Protecting the Living, Honouring the Dead

The barriers and enablers to community acceptance and implementation of safe burials

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Background

- Spread of Ebola at funerals
- SMART consortium took on management November 14
- Aim of research:

assess the barriers and enablers to community acceptance and implementation of safe burials in Sierra Leone

Allow for a Safe Burial when Someone Dies at Home

Do not touch, wash, or clean the body. Do not touch fluids or anything a person who may have died of Ebola has touched.

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EVERY CHILD FREE FROM FEAR

Barriers

- Use of black body bags and chlorine
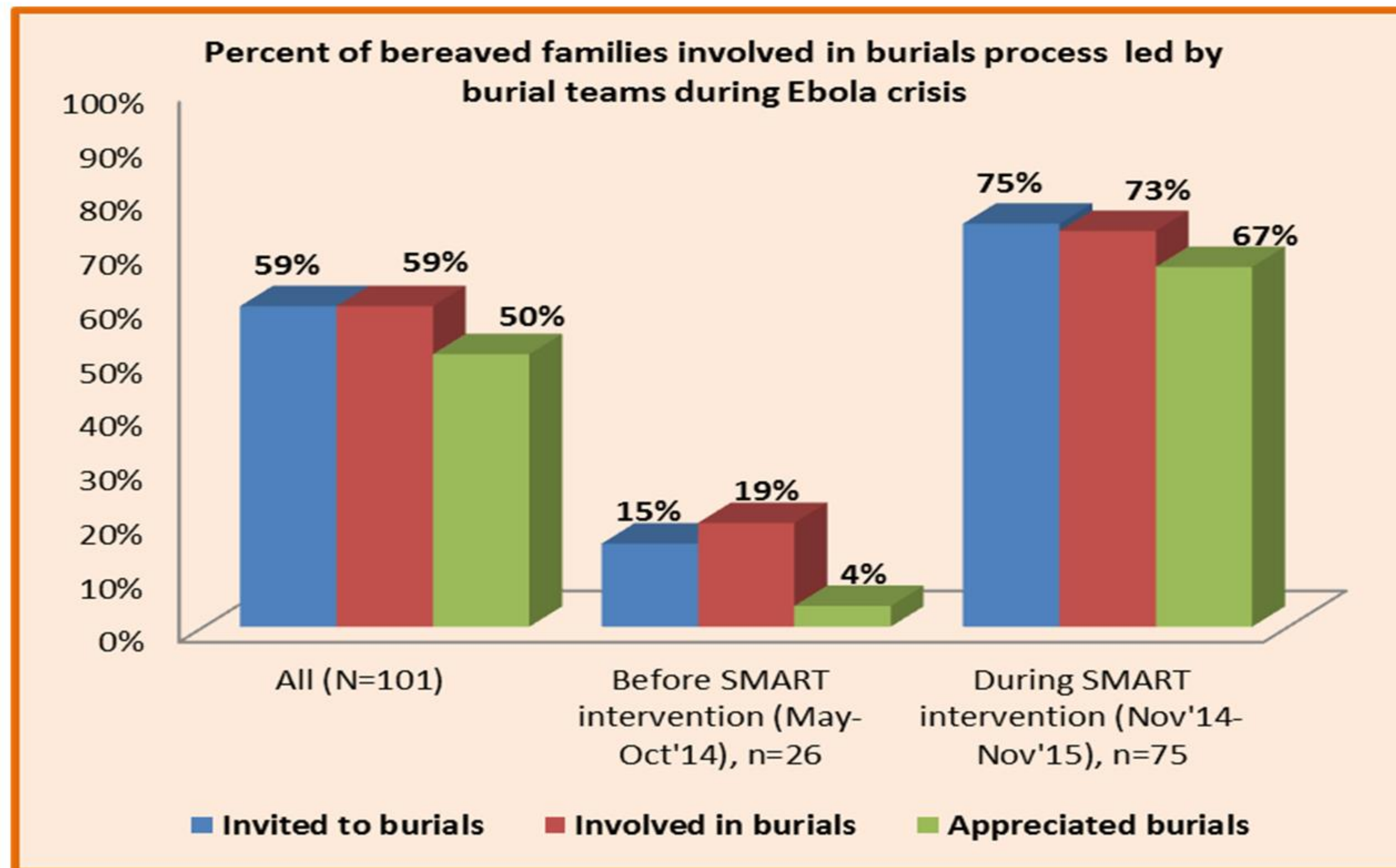- Unethical treatment of corpses

Joseph Komeh who lost his wife and two children:

"My wife was everything to me. I expected to see that her corpse was washed and the body wrapped in clean white cloths. But the burial team opposed this, and even drove us from the view of the corpses, only to see them later dragging three black bags on the ground towards the pick-up van. The process was so sorrowful and frightening. Anyone that sees this would not encourage the Burial Teams to handle the remains of their loved ones. I really hate that black bag!"

- Lack of customary & religious rites

  Exclusion of bereaved families

  Violation of customary and religious rituals

Percent of bereaved families involved in burials process led by burial teams during Ebola crisis

Underlying factors

- Poorly coordinated structures slowed down the response
- Weak capacity support and monitoring systems
- Failure to meet basic needs of Burial Teams

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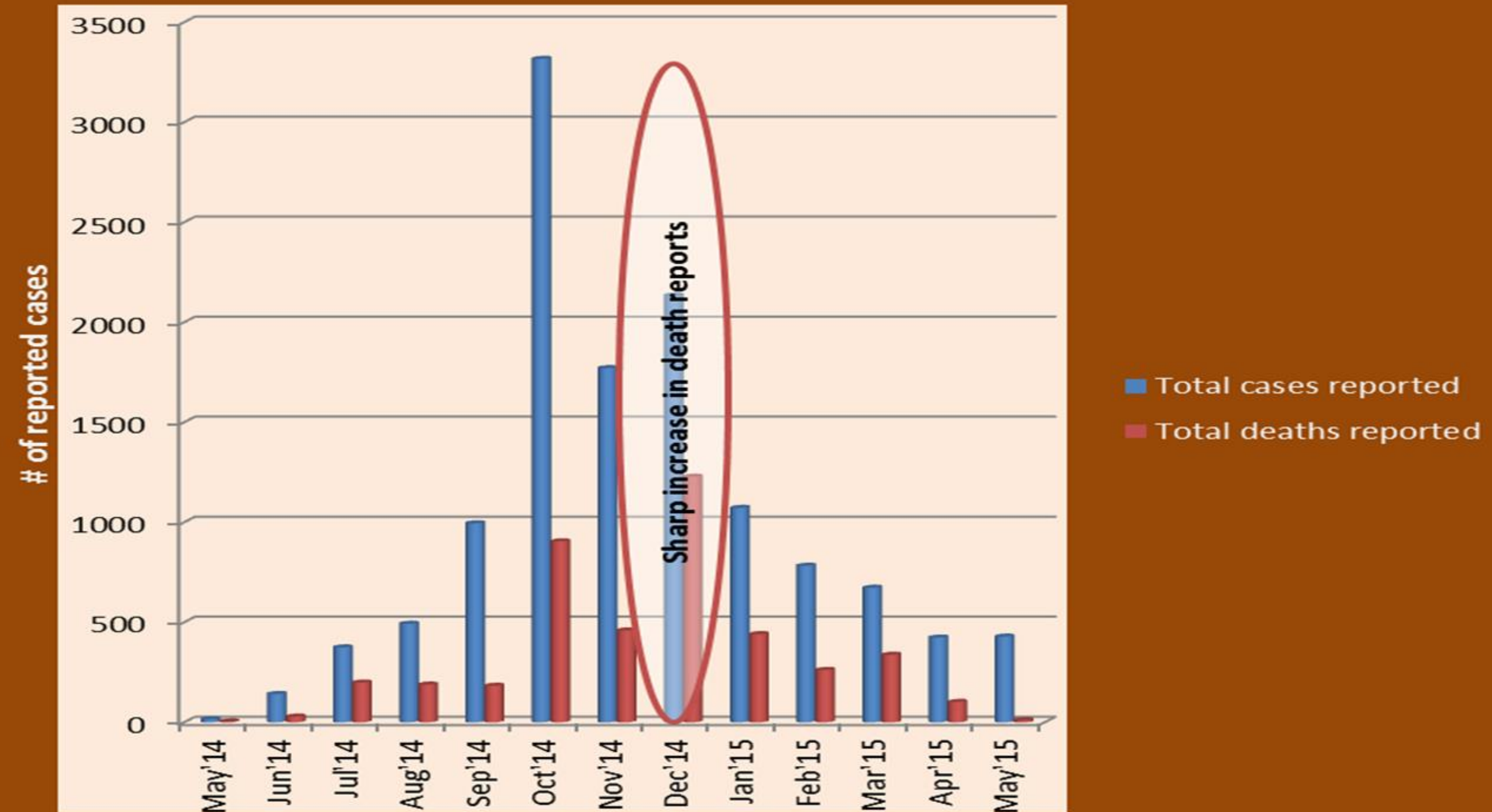
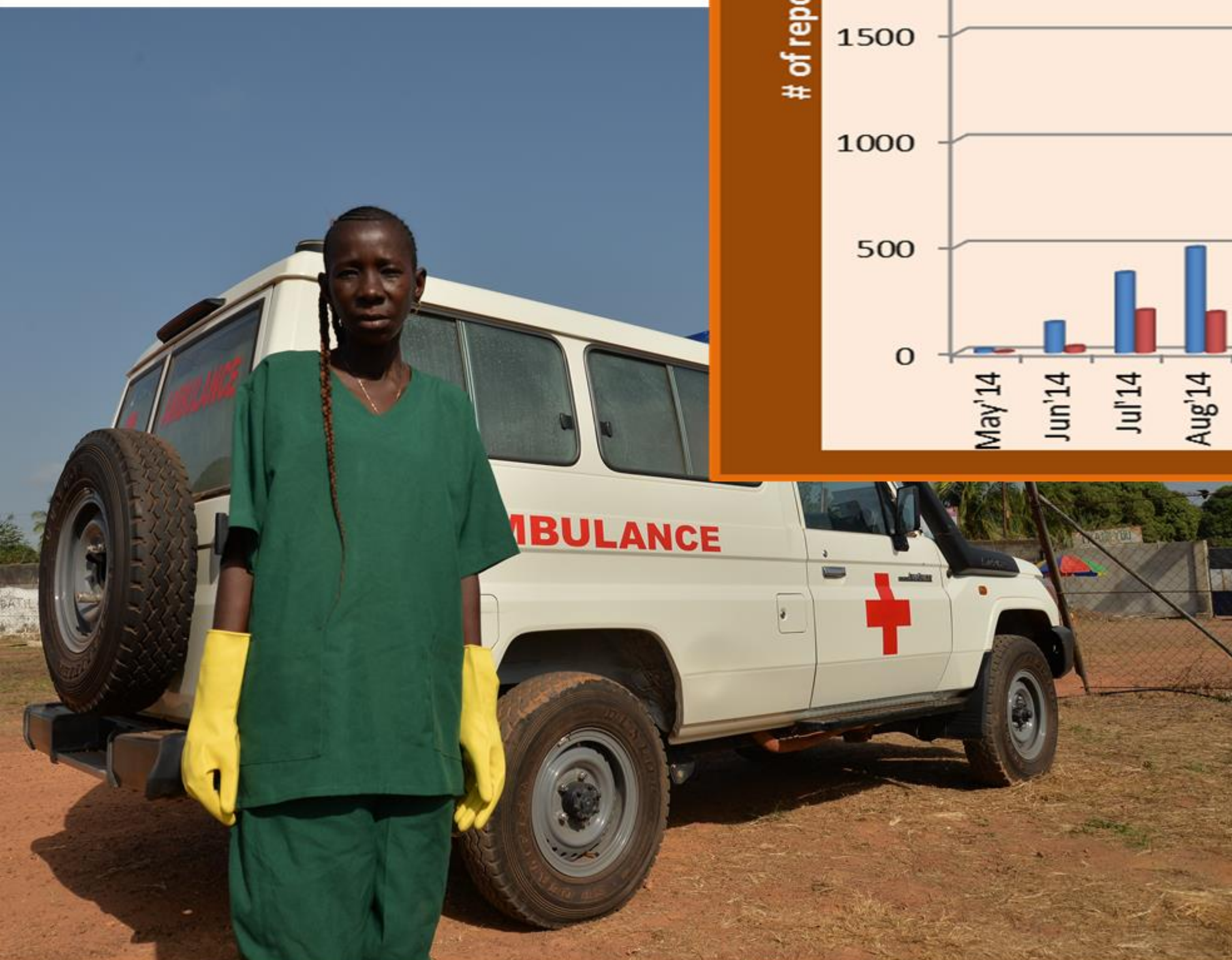**EVERY CHILD FREE FROM FEAR**

Enablers

- Inclusion of customary and religious rites

"Before this time those burial people were not polite. They used inflammatory languages against bereaved families and the corpse; and they handled the corpse in a dehumanising manner. However, we saw them as changed people when we were bereaved in July 2015. They were very polite; they asked us to provide cloth for the corpse, dig the grave and involved a religious leader to pray. There was no change to what we used to do before Ebola, except for the use of the body bag. We really appreciate their method this time."
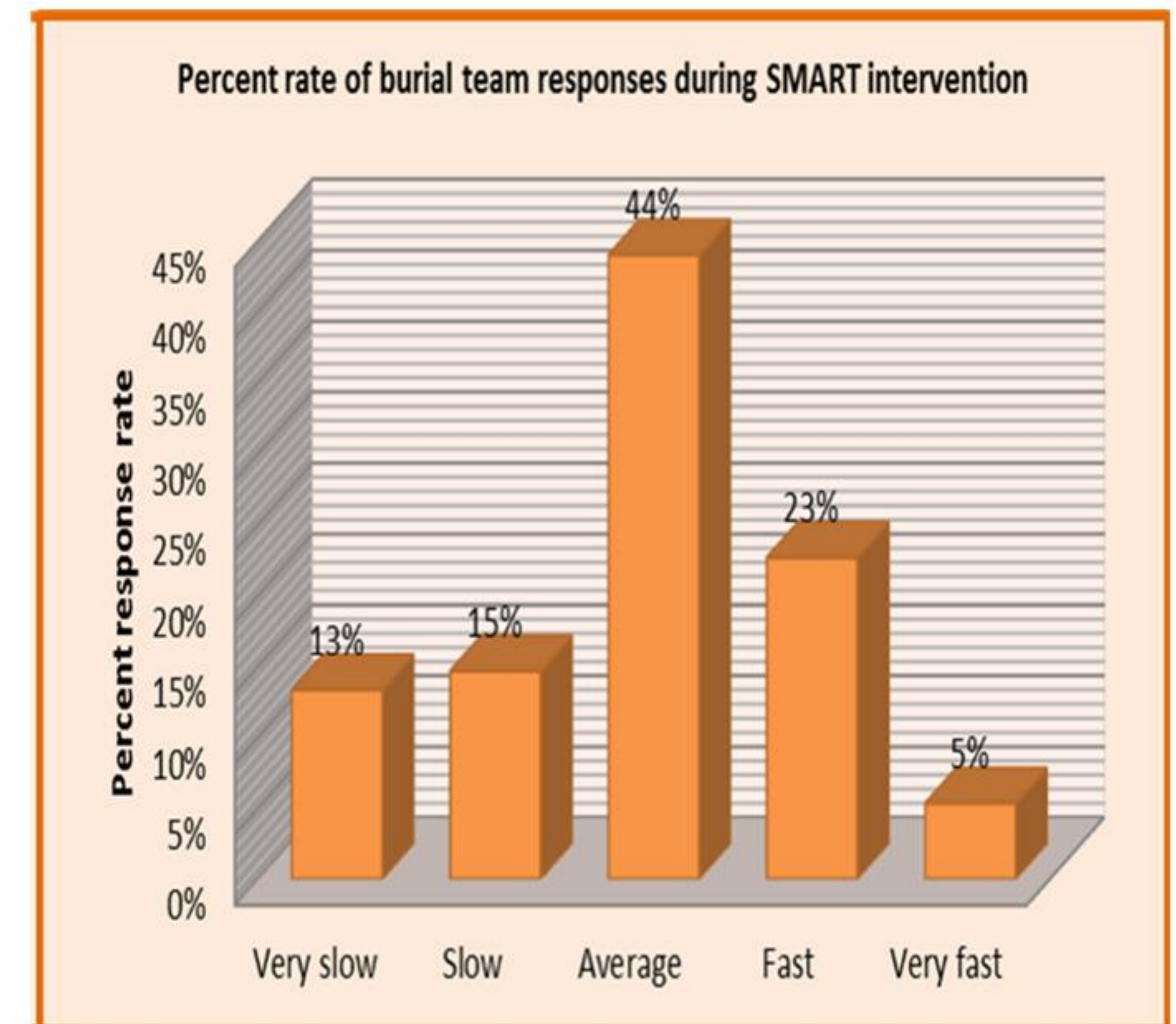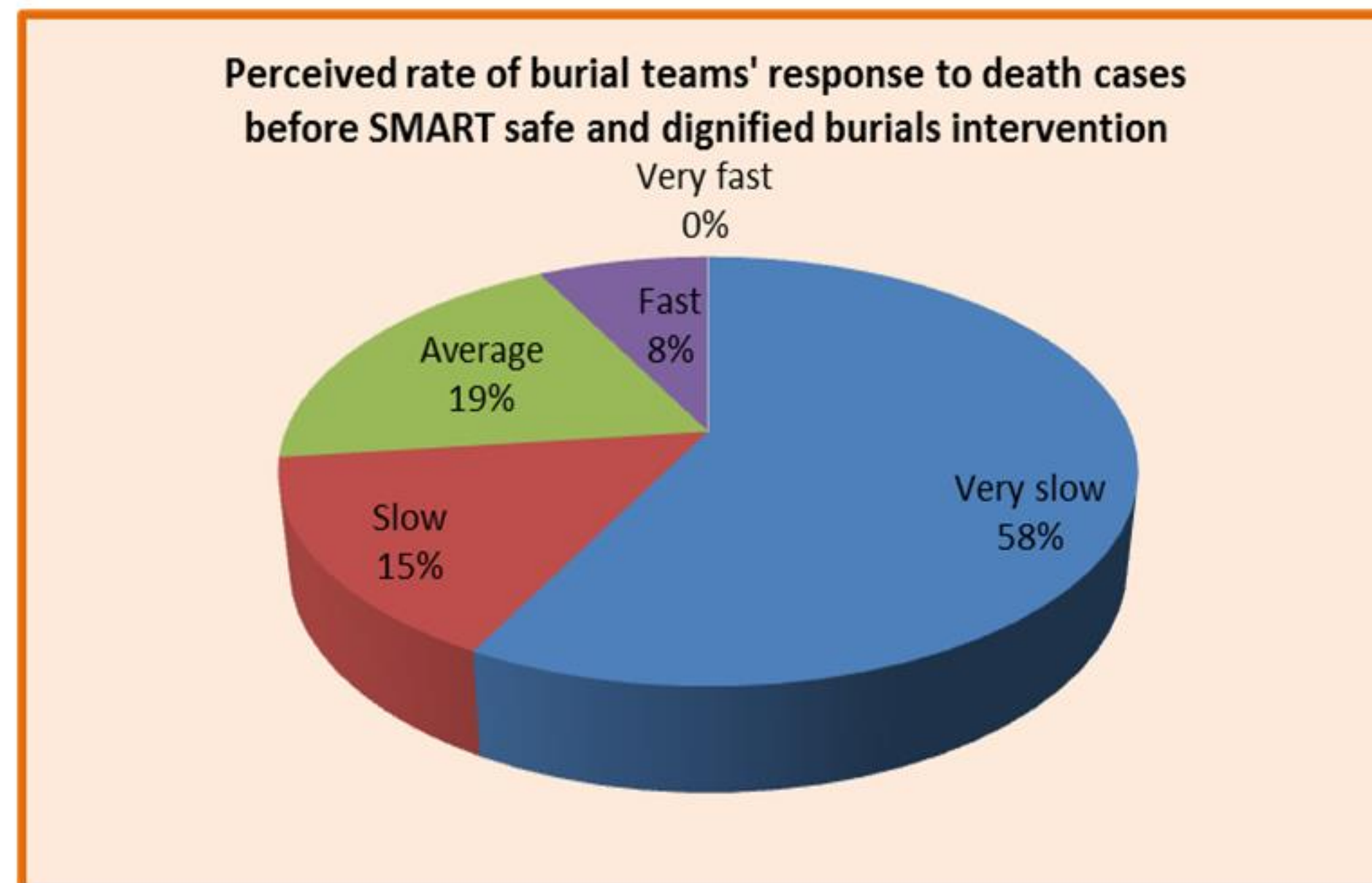Bereaved family member, Kamadu New Site, Kono District

- Recognition of faith leaders & women

Adressing underlying factors

- Command centres established in each district
- Increased capacity of staff & resources
- Met basic needs of Burial Teams

Perceived rate of burial teams' response to death cases before SMART safe and dignified burials intervention

- Very fast 0%
- Fast 8%
- Average 19%
- Slow 15%
- Very slow 58%

Percent rate of burial team responses during SMART intervention

Response	Percent
Very slow	13%
Slow	15%
Average	44%
Fast	23%
Very fast	5%

Gaps

- Sustainability of District Health Management Team activities
- Lack of effective reintegration modalities for Burial workers

Recommendations

1. Deeper engagement and involvement of communities is critical to ensuring behaviour change.

2. Faith-based alliances should be utilised for building community trust.

3. Greater consideration should be given to gender aspects of public health emergencies.

4. Ensure effective capacity building of health personnel, such as burial workers.

5. Ensure adequate support of health personnel.

6. Burial and other health workers should be provided with coping mechanisms for community reintegration.