

Where Are They Now? The Results of an HDFS Alumni Survey

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ABSTRACT. A key challenge of family science is to help students acquire a more thorough understanding of the field and career opportunities. To date, knowledge of family science graduates' professional experiences is primarily anecdotal. The goal of this study is to present empirical findings from an online survey completed by 216 human development and family studies (HDFS) undergraduate alumni. Most were employed in positions related to their degree or had pursued post-undergraduate education. Completion of a field experience was the only predictor of employment in an HDFS-related position. Income, fields of practice, job functions, and age groups with whom they work are reported for alumni employed in positions related to their degree. Significant differences were found between these alumni and graduates who had pursued additional education in the importance placed on areas of knowledge and skills in their current roles. Implications are discussed for family science faculty and researchers.

Keywords: family science, alumni, career opportunities

“What can I do with this degree and will I be able to find a job?” are familiar questions to family science faculty. Allaying students' fears is difficult when knowledge of graduates' professional experiences is primarily anecdotal. Many family science faculty members rely on a few key resources to help guide their undergraduates into potential careers. Smith and Hamon (2012) found that almost 45% of family science program representatives indicated *Careers in Family Science*, developed by the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR, 2009), was one of their primary resources for helping students understand family science and the opportunities it provides. Hollinger (2002) also identified ten career contexts or settings for family science

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graduates in her comprehensive review of the historical roots, theoretical foundations and disciplinary identity of family science. For example, in the area of education, Hollinger included parent education, peace education, sexuality education, and more.

Hollinger's (2002) list of career opportunities for graduates from family science programs was adapted from Day, Quick, Leigh, and McKenry (1988) and Keim (1995). Day and colleagues identified student career plans for alumni with graduate degrees in family and human development as reported by the graduate program faculty surveyed in their study. Keim described potential services graduates might provide as professionals. These services included case management, community outreach, community social services, coordination or administrative work, day care, education, research and planning, residential care, and vocational and professional guidance and training. The majority of his descriptions were based on Barker's (1991) *Social Work Dictionary* and focused on services that could be provided by alumni from both undergraduate and graduate programs. The services he described are similar to the functions or roles Kiser (2000) identified in her guide to human service internships. Keim also included job titles in his descriptions of services. These titles primarily came from career reference encyclopedias as well as "known positions that graduates have obtained" (p. 335). Keim and Cassidy (1989) obtained salaries and job titles from a survey of agencies where their students were placed as interns, and Smith and Hamon (2012) identified specific job titles as reported by family science program representatives. However, none of these researchers collected data from undergraduate family science alumni themselves, and with the exception of Smith and Hamon's work, the descriptions of job titles, services provided, and career opportunities were written approximately a decade ago, and in some cases, much earlier.

Twenty-five years ago, Day and colleagues (1988) suggested potential undergraduate students learn "where alumni have gotten jobs, how much their starting salaries were, and how long it took them to get jobs" (p. 324), but for most students (and their faculty), that information remains elusive. Almost 45% of the family science program representatives surveyed by Smith and Hamon (2012) indicated they would recommend "their own department's alumni career data" (p. 2), but how family science programs collected these data was not specified. Despite the number of undergraduate programs in family science, to our knowledge, there are no published studies that report data from graduates of these programs. Other disciplines have done a better job gathering and reporting alumni data. Examples include health communication (Edgar & Hyde, 2005); psychology (Landrum & Elison-Bowers, 2009); gerontology (Usita, Blieszner, & Roberto, 1998); and sociology (Paap & McMillin, 1990). Landrum and Elison-Bowers (2009) argued that "psychology faculty who care about the career paths and satisfaction of alumni need to continue to study these issues, because [doing so] informs us of our former students' opinions, who, after graduation, may have a better sense of the value of their undergraduate education" (p. 681). This is equally true for family science faculty who desire to use alumni data to better prepare students for their careers.

Given the dearth of empirical studies with alumni from undergraduate family science programs, this research is long overdue. Furthermore, because investigators in other fields have pointed out that family and demographic factors impact career paths (e.g., Novakovic & Fouad, 2013; Scott et al., 2011), research on family science alumni should explore potential associations between employment and alumni's reported demographic variables: age, gender, racial and ethnic identity, marital status, number of children, and years since graduation. Additionally, although educational level is identified by many as an important factor regarding available career opportunities (e.g., Hollinger, 2002; Keim, 1995; Vance, 1989), without the inclusion of alumni as a source of data, little is known regarding the pursuit of post-undergraduate education among graduates from undergraduate family science programs.

According to Hamon and Alexander (2010), a challenge of family science is to "help our graduates...better articulate what family science is and what they are able to do." Hollinger (2002) suggested that students might want to identify the "transferrable skills and competencies" they gain from a family science degree (p. 321), such as interpersonal communication, conflict mediation, and group facilitation. Smith and Hamon (2012) asked family science program representatives to choose the areas of knowledge most important to family science graduates. The 10 CFLE substance areas were among the 17 content options provided to participants. The researchers suggested that being able to communicate what they know and what they can do as future professionals is essential to students' success in the job search. Over 93% of their respondents identified human development as an area of knowledge most important for family science graduates. Over 87% identified families in society, and 82% identified interpersonal relationships. Other content areas included the internal dynamics of families, family theory, research methods, family diversity, and family resource management. How alumni themselves might view these same skills and areas of knowledge is unclear and may be further influenced by their current status as a professional. For example, alumni currently employed in a family science-related position may offer a different perspective than those who have chosen to seek out additional education.

This continued discourse on the post-graduate experiences of family science alumni is essential for advancing the discipline of family science and family science programs, but the voices of alumni are currently missing from the discussion. Therefore, the purpose of our online survey was to gather empirical evidence of the professional experiences of family science undergraduate alumni. Two research questions guided our analyses: (a) How do alumni from an undergraduate family science program describe their current professional situations? and (b) What areas of knowledge and skills do alumni consider essential in their current professional positions or post-undergraduate educational pursuits?

Methods

Procedure

Participants originated from approximately 680 alumni who graduated from a Human Development and Family Studies [HDFS] undergraduate program at a midwestern university

between May 2003 and December 2010. IRB approval of the study was obtained before alumni were sent an email invitation to participate in an online survey. Email addresses were obtained from a university database, faculty members, and Facebook. An invitation to participate was sent to participants via email or Facebook. Recipients were asked to click on a link to the survey that began with an introduction to the study, including an explanation of the anonymous, voluntary nature of the survey and a request for their consent to participate.

Measure

The online survey consisted of 290 questions; however, each respondent completed only a portion of the items due to the survey's skip logic. The questions related to three areas of focus: (a) demographics, (b) current professional or educational situation, and (c) the importance of specific skills and areas of knowledge in their current role.

Demographics. Demographic items requested participants' age, gender, race or ethnicity, marital status, number of children and their ages, as well as household income and their date of graduation. Respondents also were asked to report their concentration of study while enrolled in the HDFS program and whether or not they completed a field placement. At the time of data collection, a field placement was not required of all students in the HDFS program. As a result, some students chose not to complete a practicum or internship before graduation. Although the respondents were required to take the same core courses as undergraduates, the concentrations offered within the HDFS program (e.g., case management, youth development, and family life education) contribute to some variety in their educational backgrounds, suggesting a need to explore any potential associations between concentrations and post-graduation professional experiences. Likewise, because not all alumni had completed a field experience as part of their graduation requirements, its completion was determined a potential factor in graduates' future professional opportunities, based on previous research (e.g., Hollinger, 2002; Keim, 1995; Smith & Hamon, 2012; Vance, 1989).

Current professional or educational situation. The items relating to current professional or educational situations inquired into whether the respondents were employed in or seeking an HDFS-related position; employed in or seeking a job unrelated to their degree; in the process of completing post-undergraduate education; employed in or seeking a position related to their post-undergraduate education; or providing full-time care for a relative. Each respondent was asked to choose only one statement that best described his or her current professional situation. The choices provided were based on anecdotal evidence of alumni's post-graduation pursuits identified by program area faculty members.

Participants who identified themselves as employed in HDFS-related positions were prompted to answer additional questions related to their current job titles, job benefits, and the length of time they had been in their reported professional roles. Respondents who indicated they had pursued or were pursuing post-undergraduate education were asked about the degree sought (e.g., second undergraduate degree, master's degree, doctorate, or professional degree), their specific field of study (e.g., HDFS, nursing, mental health counseling, health education, social work), and how long their educational pursuits were taking/had taken. Participants who indicated

they were employed in or seeking positions unrelated to HDFS were asked follow-up questions about their career choices and perceived barriers to employment in an HDFS-related position. Respondents who identified themselves as caring full-time for a family member were asked about their choice to do so and if or when they expected to return to full-time work.

Participants who indicated they were currently employed in an HDFS-related position also were asked to identify their fields of practice and the functions performed within their positions. Items originated with those identified by Kiser (2000) in her guide to human service internships and were refined through consultation with program area faculty. Many of the functions identified were found to overlap with the services described by Keim (1995). Twenty-six fields of practice, such as poverty, mental health care, crisis services, parent education, and juvenile corrections, were included, and alumni were asked to choose all the fields that best described the focus of their current positions. Alumni also rated each of the fourteen functions, such as outreach, advocacy, education, and data management, on the extent to which they performed them within their current positions (i.e., *not at all*, *a small extent*, *a moderate extent*, or *a great extent*).

Skills and knowledge. Alumni who reported they were employed in an HDFS-related position or had pursued post-undergraduate education were asked to rate the perceived importance of 17 skills (e.g., assessing strengths and needs, working cross-culturally, communicating in writing, supervising others) and 27 areas of knowledge (e.g., developmental domains, diverse populations, family relationships, policies) in their current roles. Skills and areas of knowledge were generated from a review of the program area's identified goals and objectives for its students, a list of items from two field experience evaluation forms, and a survey developed over a decade ago by one of our faculty and distributed to our gerontology alumni. Program area faculty and selected alumni were consulted to confirm the final selection of items. These items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 (*essential*, *somewhat important*, *somewhat unimportant*, and *not at all important*). An average of 92.95% of the respondents rated the items as either *essential* or *somewhat important*; relatively few *somewhat unimportant* and no *not at all important* ratings were given. Therefore, responses were recoded into *essential* (a rating of 1) and *not essential* (ratings of 2, 3, and 4).

Analyses

Frequencies were calculated to describe the demographics and participants' current professional and educational situation. A series of chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if the variables pertaining to the importance of having certain skills and areas of knowledge differed by participants' HDFS concentration of study (i.e., Youth Development, Family Life Education, and Case Management). There were no meaningful significant findings; therefore, subsequent analyses combined all alumni, regardless of their undergraduate concentration.

Point-biserial and chi-square analyses of demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, racial and ethnic identity, marital status, number of children, years since graduation, concentration, and completing a field experience) were run to determine their relationship to a key variable of

interest: working in an HDFS-related field with an undergraduate degree only. A logistic regression was conducted to determine the odds ratio for demographic variables found to be significantly related to alumni being employed in an HDFS-related field with an undergraduate degree only.

In order to identify the areas of knowledge and skills alumni perceived to be essential in their current roles, participants were categorized into two groups: alumni currently employed in HDFS-related positions ($n = 101$) and alumni who had received post-undergraduate education ($n = 46$). Those not meeting these criteria were excluded from the remaining analyses because of our focus on the two primary roles family science undergraduate students are prepared for: careers in HDFS-related fields and graduate school. Given the breadth of reported post-undergraduate fields of study, all alumni pursuing post-undergraduate education were included in one group for comparison with the group of alumni employed in HDFS-related positions. A series of 2 X 2 (current professional/educational position X item rated as *essential* or not) chi-square analyses were conducted to identify significant differences between the two groups' perceived importance of various areas of knowledge and skills in their current roles.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Two hundred sixteen alumni completed the survey. Female participants (93.1%, $n = 201$) greatly outnumbered male participants (6.5%, $n = 14$), which is representative of students in the program during the time in which the study's participants were enrolled (94.3% women, 5.4% men). Ages ranged from 21 to 59 years ($M = 28$; $SD = 6.34$). Most of the alumni identified as Caucasian (84.7%, $n = 182$), while 13.4% ($n = 29$) identified as African American, and less than 1% ($n = 2$) identified as Hispanic or Latino. Two alumni (0.9%) reported "other" as their ethnic identity. Less than 39% ($n = 83$) were married, 49.1% ($n = 106$) had never been married, 10.2% ($n = 22$) were living with a partner, 1.4% ($n = 3$) were divorced, and one participant was separated. The majority (74.5%, $n = 161$) of participants reported having no children. Time since graduation ranged from 0.25 to 7.83 years ($M = 3.37$; $SD = 2.14$), and 59.7% ($n = 129$) had completed a field experience as a student.

Current Professional Experiences

Positions related to HDFS. Nearly 47% of alumni ($n = 101$) reported being employed in positions related to their HDFS undergraduate degree. See Table 1 for a complete list of alumni's reported professional situations. Those alumni who reported being employed in positions related to their HDFS undergraduate degree had been in their current positions between .08 and 9.33 years ($M = 1.78$; $SD = 1.83$). The majority of alumni (79.3%) were working at least 40 hours per week. Their reported weekly work hours ranged from 8 to 82, with a mode of 40 hours ($n = 60$; $M = 39.83$; $SD = 7.81$). The annual individual income for respondents working 40 or more hours a week is reported in Figure 1. Most received health benefits through their employer: medical (85%), dental (78.2%), vision (62.4%), and disability (40.6%). Most also were granted paid

vacations (85.1%), holidays (83.2%), and sick leave (76.2%). Retirement benefits were earned by 71.3% of these alumni. Additionally, flextime (48.5%) and educational reimbursement (32.7%) were available to several alumni working in the field.

Alumni in HDFS-related positions indicated to what extent they perform a variety of functions in their current positions. The most frequently reported activity was education; 78.2% reported their job entails providing education to a *moderate* or *great extent*. Nearly two-thirds (65.3%) of the respondents participated in resource management (i.e., helping clients locate, access, and maintain services) to a *moderate* or *great extent*, followed by advocacy (i.e., assertively seeking services for clients and defending clients' rights; 57.4%), caregiving (i.e., offering direct care to clients physically, socially, and/or emotionally; 52.5%), data management (i.e., gathering and organizing information for use in direct services and administrative services; 51.4%), outreach (i.e., going into the community to work with clients for the purpose of reaching underserved populations; 48.5%), and treatment provision (i.e., using intervention strategies to facilitate client change; 45.7%). Activities in which at least a third of the alumni in HDFS-related positions were *not at all* engaged were: grant writing (79.2%), administration (59.4%), fundraising (52.5%), community mobilization (44.6%), community program planning (40.6%), and program evaluation (37.6%). Fields of practice within which these alumni work are reported in Figure 2.

Positions unrelated to HDFS. Of the 15.3% ($n = 33$) of alumni who identified themselves as being employed in or seeking a position unrelated to HDFS, 15 reported being unable to find an acceptable position related to HDFS and 9 indicated they were able to earn a higher salary or better benefits in a position unrelated to HDFS. Only 2 stated a position in an unrelated field is a better "fit" for them, but another 7 alumni selected "other" to explain their choice to work or seek employment in a position unrelated to HDFS. The breadth of their open-ended responses was considerable, but included the timing of non-HDFS opportunities, limitations due to immigration policy, plans to pursue graduate education, and perceived barriers to finding employment in an HDFS-related position. Of the respondents who perceived a barrier to obtaining an HDFS-related position, the most frequently reported barrier was not having the appropriate license (e.g., LSW, LPC; $n = 8$).

Post-undergraduate education. Approximately one-fifth (21.3%) of the alumni reported they had completed or were pursuing post-undergraduate education. The most frequently reported area of study was mental health counseling (27.3%), followed by social work (15.9%), early childhood education (11.4%), and school counseling (9.1%). A variety of other fields of study were reported by a small number of respondents, including law, HDFS, higher education, health education, and nursing.

Predicting Employment

Point-biserial and chi-square analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between working in an HDFS-related position with only an undergraduate degree and the following demographic variables: age, gender, racial and ethnic identity, marital status, number of children, years since graduation, HDFS concentration, and completion of field experience. The only

variable found to be significantly correlated with alumni being employed in an HDFS position was completion of field experience, $\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 9.01, p < .01$. A logistic regression was run to determine the odds ratio between these two variables. The findings indicated that alumni who completed a field experience were nearly three times more likely to be employed in an HDFS-related position than those who did not (odds ratio = 2.82).

Importance of Having Knowledge in Identified Areas

As can be seen in Figures 3 through 8, the alumni who received some education beyond their bachelor's degree generally were more likely than alumni in HDFS-related positions to rate the knowledge items as *essential* in their current professional role. Chi-square analyses revealed several significant differences, including how the two groups rated the importance of having knowledge about various developmental stages (see Figure 4). Alumni who were educated beyond their undergraduate degree were significantly more likely to view it to be essential in their current professional or academic situation to have knowledge of middle childhood, early adolescence, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and older adulthood. Chi-square values ranged from 6.78 to 9.87

HDFS alumni with post-undergraduate education also were significantly more likely than those working in HDFS-related positions to perceive it essential to have knowledge about the following diverse populations (see Figure 5): GLBT, individuals with physical and/or mental exceptionalities, various ethnicities, and historical cohorts. Chi-square values ranged from 9.30 to 21.09. The more extensively educated respondents also were significantly more likely than alumni employed in HDFS-related positions to view it essential in their current professional situation to have knowledge about the influence of religious institutions, $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 7.37, p < .01$. However, as can be seen in Figure 7, both groups of respondents rated having knowledge about religious institutions relatively nonessential compared to other environmental systems.

Importance of Having Skills in Identified Areas

Differences were likewise found between HDFS-employed and post-undergraduate educated alumni in the importance of having certain skills (see Figures 9 – 12). As shown in Figures 11 and 12, the more educated alumni were significantly more likely than the HDFS-employed graduates to perceive the following skills to be essential in their current role: giving presentations, accessing and applying research, creating and managing budgets, and fundraising. Chi-square values ranged from 5.35 to 19.78.

Discussion

The results of this study have important implications for the future of family science. Hamon and Alexander (2010) outlined ten future challenges and goals for the discipline of family science. Among these were three challenges focused on improving the employability of graduates: communicating the discipline's distinctiveness to employers, helping graduates

explain what they know and can do, and developing resources that feature career opportunities for family science graduates. The results of this study begin to address these challenges.

Just over 68% of the alumni surveyed in this study indicated that they were employed in HDFS-related positions or had sought out post-undergraduate educational opportunities, indicating the existence of multiple career paths for family science graduates. However, 8.3% reported they were still seeking positions related to HDFS, and another 15.3% identified themselves as seeking or being employed in positions not related to HDFS. These findings suggest there is room for improvement regarding the employability of family science graduates. Being employed in positions unrelated to their degrees may be the norm for many college graduates. However, the majority of this study's participants who were seeking or employed in positions not related to HDFS reported being unable to find acceptable HDFS-related positions or perceived they could earn higher salaries or better benefits in positions unrelated to HDFS. This may be understandable. The careers selected by many HDFS graduates within the industry of individual and family services as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) are among the lowest-paid. Not having the appropriate licensures for employment also was reported as a perceived barrier to finding a position related to HDFS. Licensure requirements vary by state, but efforts by NCFR to obtain greater recognition of the CFLE nationally could be helpful in minimizing some of these barriers. Furthermore, utilizing alumni data to help current family science students understand the breadth of career opportunities available to them may help reduce the misconception that HDFS-related positions are limited to those that require licensure in social work or counseling. Family science faculty also may want to play a more active role in advocating for their alumni with potential employers, beginning with the supervisors of their students' field experiences.

The only variable found to be a significant predictor of employment in an HDFS-related position was completion of a field experience. This confirms what those of us in applied fields have known. Family scientists have long emphasized practical, hands-on, contextual, and experiential learning (e.g., Hollinger, 2002; Keim, 1995; Vance, 1989). More recently, Smith and Hamon (2012) found the same emphasis on field experiences from family science program representatives. Over 80% of their participants identified the practicum or internship as a content area most important for family science graduates. According to Hollinger (2002), "Not only do such experiences enhance a student's appeal to prospective employers, but they help provide greater meaning and relevance to a student's formal course work" (p. 319). Graduates who have had field experience may be better equipped to articulate to potential employers what they know and are able to do, having put both their knowledge and skills to the test in an internship.

In addition to job placement concerns, most family science majors desire to know what income they can anticipate in their future positions. Almost half of those working 40 hours or more each week in HDFS-related positions indicated they were earning less than \$30,000 in annual salary. Although these respondents had only been out of school for three years on average, this number is likely to be discouraging to students. Low salaries are worth acknowledging as an additional challenge for family science graduates. Landrum and Elison-Bowers (2009) found that among psychology graduates, "Current salary was positively correlated with alumni happiness with career choice" (p. 680). This is likely to be true for family

science graduates as well. Keim (1995), however, encouraged his readers to consider employee benefits when evaluating salaries, and the results of our survey confirmed the majority of alumni employed in HDFS-related positions receive the typical benefits identified by Keim (e.g., medical insurance, sick leave, retirement plans).

Job titles reported by previous researchers reflect the breadth of opportunities available to family science graduates (Keim & Cassidy, 1989; Smith & Hamon, 2012). However, job titles may be less useful than helping students understand the fields of practice reported by alumni (e.g., child and youth care, parent education, child abuse and neglect). Family science alumni work in a variety of organizations that vary widely in the services they provide. It may be impossible to identify every field of practice covered by employers of family science graduates, and the overlap between some settings is important to note. However, the fields of practice reported by alumni might help students in family science consider areas of employment they might not have previously considered (e.g., legislative and policy work, adult corrections).

The specific functions in which alumni employed in HDFS-related positions indicated they participated (e.g., outreach, resource management, advocacy) are equally important in helping family science students and graduates better understand career opportunities. Family science graduates perform a variety of functions, and in some positions, specific functions may be emphasized over others. The most frequently reported functions by the alumni in this study (e.g., education, resource management, advocacy, and caregiving) suggest that many of their positions are focused on providing direct services to clients. Such functions may be more common among recent graduates than among those with more experience who find themselves promoted into administrative roles in which those functions reported less frequently by our respondents are performed (e.g., grant writing, administration, community mobilization, program planning and evaluation). Our respondents were recent alumni ($M = 3.37$ years since graduation) so their focus on direct services is not all that surprising. Family science faculty may want to consider how they prepare students' expectations related to the functions they may perform as professionals and how those functions might evolve as alumni gain experience. Because these functions can be transferred from one field of practice to another, helping family science graduates articulate their knowledge and skills within these functions is important.

But what skills and areas of knowledge should family science graduates have? In one study, respondents seemed to agree that human growth and development, interpersonal relationships, and internal dynamics of families are important content areas for family science graduates (Smith & Hamon, 2012). Similarly, most of our alumni in HDFS-related positions and those pursuing post-undergraduate education described their knowledge of developmental domains, specifically the cognitive and socioemotional domains, and their knowledge of family relationships as being essential to their current roles. Smith and Hamon (2012) also found their respondents to consider written communication skills and interpersonal skills to be important for family science graduates. Similarly, our respondents identified these skills as essential to them.

The differences between the skills and areas of knowledge reported by alumni and those reported by program representatives are important to note as well. For example, over 74% of the family science program representatives identified research methods as highly important for

graduates (Smith & Hamon, 2012). However, only 32.5% of the alumni employed in HDFS-related positions identified collecting and analyzing data as an essential skill. Even fewer (19.2%) reported that accessing research and applying findings was an essential skill in their current positions. The discrepancy indicates that faculty members may need to increase their efforts to help future family science professionals understand the role of research knowledge and skills outside the academy. Classes that focus on applied research as a way to improve practice may be helpful in this endeavor. Specifically, faculty may want to engage undergraduates in program evaluation research, reaching out to community organizations that need outcome data.

Knowledge of ethics and professional standards was identified as essential by 81.4% of the alumni employed in HDFS-related positions and 82.5% of alumni who pursued post-undergraduate educational opportunities. Only 56.5% of the program representatives surveyed by Hamon and Smith (2012) identified ethics as a content area “most important” for family science graduates, but more of them may have identified the area of ethics as “essential” had they been given the same options as the alumni in our study (i.e., essential, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, and not at all important). Given the importance placed on ethics by alumni and program representatives, family science faculty might want to require a course specific to ethics in family science or to more deliberately integrate ethical concerns in courses if they are not already doing so. Following up with alumni to learn more about their experiences with ethical decision making could be valuable to faculty wishing to include real-world examples in their courses. “The importance of clarifying ethical principles and guidelines for family scientists is reinforced by the fact that one of the CFLE [Certified Family Life Education] substance areas includes attention to the area of ethics” (Hollinger, 2002, p. 304). Although ethical principles and guidelines are taught in all approved CFLE programs, it is important for family science faculty to evaluate how the area of ethics is currently being addressed in the courses fulfilling this requirement.

The emphasis on an ecological approach within family science prompted us to ask alumni about the importance of their knowledge of specific environmental systems, such as religious institutions and community. With the exception of community knowledge, environmental systems were identified as essential by less than half of those alumni employed in HDFS-related positions, and only a small minority (11.8%) identified knowledge specific to religious institutions as essential. These results surprised us. “Families in society” is a CFLE substance area and is identified by family science program representatives as an important content area for family science graduates (Smith & Hamon, 2012). Increasing awareness of these systems and their impact on families seems critical in helping family science graduates articulate distinct areas of knowledge and skills to potential employers. Family science faculty may want to specifically highlight research and practice that focus on the impact of religion or spirituality on families and family interventions. For example, Evans, Boustead, and Owens (2008) argued for “including this dimension...because spirituality is at the center of many families’ approaches to their world or culture” (p. 251).

Not all alumni in the present study viewed areas of knowledge and skills the same way. Alumni who pursued post-undergraduate education rated more areas of knowledge and skills as essential than those alumni employed in HDFS-related positions. In some cases, alumni with

greater education may have been “in the trenches” longer than those in HDFS-related positions, having returned to further their education after time spent in the field. Alumni seeking additional education may be more primed to identify what they have learned as essential or to have had faculty members reinforce the importance of specific areas of knowledge and skills in their post-undergraduate coursework. Landrum and Elison-Bowers (2009) found that older psychology alumni and those who attended graduate school were more likely to describe their psychology courses as helpful to them in their careers than younger alumni and those who did not attend graduate school. The relatively lower numbers of alumni who identified administrative skills as essential and the almost 60% of alumni who indicated administration was not one of their primary functions, again suggests the younger nature of this study’s participants, especially among those who identified as working in HDFS-related positions.

The present study is limited by its survey of undergraduate alumni from a single program at a large Midwestern public university. Findings may not be generalizable to other family science programs, though according to Day and colleagues (1988), it bears the most common name for family science programs: Human Development and Family Studies. The specific concentrations offered by this program at the time data were being collected also may set it apart from other family science programs. Programs across the country could benefit from distributing their own surveys to undergraduate and graduate program alumni and further contribute to the discipline by expanding on family science career opportunities that may differ by region or state as well as educational level. Furthermore, grade point averages or other indicators of academic success were not collected, but according to Landrum and Elison-Bowers (2009), psychology alumni perceptions of their degree program differed according to GPA. As a result, including some measure of academic success is warranted in future studies.

Another limitation of the study was its snapshot approach for capturing the professional situations of alumni. Given the breadth of career opportunities and the number of alumni who seek out post-undergraduate experiences, it seems clear that a closer look at career paths over a more extensive period of time might tell us more about the future of family science. Interviews with alumni also might add to the richness of the data as participants tell their own stories regarding career trajectories and the skills and knowledge areas most important to them.

Students struggle to define family science, but they are not alone in this struggle. Arguments related to nomenclature have a long history in family science and have not entirely abated. Alumni, however, have rarely been asked, in any systematic way, to contribute to the discussion. If we wish to advance the discipline of family science and family science programs, faculty must fully engage in a partnership with our alumni, facing our challenges together, and educating ourselves and others about family science.

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Table 1

2003-2010 HDFS Graduates' Reported Current Professional Situation (N = 216)

Professional Situation	Frequency	Percent
I am employed in a position related to my undergraduate degree in HDFS	101	46.8%
I am employed in a position unrelated to my undergraduate degree in HDFS	31	14.4%
I am enrolled in school, pursuing a graduate or professional degree or a second undergraduate degree	27	12.5%
I am currently seeking a position related to my undergraduate degree in HDFS	18	8.3%
I am employed in a position related to my graduate or professional degree or a second undergraduate degree	16	7.4%
I am providing care full-time for a family member or family members	8	3.7%
I am currently seeking a position related to my graduate or professional degree or a second undergraduate degree	3	1.4%
I am currently seeking a position unrelated to my undergraduate degree in HDFS	2	0.9%
Not reported	10	4.6%

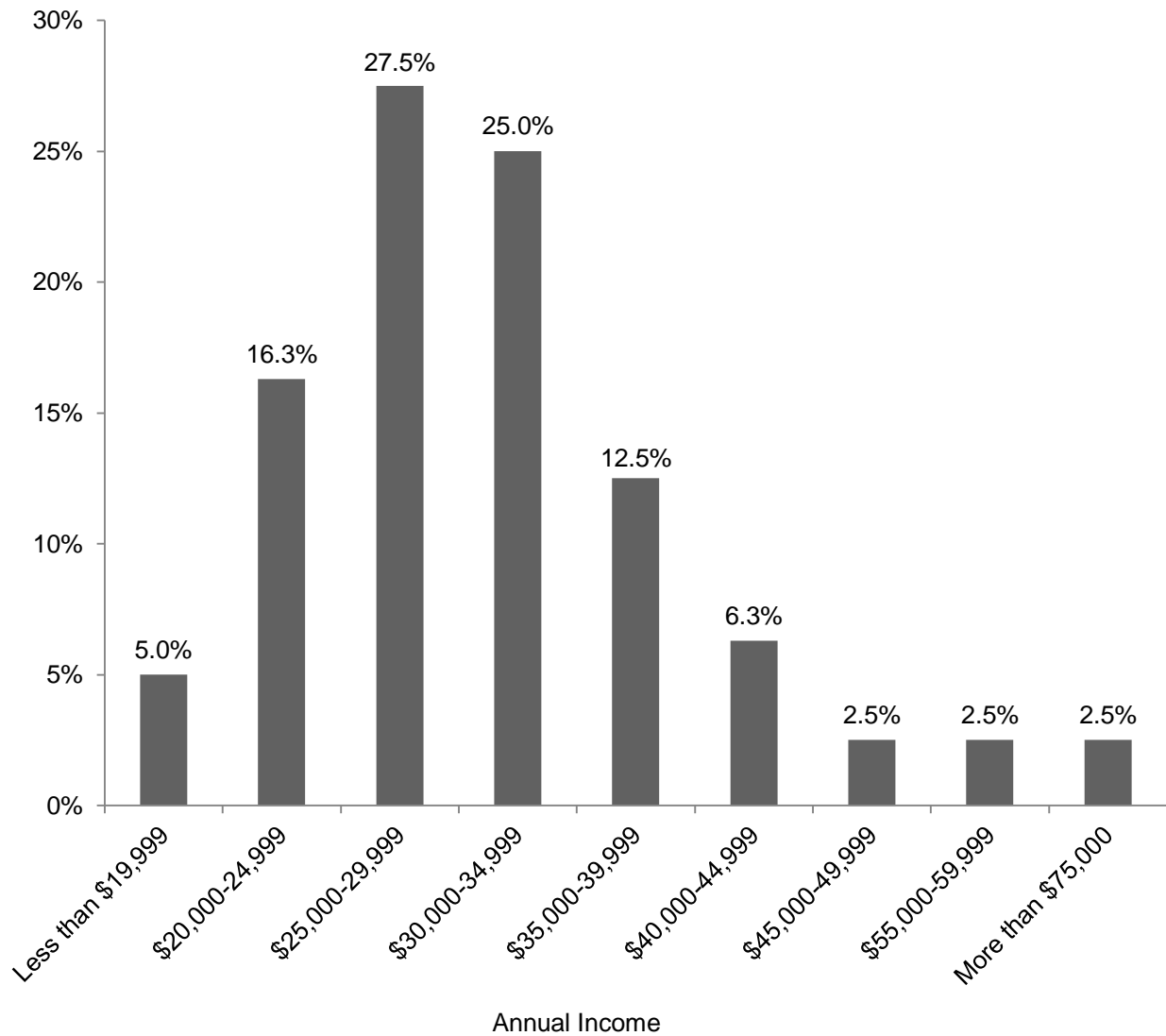


Figure 1. Annual individual income as reported by alumni currently employed 40 hours per week or more in an HDFS-related position.

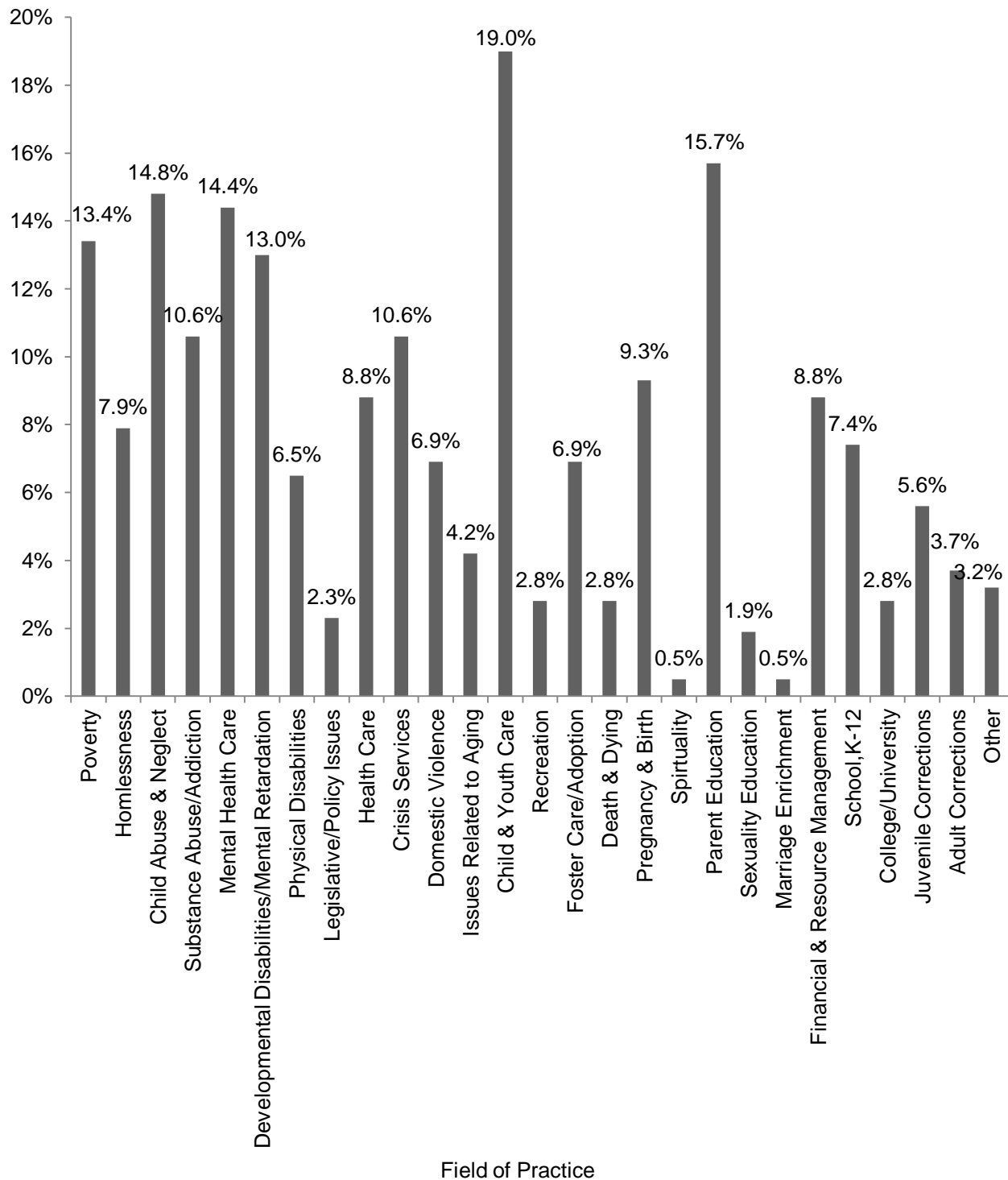


Figure 2. Fields of practice within which alumni employed in HDFS-related positions reported working.

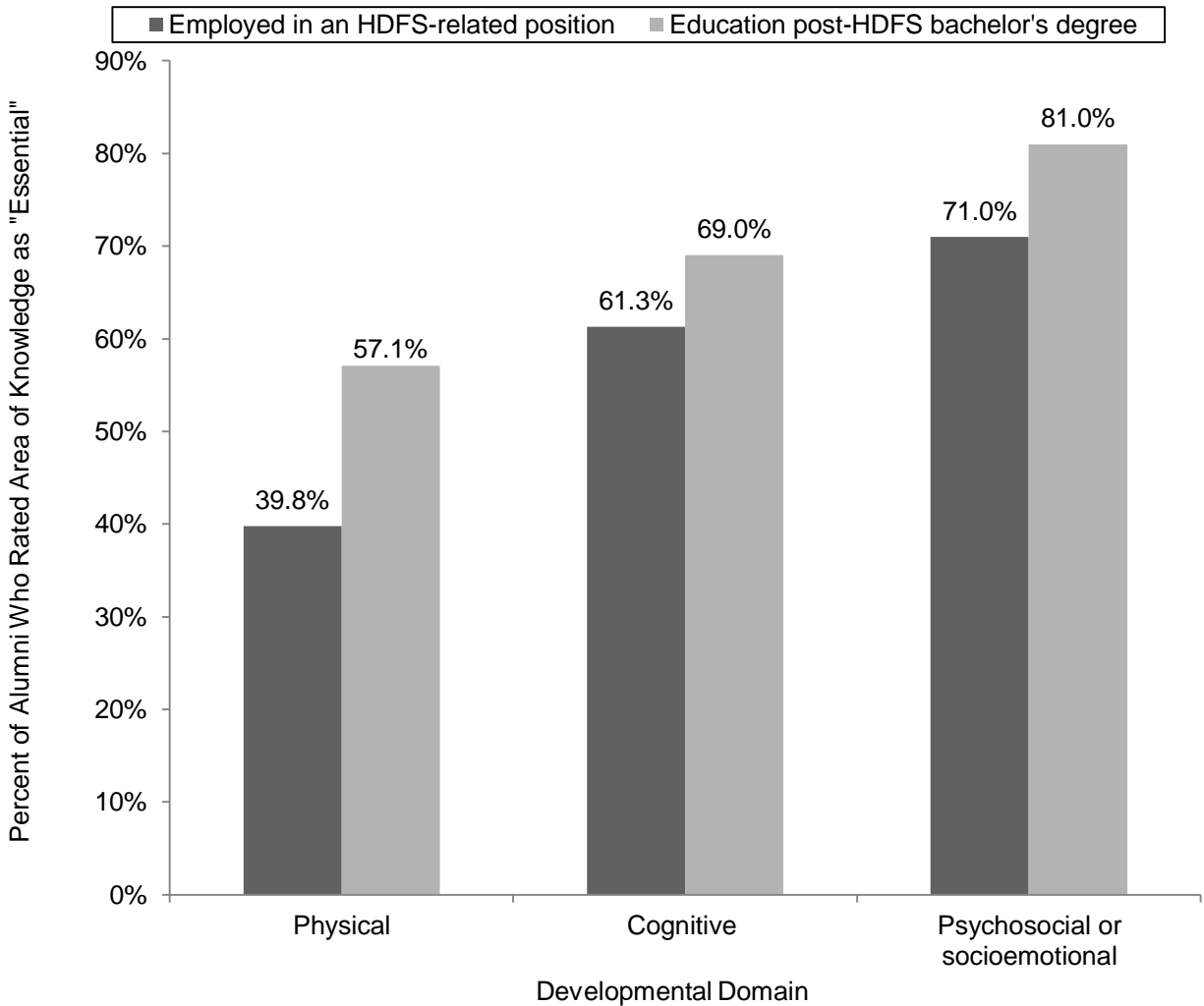


Figure 3. Knowledge of developmental domains rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

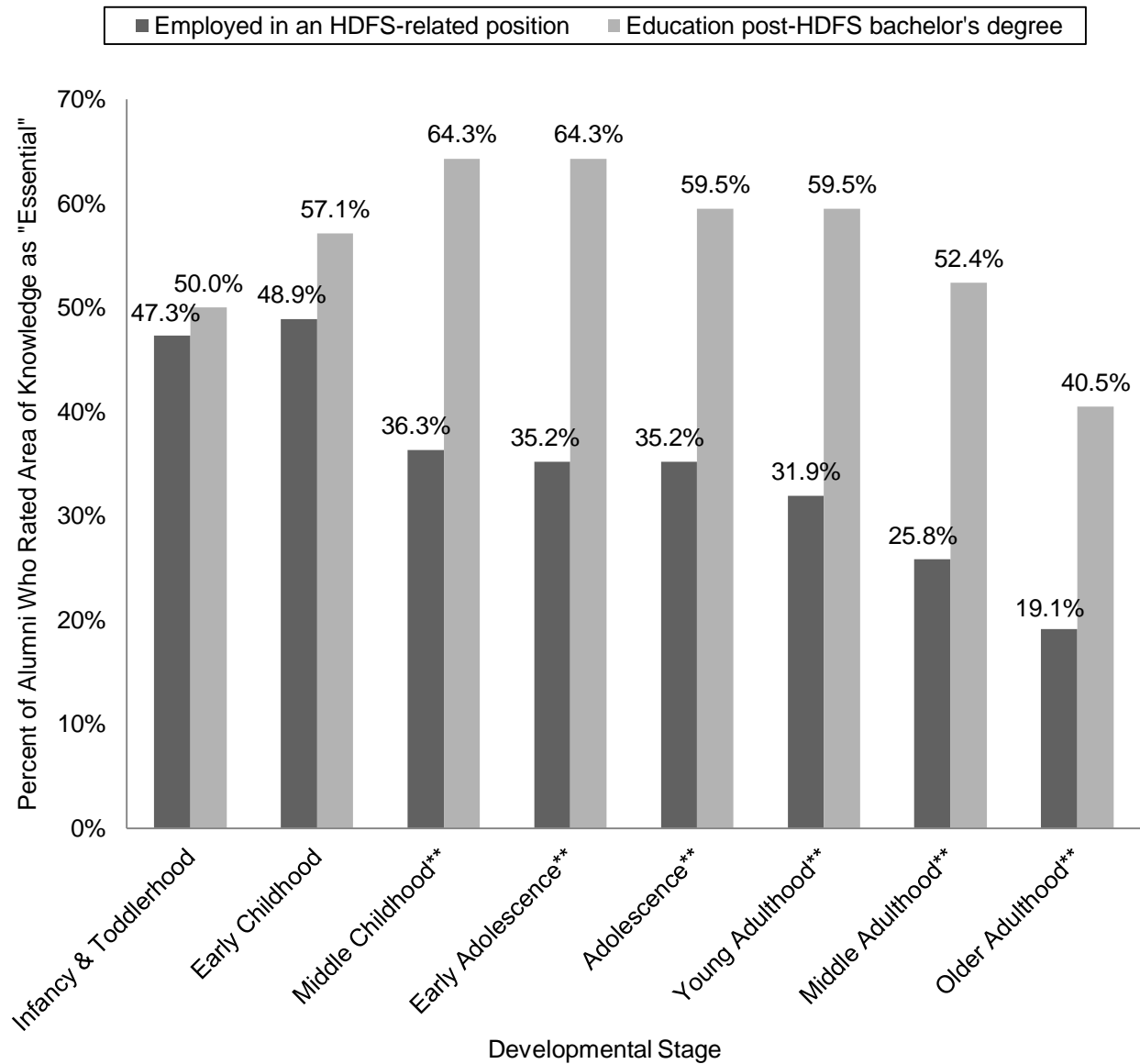


Figure 4. Knowledge of developmental stages rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

**p < .01.

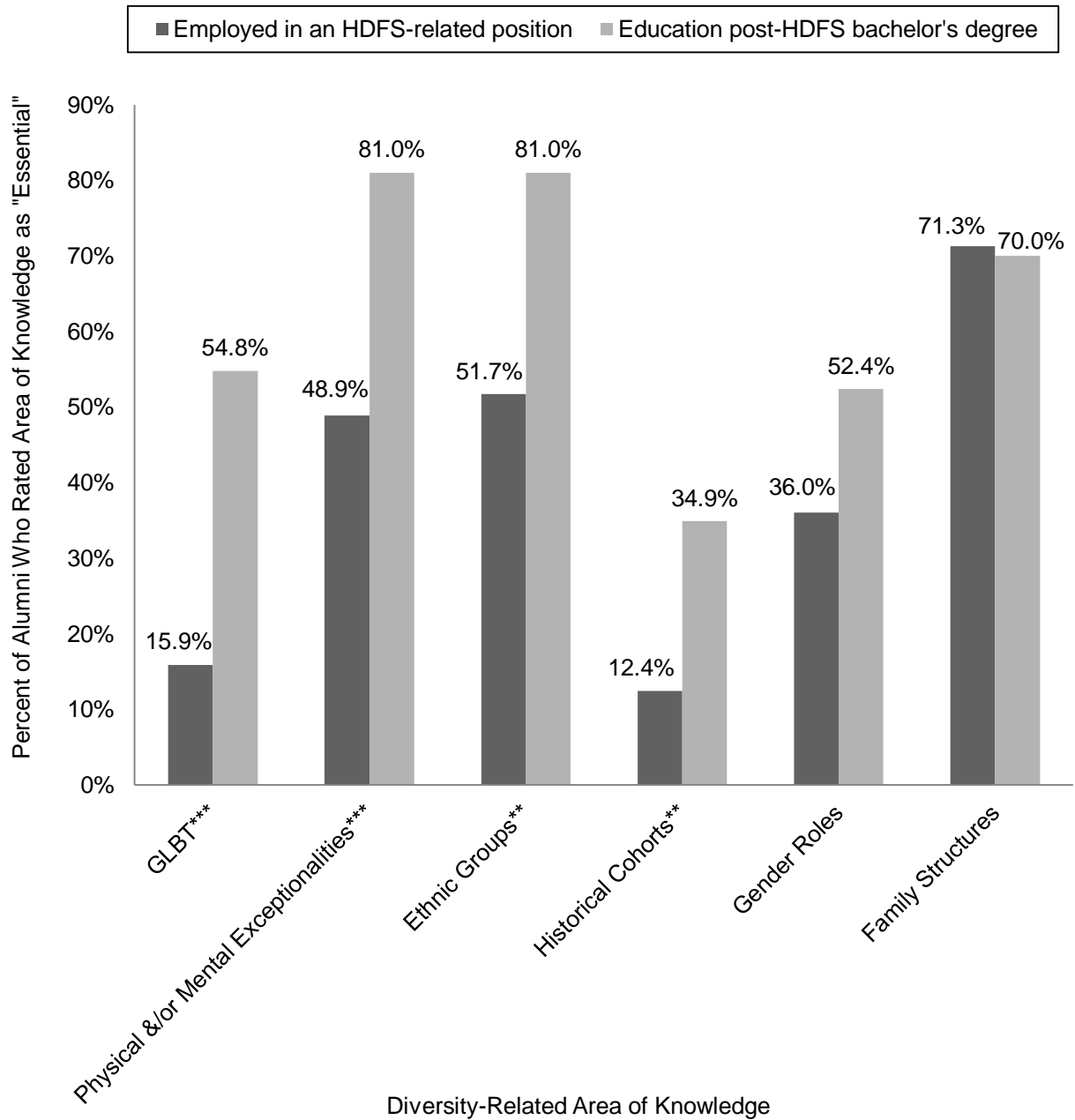


Figure 5. Knowledge of diversity rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

** $p < .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

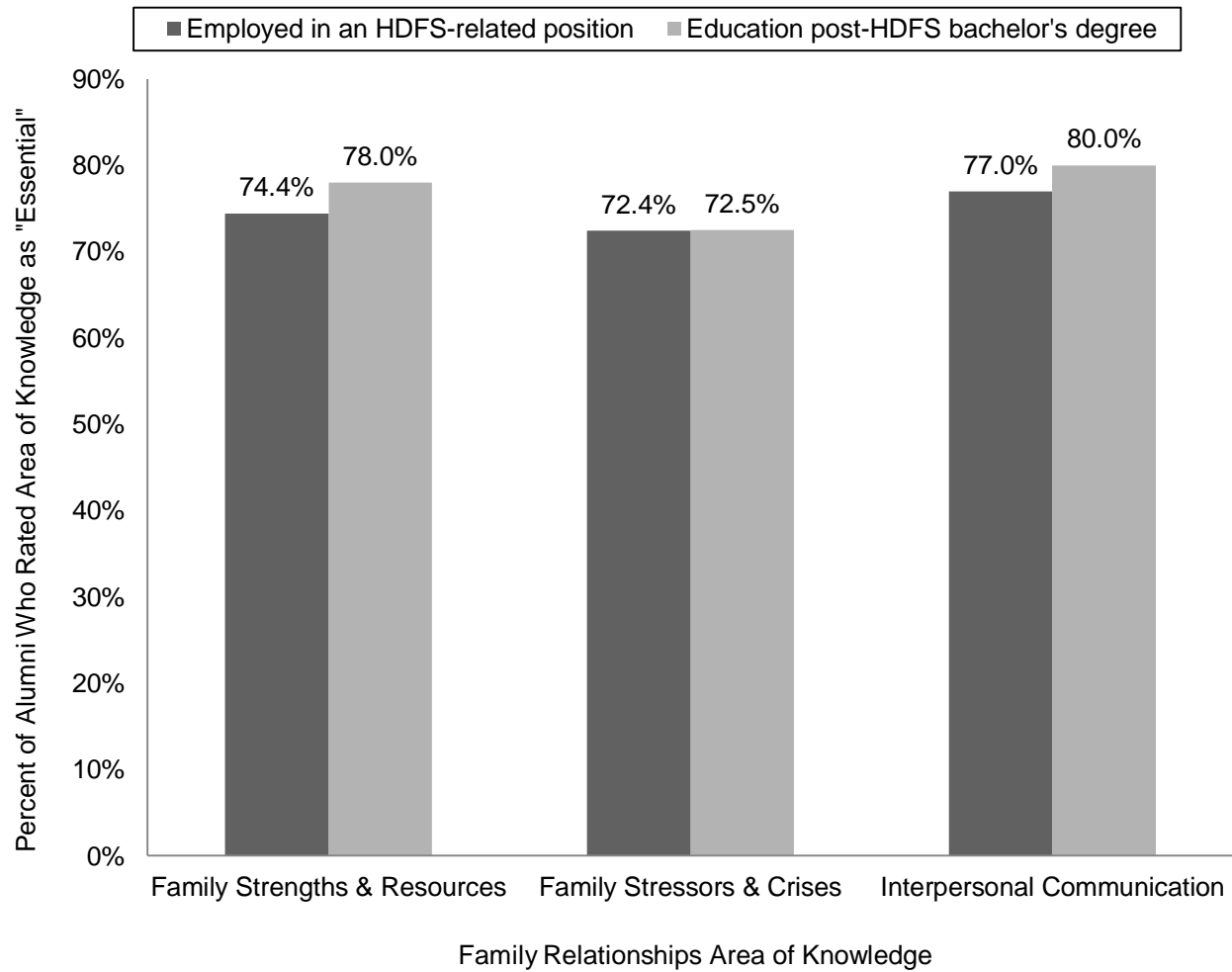


Figure 6. Knowledge of family relationships rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

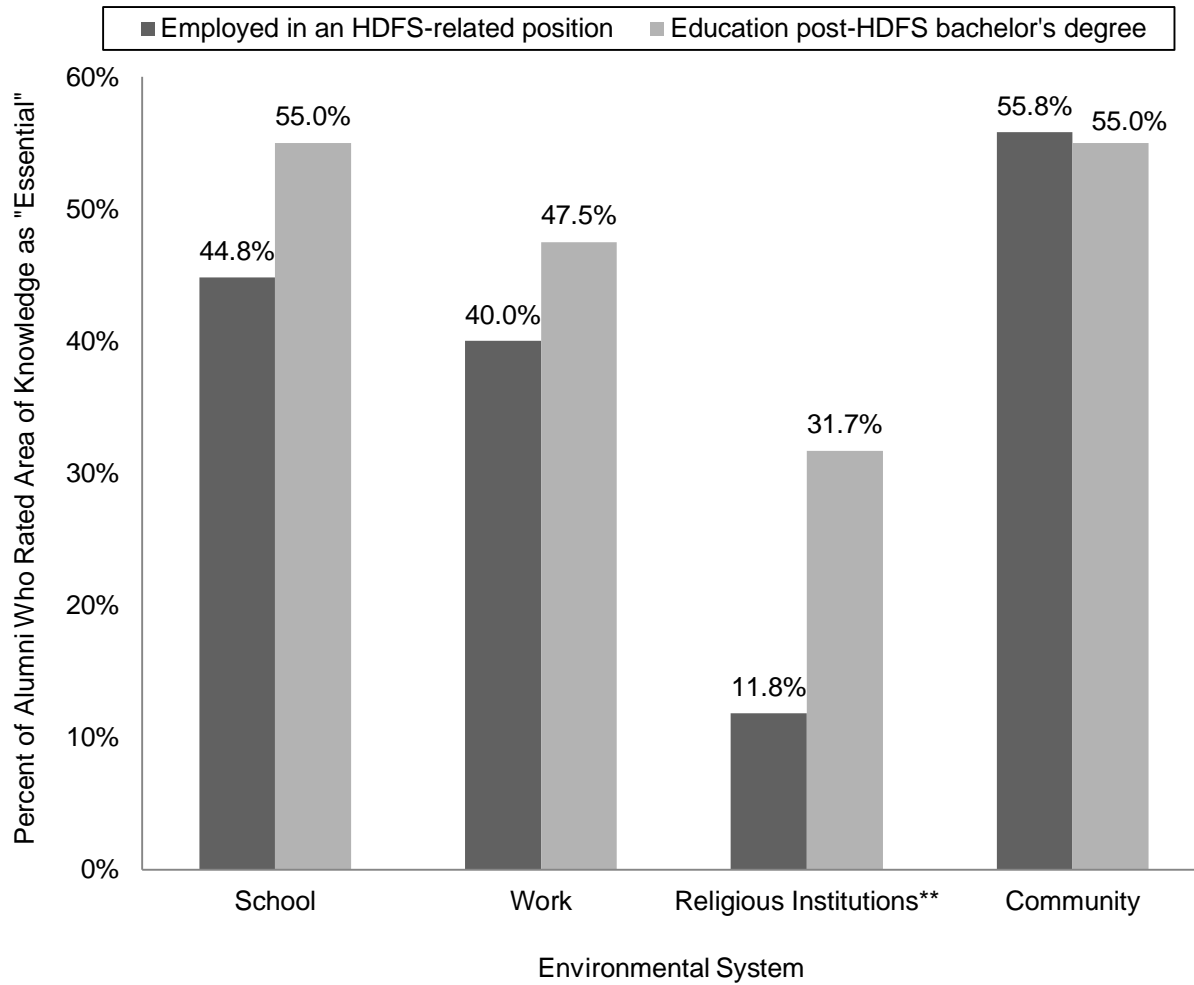


Figure 7. Knowledge of environmental systems rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

** $p < .01$.

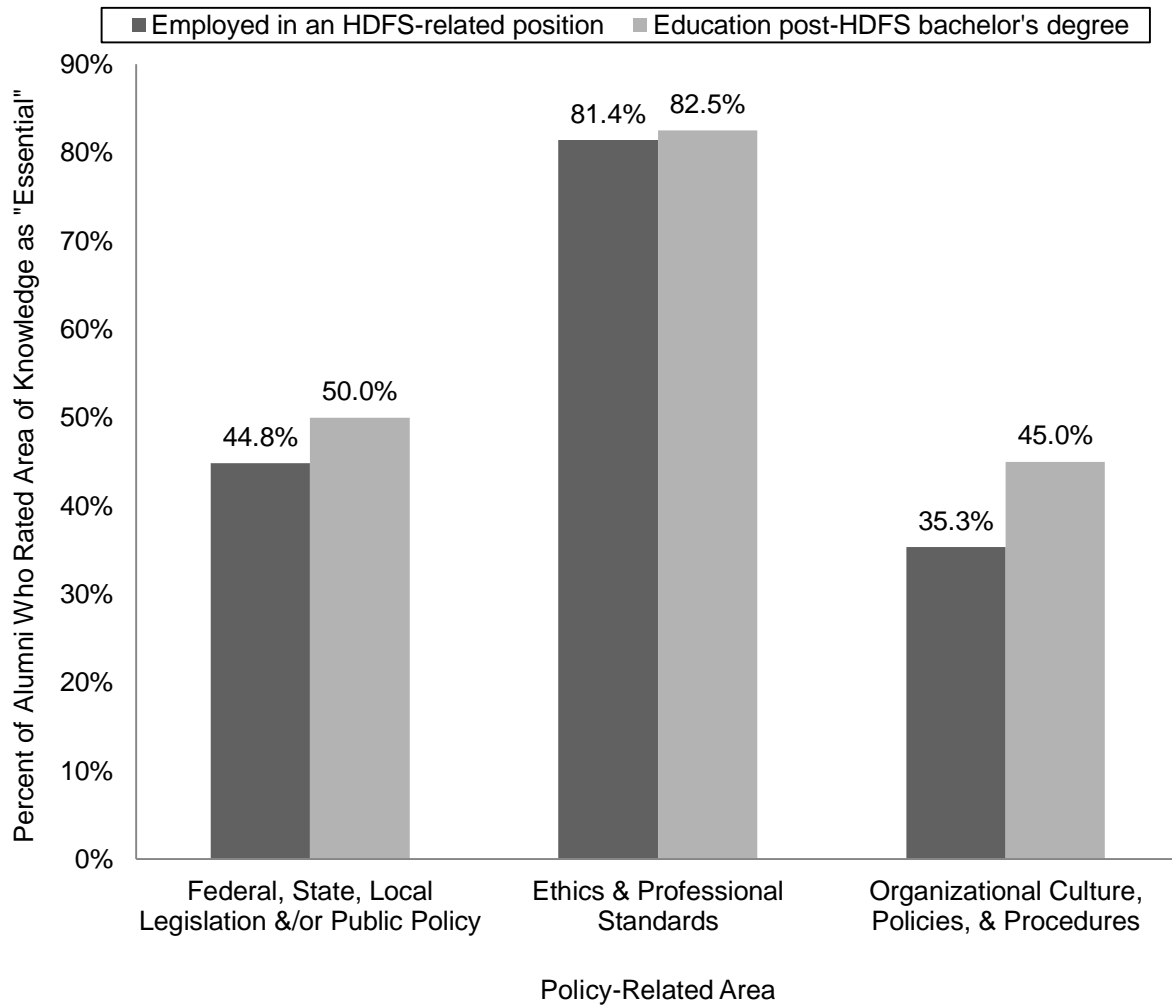


Figure 8. Knowledge of policy rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

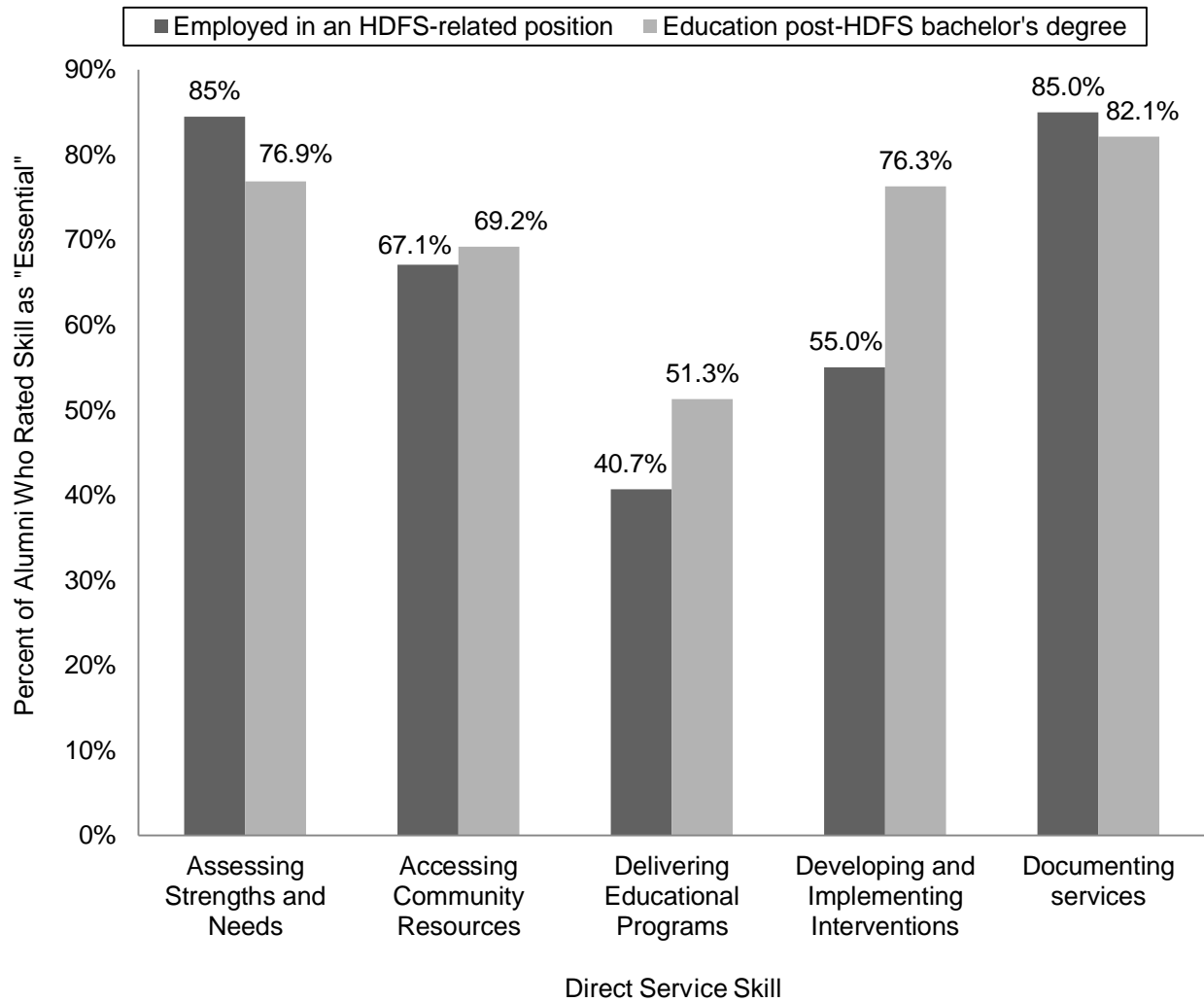


Figure 9. Skills rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor’s degree.

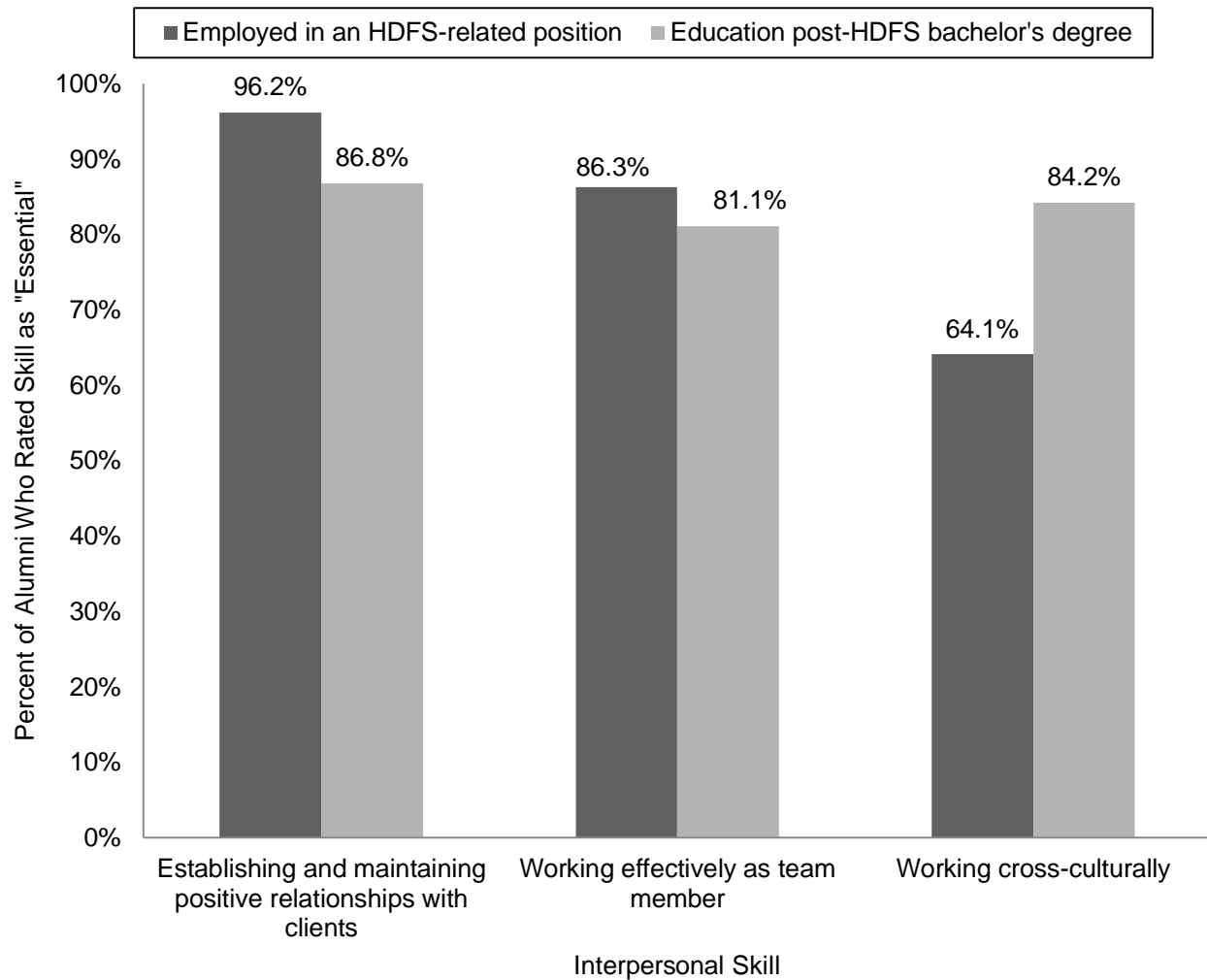


Figure 10. Interpersonal skills rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

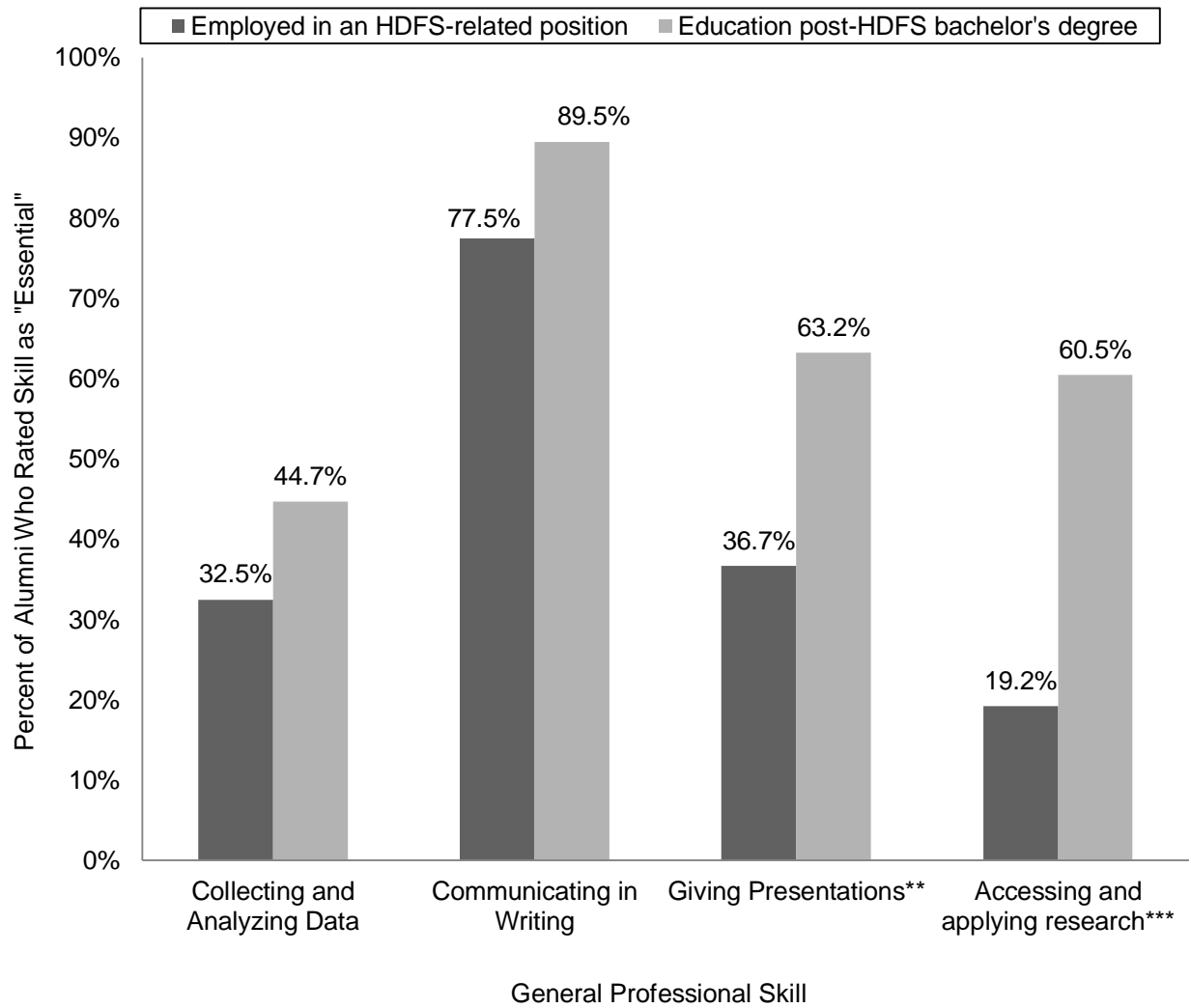


Figure 11. General professional skills rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

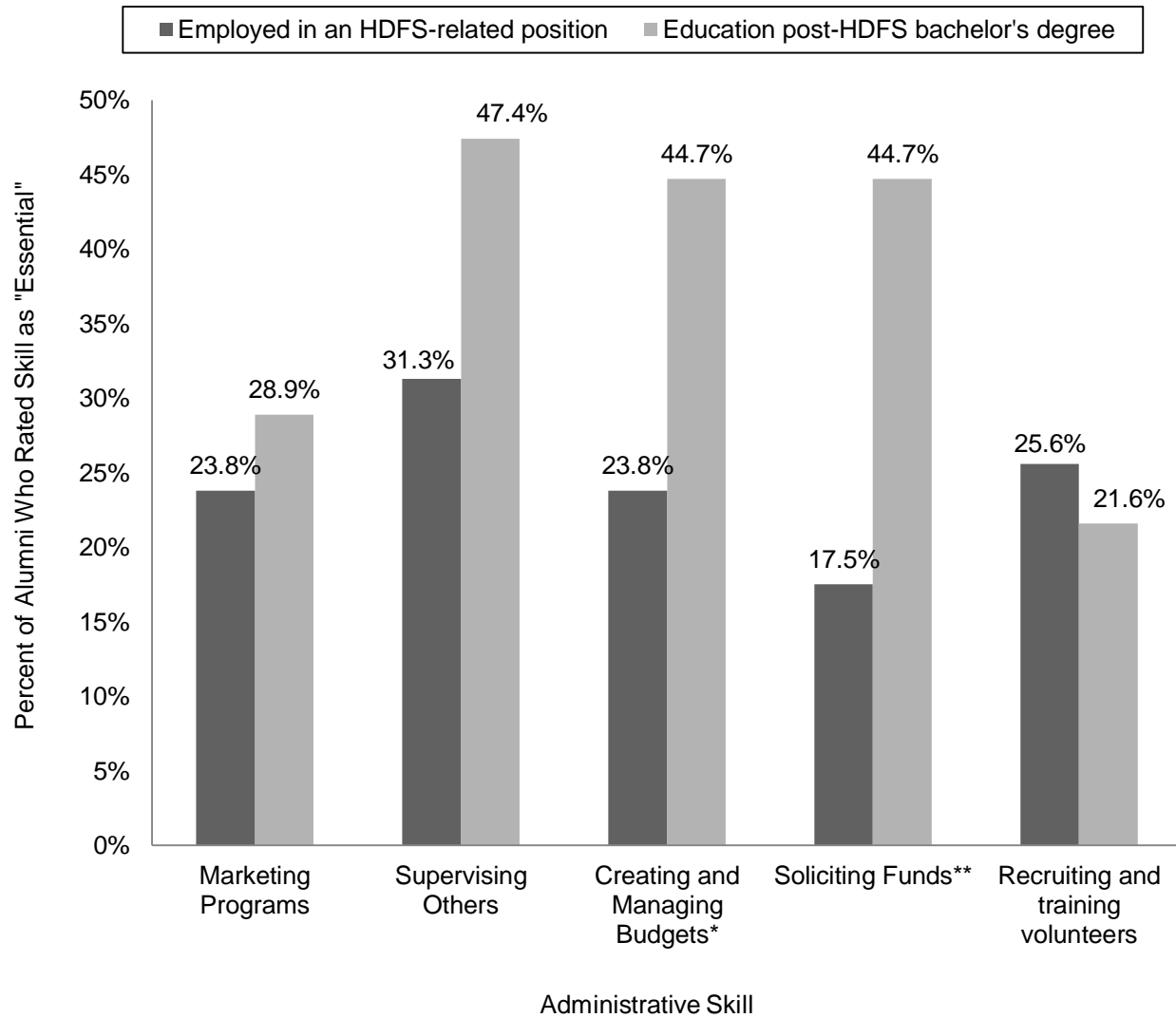


Figure 12. Administrative skills rated as essential in their current role by alumni employed in an HDFS-related position and alumni who continued their education after earning their HDFS bachelor's degree.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.