

Enhancing nutritional care for persons living with dementia: findings from an online questionnaire on dietitians' perspectives on educational resources, and professional development need

Hana Dakkak, MScFN, RD, Ph.D.(c)¹, Carrie McAiney Ph.D.^{2,3}, Laura Middleton, Ph.D.^{1,3}, Ashwini M Namasivayam-MacDonald Ph.D., SLP(C)⁴, Heather Keller, Ph.D. RD^{1,3}

(1) Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences, University of Waterloo, ON; (2) School of Public Health Sciences, University of Waterloo; (3) Schlegel-UW Research ; Institute for Aging, Waterloo, ON; (4) School of Rehabilitation Sciences, University of McMaster, Hamilton, ON

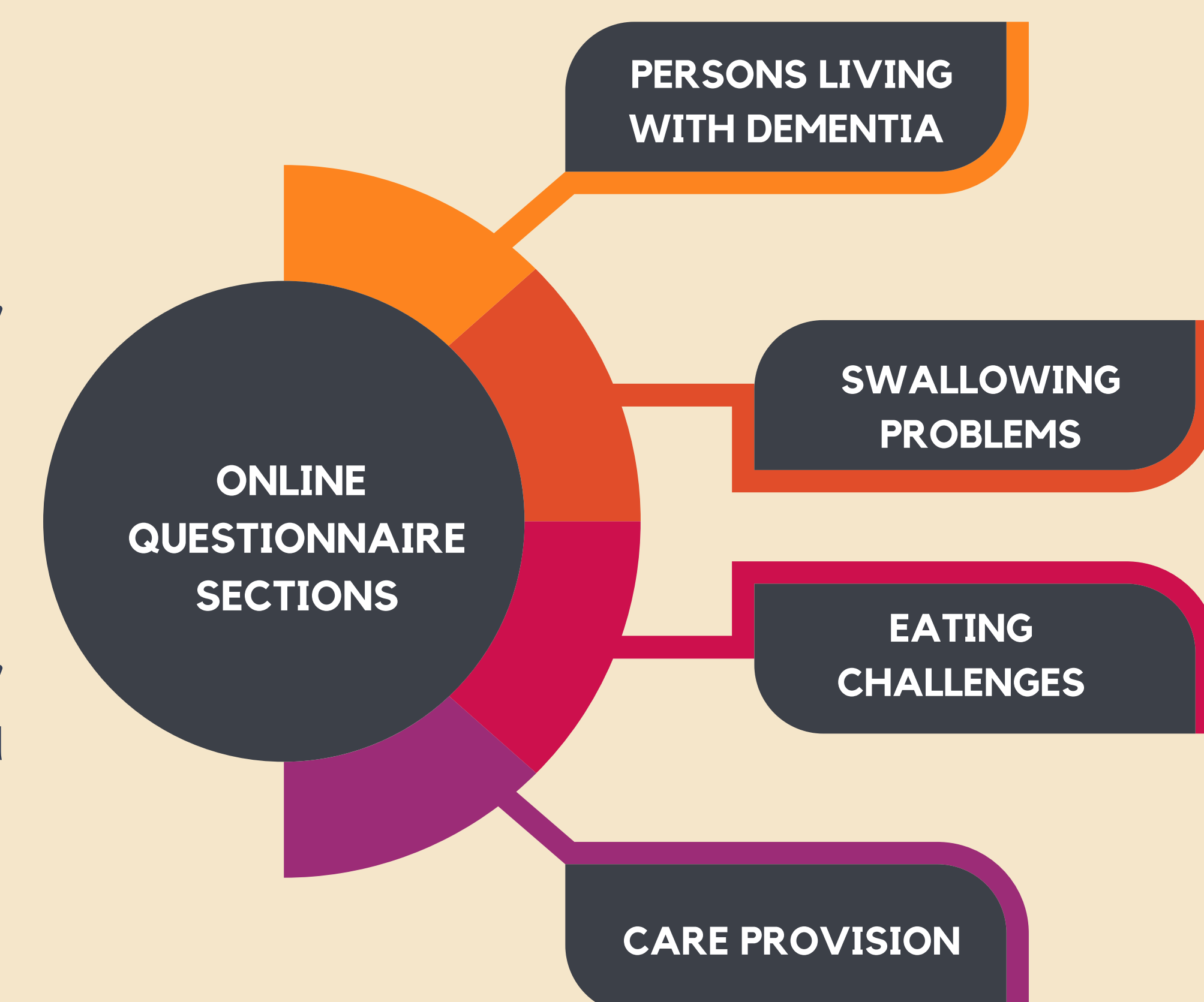
Background

- Malnutrition impacts up to 47% of community-dwelling older adults, and can lead to negative health outcomes such as frailty, osteoporosis, lower quality of life, and increased risk of morbidity and mortality¹.
- Registered dietitians (RDs) are considered nutrition experts who play an integral role in preventing and treating malnutrition, as their role includes the management of eating difficulties (e.g. feeding challenges, chewing and swallowing difficulty, etc)².
- Research suggests that dietitians report a need to build their knowledge and improve their skills when providing care to older adults, however, research examining the professional development needs is scarce³.
- Furthermore, despite the growing need for education resources related to nutrition and dementia, a knowledge translation gap has been identified in the literature⁴.

This study aims to understand the professional development needs of dietitians and examine their perspectives on educational resources available for clients living with dementia.

Methods

- Online questionnaire was utilized to understand the perspective of dietitians.
- The questionnaire inquired about the dietitians' experiences providing care to client: persons living with dementia, swallowing problems, eating challenges, and care provision (e.g., educational resources, professional development needs).
- Inclusion criteria: primary care dietitians (e.g., private practice, community care, outpatient clinic).
- Exclusion criteria: dietitians working exclusively in acute, complex, and long-term care (LTC) settings.
- Snowball and convenient sampling methods were used to recruit dietitians. RDs were recruited via social media, stakeholder organizations (e.g., Primary Care Dietitian Association and Dietitians of Canada Gerontology Network), and through conferences and workshops relevant to their practice.
- Descriptive statistics was used to report the data from the survey



Results

A total of 47 dietitians responded to the survey*

- 98% identified as female, and 88% were white
- 74% were between 26-39 years of age
- 42% from Ontario and 30% from Alberta
- 63% work in community, 65% in homecare and 33% also worked in LTC
- 55% work with community clients for > 5 years
- 53% and 21% of participants reported 1-24% and 25-49% of their clients respectively live with dementia

*The number of answers varied per question.

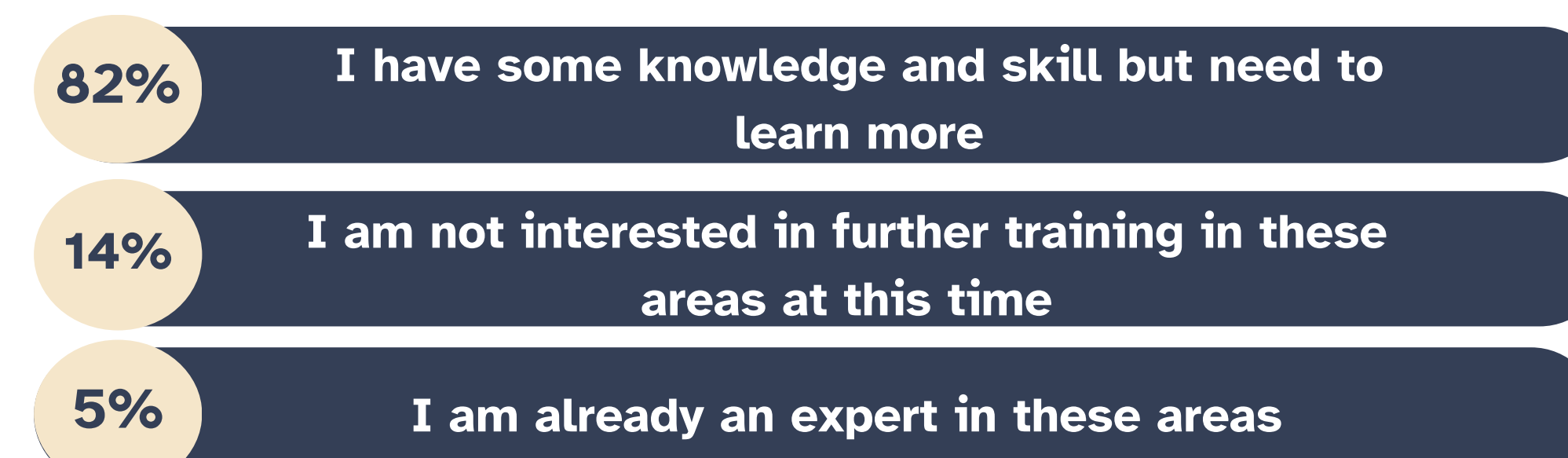
The source of educational materials on swallowing difficulties and eating changes used by registered dietitians (n=43)



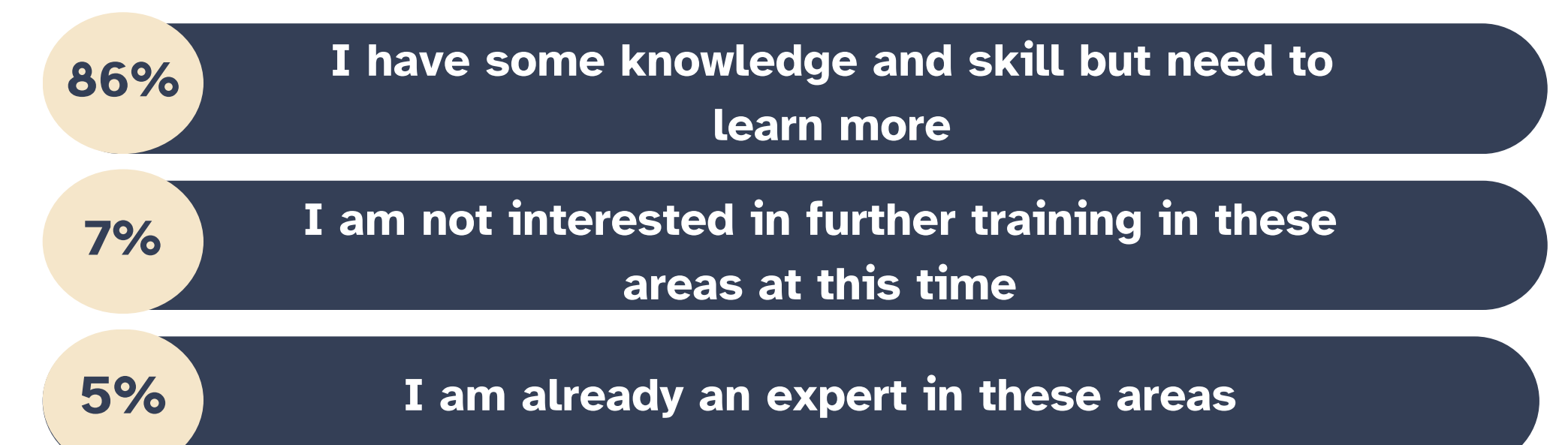
The reported suitability of resources for persons living with dementia (n=43)



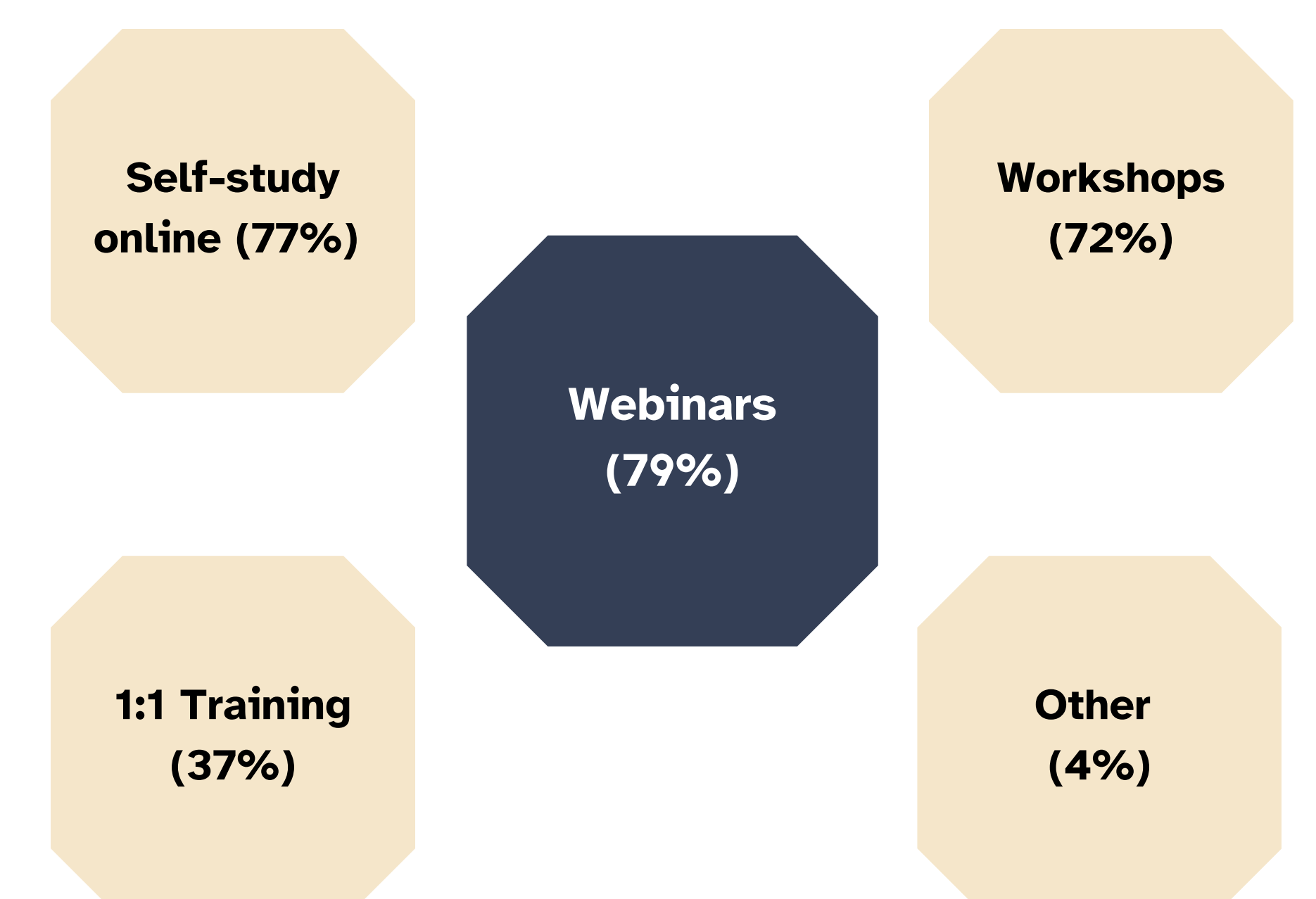
RDs reporting a need to learn more about the management and assessment of swallowing problems (n=44)



RDs reporting a need to learn more about the management and assessment of eating challenges (n=44)



RDs' preferred method for further learning to improve their clinical skills (n=43)



Conclusion

- The current analysis reveals an opportunity to enhance the nutrition care provided to persons living with dementia in the community by developing dementia friendly nutrition resources and meeting the professional development needs of the dietitians working with this population.
- Insights into dietitians' educational needs will be instrumental in advancing nutritional care for persons living with dementia in the community.
- Further research should explore strategies to minimize barriers to nutrition care in community-clients and support RDs in their practice.

References:

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Contact email: hdakkak@uwaterloo.ca Twitter/X: @DakkakHana

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