

ABSTRACT

Voluntary Self-Exclusion (VSE) is a process in which an individual voluntarily signs a contract that limits access to engage in forms of gambling indicated by the contract. Contract language and consequences for contract violation vary depending on state law and contract language making it harder for individuals who gamble across state lines or may need to sign contracts in multiple jurisdictions understand the process.

INTRODUCTION

Responsible gaming strategies in the gambling industry are proactive approaches aimed at minimizing the negative consequences associated with gambling activities, particularly for individuals **at risk of experiencing gambling-related harms**. VSE programs provide individuals with a mechanism to limit their access to specific gambling activities for a specified term length which allows individuals to actively engage in overt behavioral change (Blaszczynski et al., 2007). By enabling individuals to block access to gambling, VSE programs have become an increasingly popular strategy to aid in the prevention and reduction of problem gambling (Devault-Tousignant et al., 2023).

By voluntarily placing themselves on VSE, individuals establish a consequence of restricted access to gambling activities, that may serve as a form of punishment. Violation of the VSE agreement may result in severe consequences, such as legal repercussions.

Little is known as to the discrepancies between state VSE applications, including the processes of applying VSE, length of terms available, and the potential consequences. This research compares VSE contracts from 22 states to better understand VSE. Results indicate a great variability between state VSE application forms.

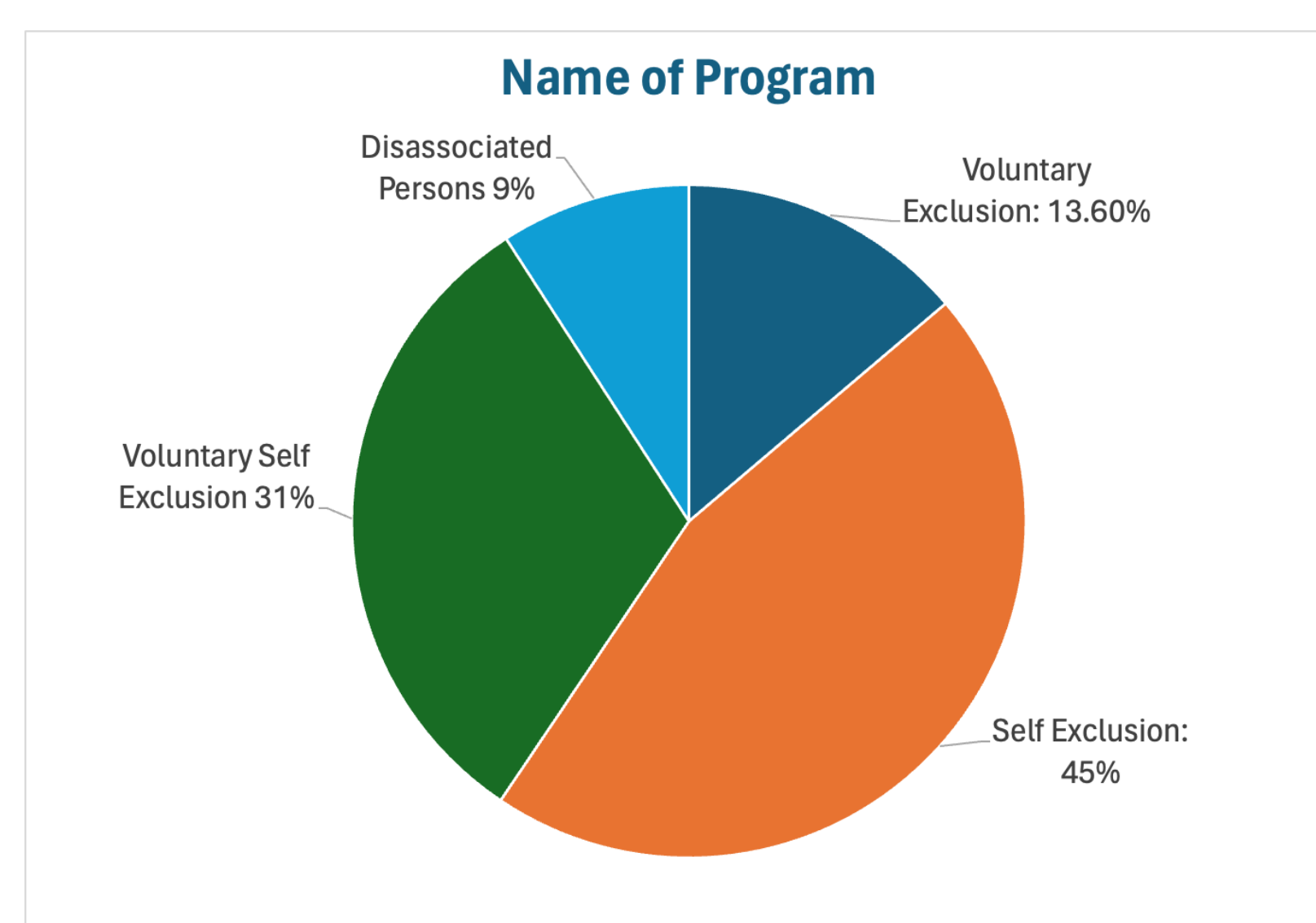
METHODOLOGY

Research started by reviewing which states offer VSE and 32 states were identified. An online search of state VSE application forms was then conducted between September-November 2023. Overall, 22 state-wide applications were included in this analysis due to 10 states not offering an easy pathway to their contract.

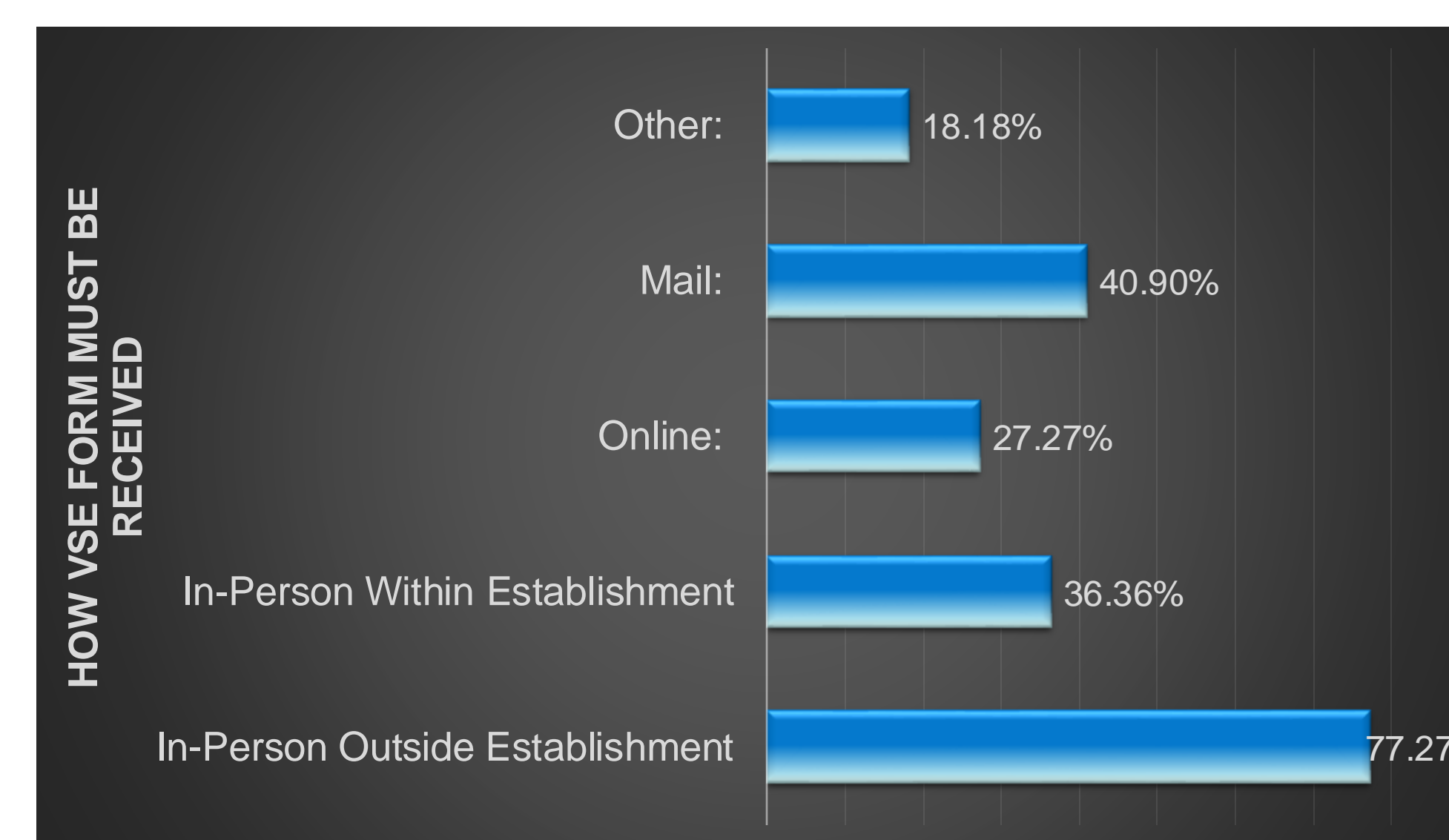
Analysis involved reviewing the contract application and recording details to compare to other state applications. The language of each contract was then analyzed based on the following broad categories: name of VSE program, process and requirements for submission, types of gambling included, term length(s) offered, demographic details on individual requested, violation consequences, and hold harmless language.

For the purpose of this poster presentation, this research focuses on findings that consider the names given to the process, the length of self-exclusion offered, how the form is submitted, and potential punishments or consequences for violating the terms of the contract.

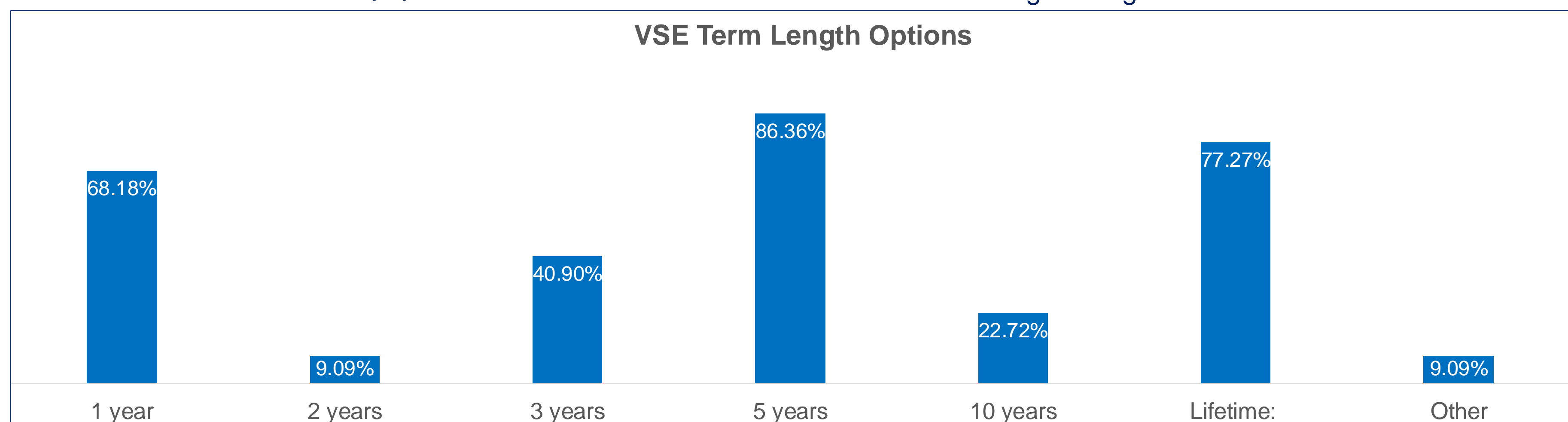
RESULTS



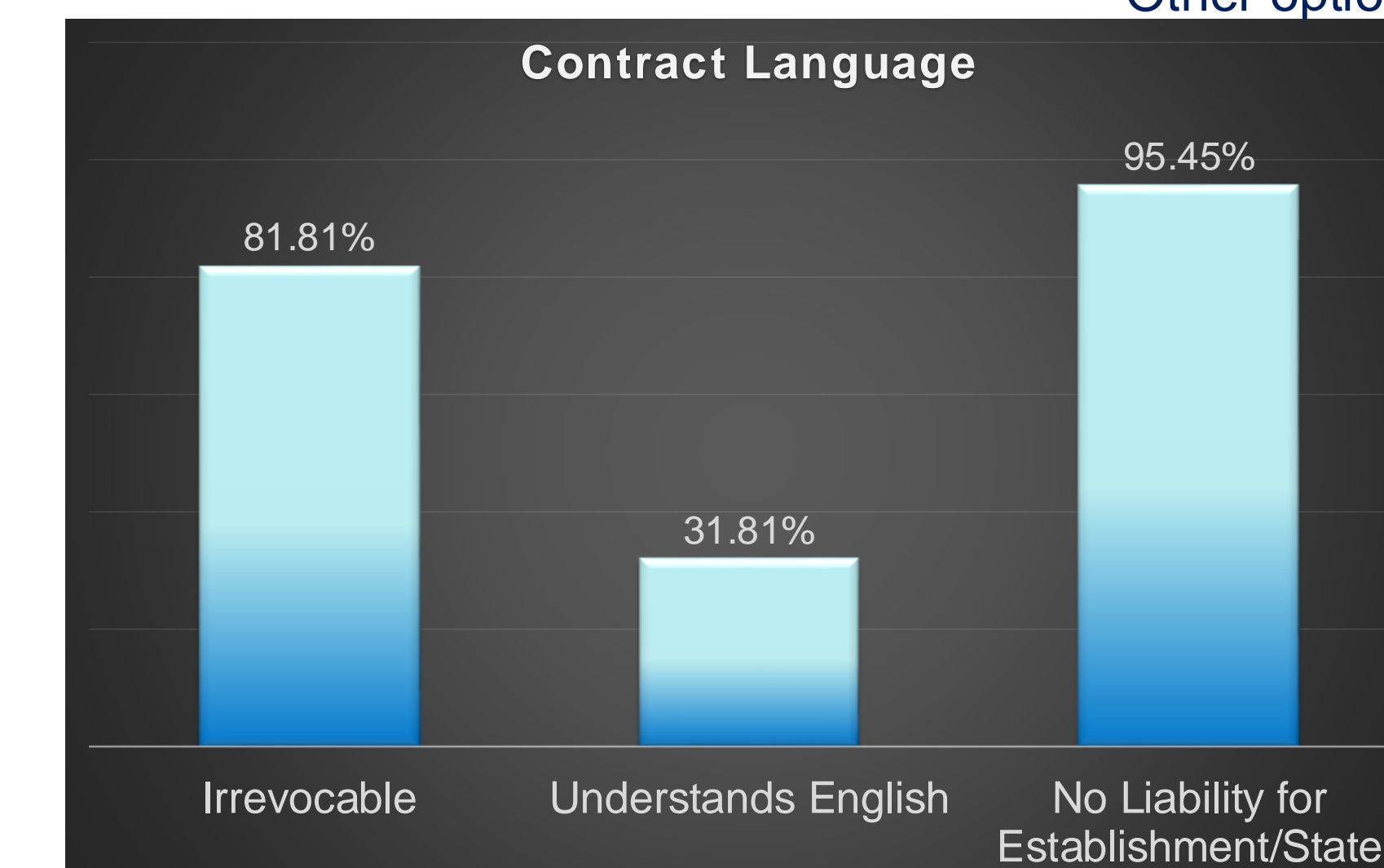
Most VSE programs have one of four potential names, with Voluntary Self Exclusion or Self Exclusion being the most popular.



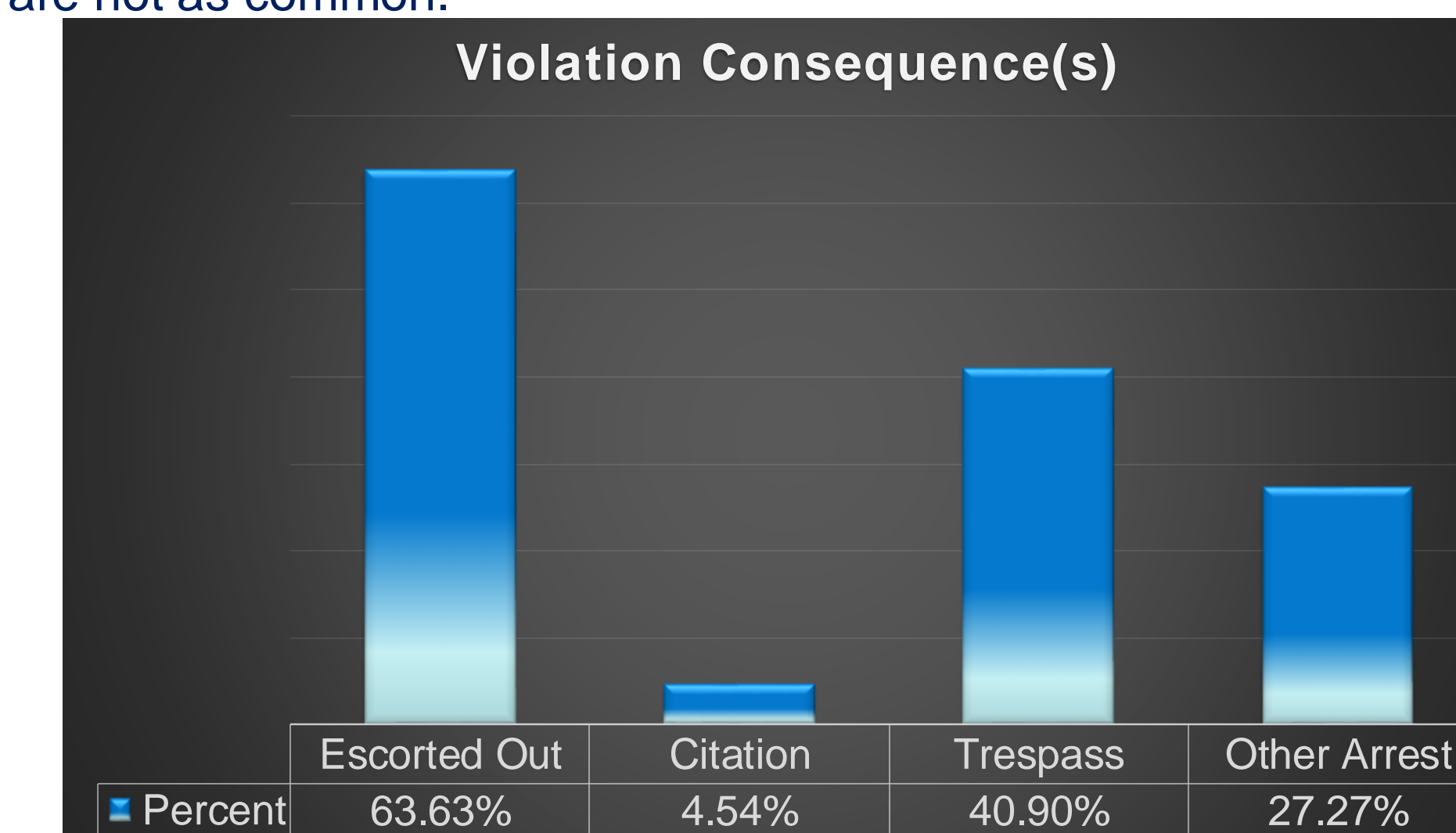
There are many ways an individual needs to submit their form, with most states allowing someone to submit without entering a gambling establishment.



Most states include a 1 &/or 5-year VSE option, with about 77% also allowing for lifetime self-exclusion. Other options, are not as common.



Contracts include many different important provisions, including whether they are irrevocable (82%) and there is no liability if the individual violates their VSE (95%). Only 32% ensure the individual can understand English (the contract language).



Contracts also include a variety of violation consequences, with the majority (64%) stating the individual will be escorted off the property. However, **nearly 70% indicate the person may be arrested** if they violate the VSE.



When an individual violates their VSE, but wins a jackpot, the money is forfeited. The vast majority of contracts do not indicate where the funds will be sent or whether the gambling establishment keeps the forfeited wins.

DISCUSSION

With the analysis of the available VSE contracts concluded, a comparison can be drawn. Overall, the contract language and characteristics are similar across most states but are far from uniform. States varied broadly on options and language, although several had some similarity.

The variables that had the greatest similarity include length of time options, with 1 year, 5 year, and lifetime options being most prevalent. In order to protect the state and/or gambling industry partner, language that the contract is irrevocable and indication that the gambling establishment or state holds no liability if the terms have been violated are in the vast majority of contracts. Meanwhile, what occurs when a violation does happen varies greatly, such as whether they will be arrested or just escorted off the property and what may happen to any winnings. This seems one-sided where the industry and state take little responsibility for violations, but the individual may face dire consequences for what would be a normally legal activity except for the voluntary signing of self-exclusion. **Individuals likely need treatment and help over potential criminal sanctions for their gambling disorder.** Essentially, VSE follows prior attempts to criminalize addiction, where treatment has been found to be the most beneficial for the individual and community.

There is also variation between the methods of submitting the application and the names used for the program, such as self-exclusion, voluntary self-exclusion, and disassociated persons. Having a unified name and process for self-exclusion can make the application process easier to access across the states and allow individuals seeking help to locate the resources needed.

The analysis of VSE contracts across the states demonstrates variations in the contracts that can be confusing to the applicants. A lack of uniformity in aspects as important as terms of self-exclusion available and potential consequences for violations can make self-exclusion more convoluted, especially for those gambling across state lines or in multiple jurisdictions.

There were some limitations to this research. The greatest limitation of this research was that not all states had VSE programs, and some states that had VSE programs did not provide access to the contracts, disqualifying them from the research project. Given the limited number of state contracts available for analysis, future research should include all state contracts, as well as individual gambling industry VSE contracts, to establish whether these findings are universal among all VSE options.

This research is just the beginning of analyzing VSE and opens the door for further research in how uniformity with contracts may potentially benefit those who volunteer to self-exclude from gambling availability. No one responsible gaming approach works for everyone, however VSE could be successful if better understood by the potential user.

REFERENCES

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 Devault-Tousignant, C., Lavoie, N., Côté, M., Audette-Chapdelaine, S., Auger, A. M., Håkansson, A., & Brodeur, M. (2023). Qualitative experience of self-exclusion programs: A scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5), 3987. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20053987>

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