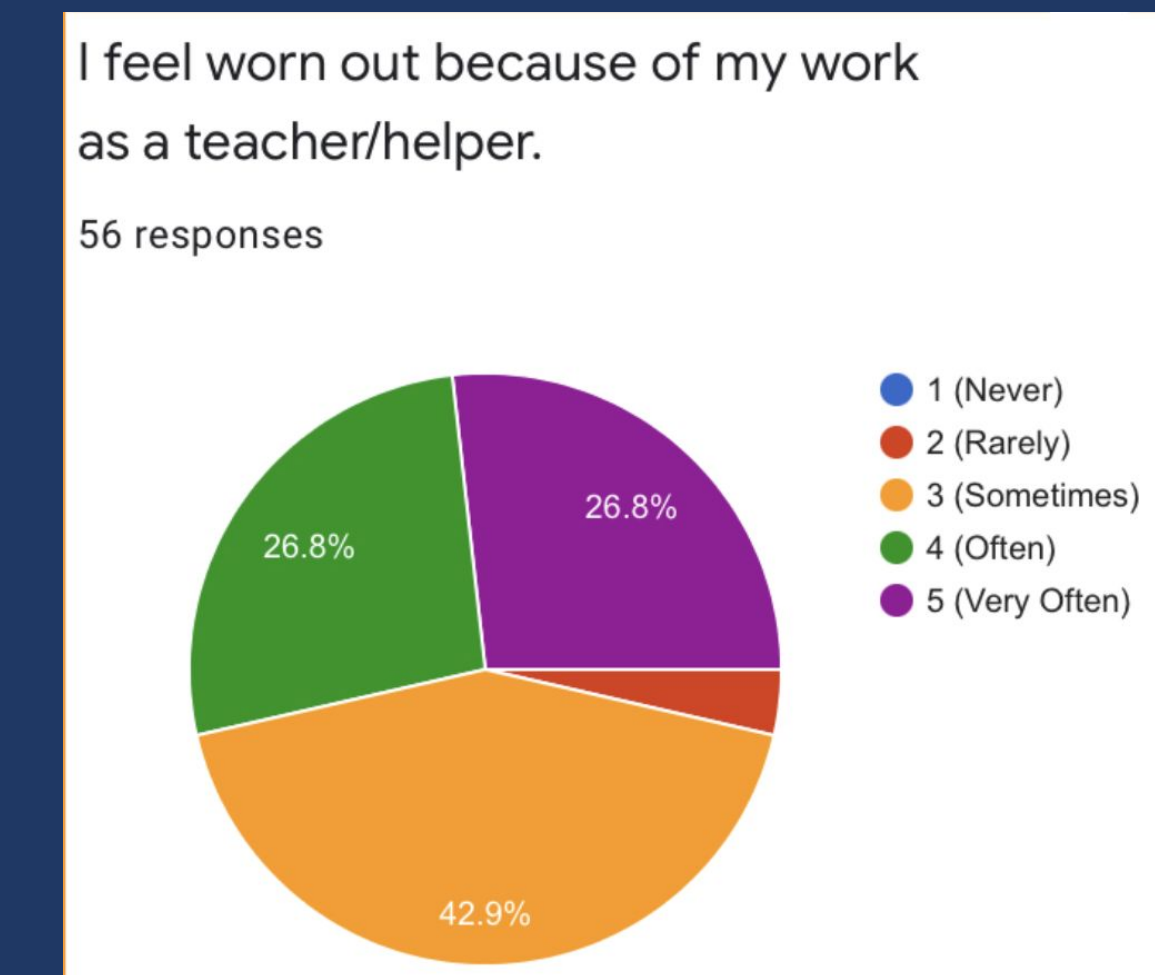
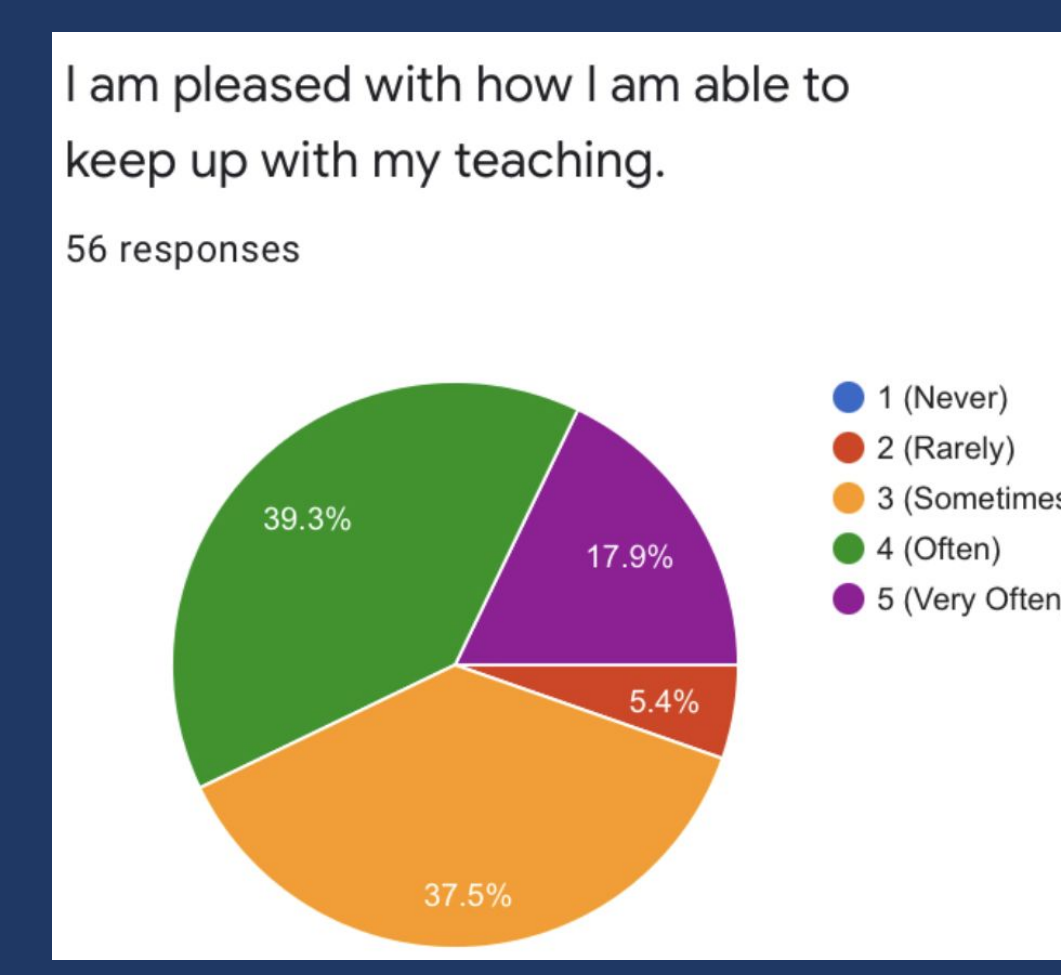
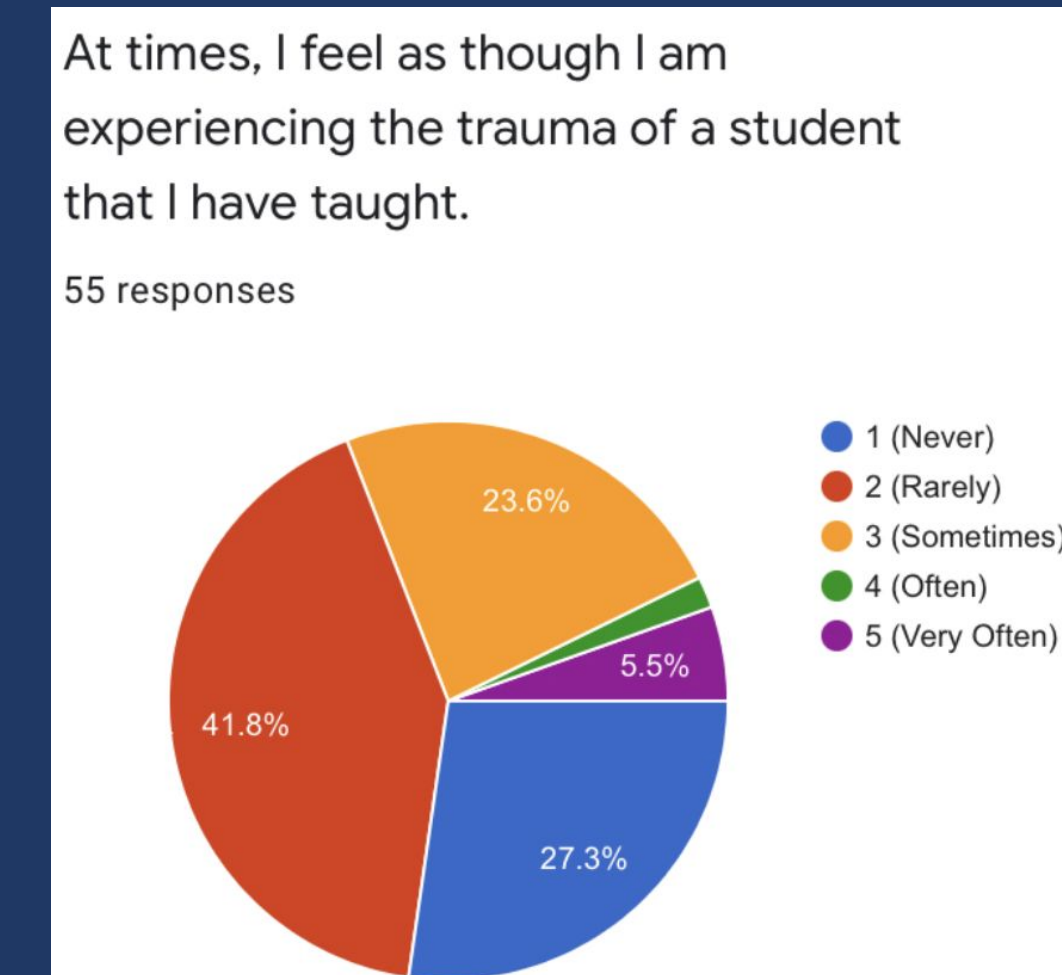
In that vein, this research question was “Do student teachers that are finishing up their student teaching show Compassion Fatigue as shown in the instrument entitled the *Professional Quality of Life Scale*.”

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METHODOLOGY

Fifty-five out of seventy-five student teachers completed the *Professional Quality of Life Scale* assessment during their final semester while in the field 100% of the time during their student teaching seminar class. The Professional Quality of Life Scale or ProQLS was given online and the student teachers names were not identified. Only the quantitative results are reported in this particular study.

DISCUSSION

- Some positive results:
 - 86% feel happy that they chose to do this work “very often” or even “often.”
 - 75% feel connected to others “very often” or “often.”
 - 69% “never” or “rarely” feel that they experience the trauma of one of their students.
- Some negative results:
 - 54% feel worn out from working as a teacher already “very often” or “often.”
 - 61% feel overwhelmed by their workload “very often” or “often.”
 - 41% feel pleased with their ability to keep up with their teaching only “sometimes” or even “rarely.”

From this research, it appears that these student teachers from our liberal arts college are overwhelmed with their intense workload of student teaching. This is an item that can be future researched.