



Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out
presents

A Complex Picture:

Results of a 2014 Survey of Adult Alumni of the Modern Christian Homeschool Movement
Installment 4: Food and Health
June 1, 2015

Data analysis provided by:



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Read the first installment, which includes a description of the survey methodology, [here](#). The second installment, which focuses on demographic variables, can be found [here](#). The third installment, which discusses academics and other non-academic educational aspects, is [here](#). *Note that this survey should not be used to make any generalized statements about homeschoolers as a whole; the only people it can be used to make claims about are the 3,702 people who took the survey.*

0. Introduction to Installment 4: Food and Health

In this installment, we discuss the reported attitudes of respondents' families towards food and modern medicine. A majority of respondents experimented with homesteading and/or fad diets, and an appreciable minority had negative experiences related to food. Though respondents' families had, in general, positive attitudes toward modern medicine, around 15% lived in families which preferred alternative medicine. One-third of respondents' families were totally or partially opposed to vaccination.

1. Food

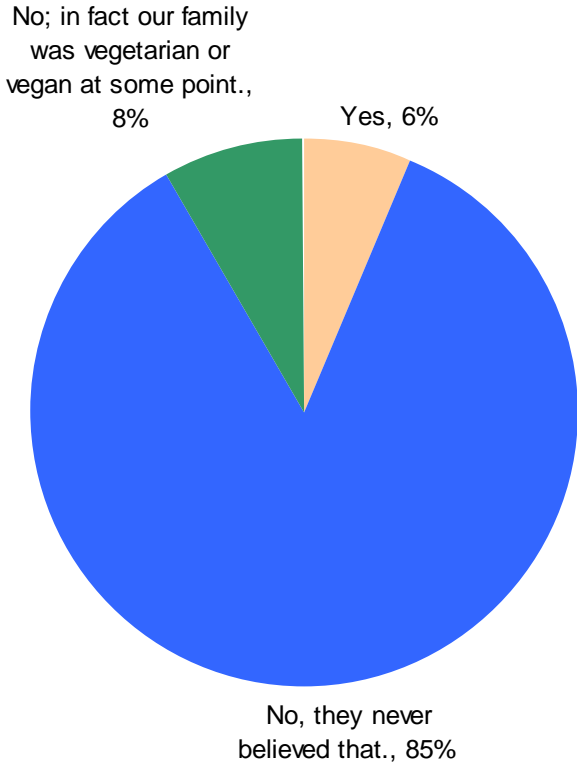
Food was a highly charged topic for many of our respondents. Around 80% of respondents' families had participated in homesteading activities or fad diets. (Most families were not vegetarian/vegan.) Respondents' families highly valued food that was healthy, cheap, and homemade, and about half of respondents did not consider making food choices different from their families while being homeschooled. For between 10% and 20% of our respondents, food was used as a way to punish and control, including through frequent fasting, food deprivation or forced eating as punishment for wrongdoing, and food insecurity.

Food values & practices

Respondents were asked whether their family practiced any homesteading activities or fad diets. Three quarters of respondents (74.4%) had participated in at least one homesteading activity, including home gardening (65.9%), canning (38.8%), making "whole" or "daily" bread (35.1%), and home fermentation (7.6%). Nearly a third of respondents (31.4%) had participated in at least one fad diet. These included raw milk (15.8%), the Atkins Diet (10.3%), the Hallelujah Diet (3.7%), Weigh Down (3.6%), the Weston A. Price Foundation/Nourishing Traditions (3.1%), the Daniel Diet (2.7%), Masters Cleanse (2.5%), Maker's Diet (2.4%), and avoiding unprocessed foods for spiritual reasons (2%). One fifth of respondents (18.8%) had not participated in either a fad diet or a homesteading activity.

Vegetarianism/veganism were not particularly prevalent among respondents; around 8% of respondents' families had been vegetarian or vegan at some point, while around 6% of respondents' families were opposed to vegetarianism/veganism (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Did your family believe vegetarianism or veganism were sinful food lifestyles?



Respondents were asked about the values that guided their families' choices about food (Figure 2). They rated the importance of each aspect from 1 ('Of no importance') to 5 ('Of utmost importance').

Figure 2: How important were the following values to your family in food and beverage choices?

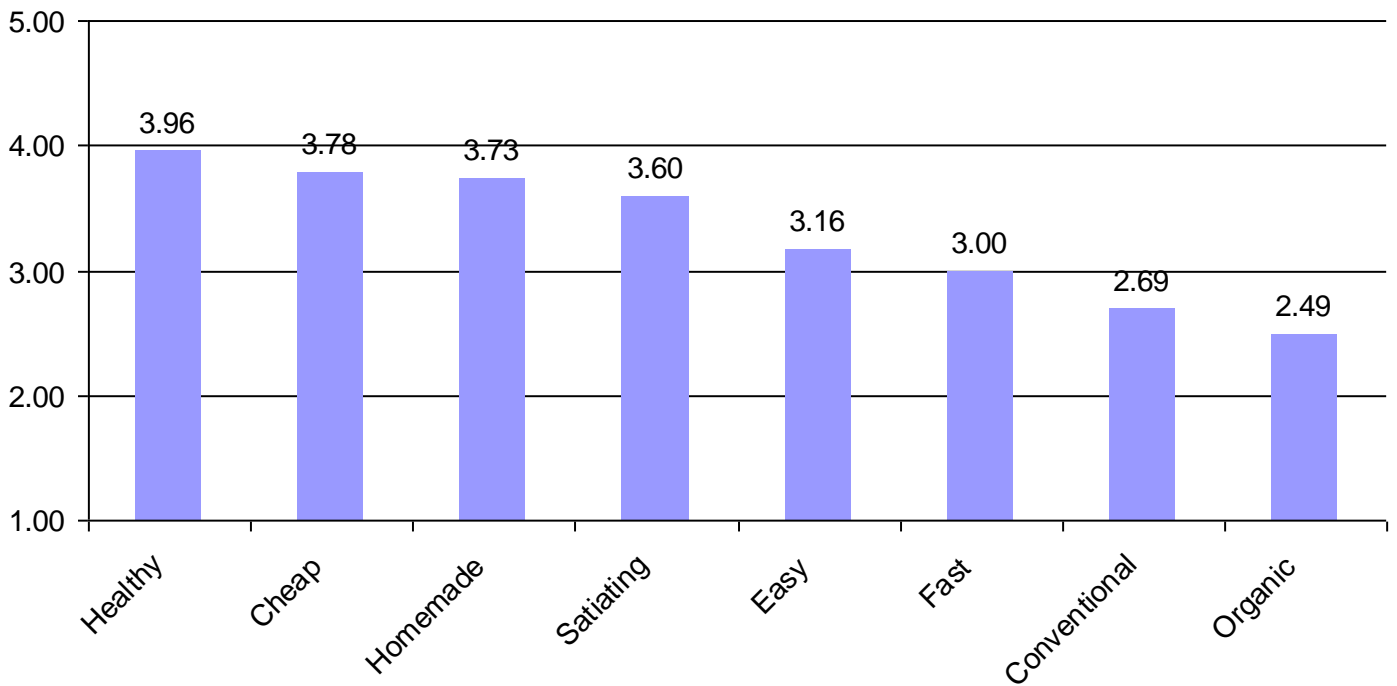


Figure 2 shows that in the aggregate, respondents' families placed higher than neutral importance on choosing food that was healthy, cheap, homemade, and satiating, while placing lower than neutral importance on choosing food that was conventional and organic.

Around one-third (33%) of respondents never made food choices that were different from those of their families while growing up (Figure 3). Another third (34%) stated that food choices were not that important to their families. One-fifth (18%) of respondents' families actively discouraged them from making their own choices about food, while 15% of respondents' families actively encouraged them to make their own choices.

Figure 3: Growing up, if you made food and/or eating choices different from your family, how did your family respond?

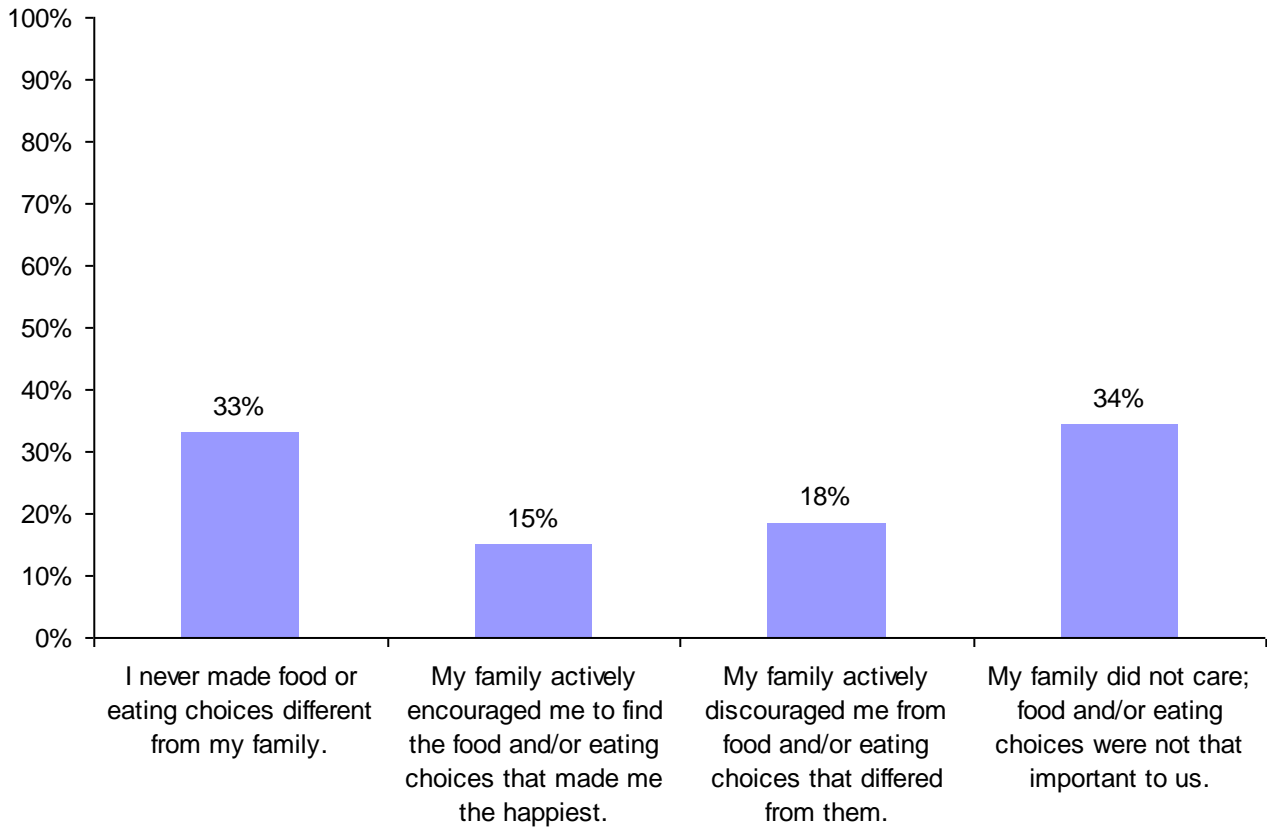
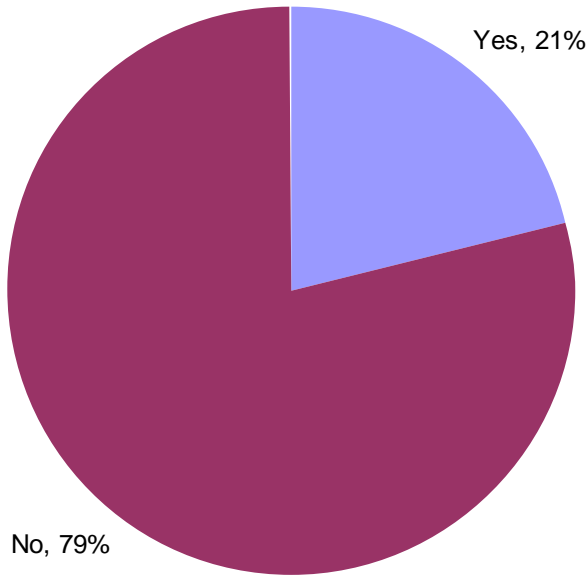


Figure 3 shows that approximately half of respondents (51%) did not consider or were discouraged from considering making food choices different from their families.

Food abuse

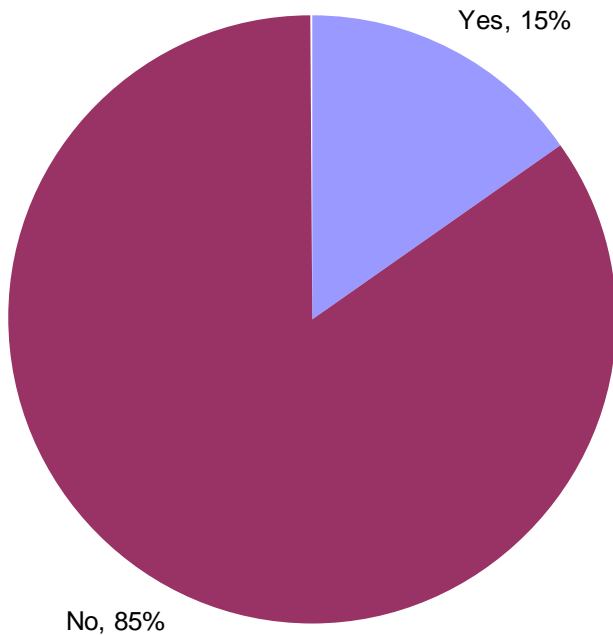
Some respondents reported that their parents had used food to abuse or control them. Approximately 8% of respondents stated that their family had practiced frequent fasting, while more than one-fifth of respondents (21%) experienced food deprivation as a form of punishment (Figure 4). Note that there were no follow-up questions to address the severity of the food deprivation.

Figure 4: Did your parents ever withhold food (liquid or solid) as a form of punishment?



In addition, 15% of respondents reported that they had been forced to eat something they hated as a form of punishment (Figure 5).¹

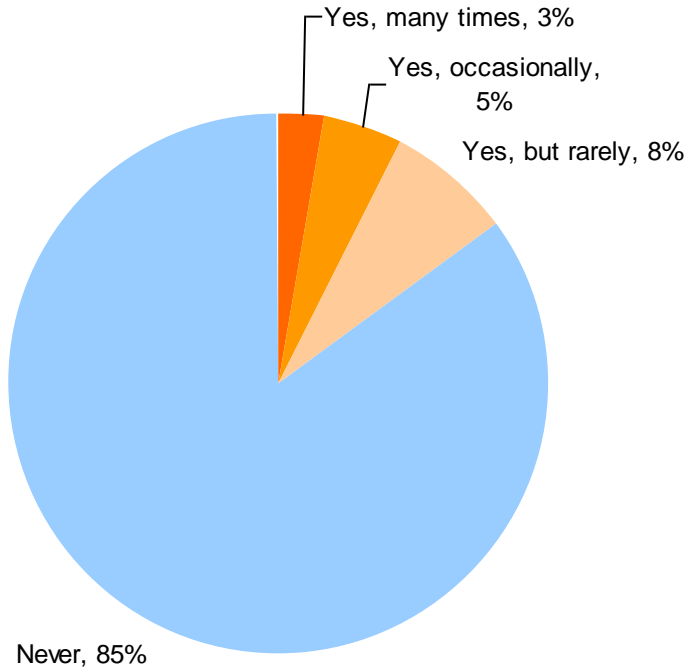
Figure 5: Did your parents ever employ food (liquid or solid) as a form of punishment?



A total of 16% of respondents reported experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity (Figure 6).

¹ The wording of this question was: “Did your parents ever employ food (liquid or solid) as a form of punishment? As an example: did they force you to eat or drink something you hated -- not because it was essential to your physical well-being, but simply as an act of punishment?” Note that there were no follow-up questions to determine the severity of the forced eating.

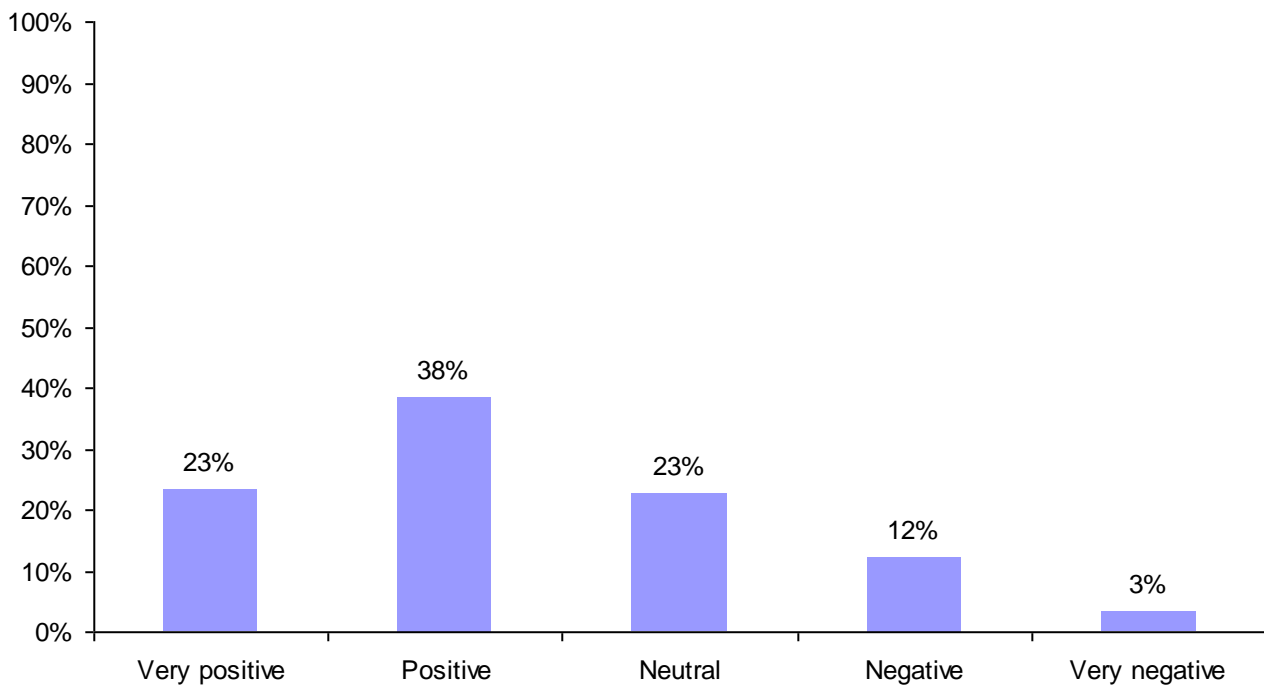
Figure 6: Growing up, were you ever worried about if you would have food for your next meal?



2. Health

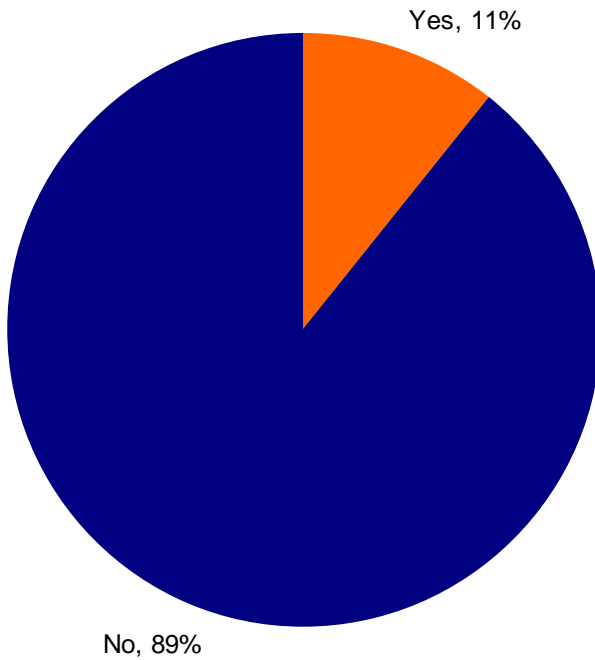
Most respondents' families were generally positive towards mainstream doctors and hospitals. On a scale from 1 'Very negative' to 5 'Very positive', their average attitude was 3.7, closer to 'Positive' than 'Neutral' (Figure 7).

Figure 7: What was your family's general attitude towards mainstream doctors and hospitals?



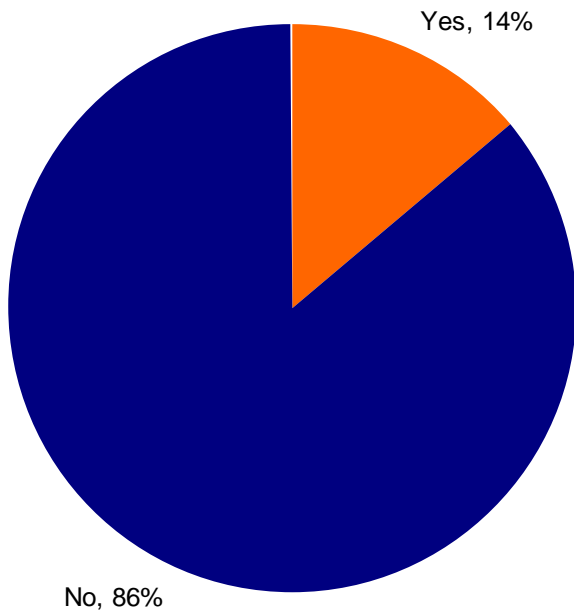
However, around 15% of respondents' families had a negative or very negative attitude towards mainstream medicine. This figure is also reflected in respondents' preferences for alternative medicine. Around 13% of respondents' families practiced using essential oils, and 11% preferred essential oils to medicine (Figure 8).

Figure 8: In the treatment of physical illness, did your family prefer essential oils to modern medicine?



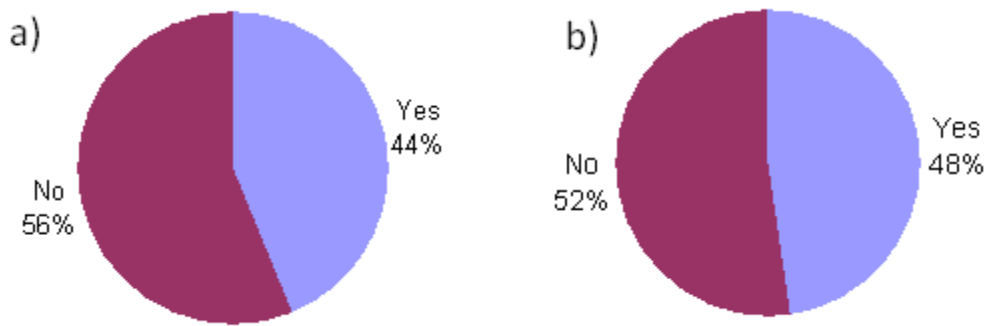
Around 14% of respondents' families preferred prayer to medicine (Figure 9).

Figure 9: In the treatment of physical illness, did your family prefer prayer to modern medicine?



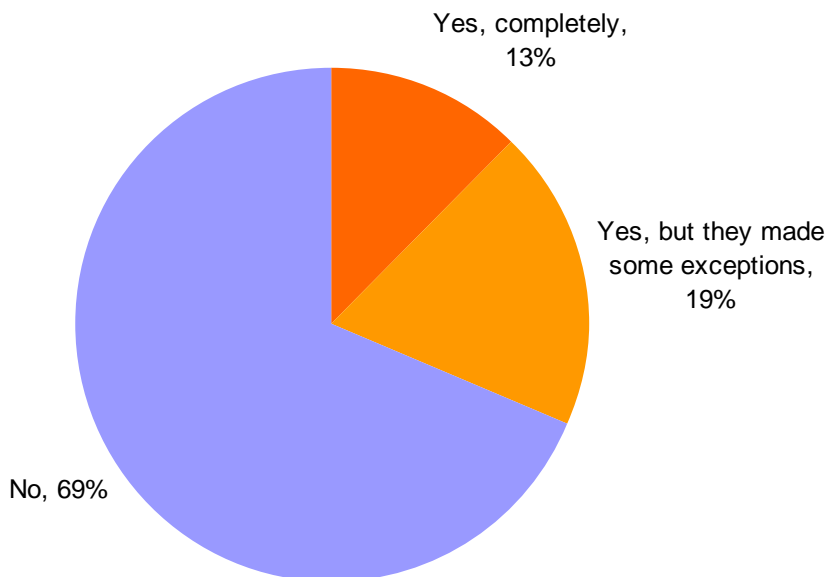
Unsurprisingly, if we isolate the analysis to only those respondents whose families had a negative or very negative attitude towards modern medicine, we find that 44% of these families preferred essential oils to modern medicine and that 48% of them preferred prayer to modern medicine (Figure 10).

Figure 10: In the treatment of physical illness, did your family prefer a) essential oils; b) prayer to modern medicine? (Includes only respondents whose families had a negative or very negative attitude towards mainstream doctors and hospitals)



A few respondents also reported that they were users of Dr. Bronner's (5.59%) or Miracle Soap (1.86%) products. Approximately 15% of respondents' families were anti-fluoride. About one-third (32%) of respondents reported that their families were at least somewhat anti-vaccination (Figure 11).²

Figure 11: Was your family anti-vaccination?



Conclusion

In conclusion, key findings from this installment include: respondents' families highly valued food that was healthy, cheap, and homemade, as was reflected by the prevalence of homesteading and fad diets. Between 10% and 20% of respondents reported negative food experiences and food used as punishment. Though on average respondents' families had a positive attitude towards mainstream medicine, around 15% reported that their families preferred alternative medicine. One third of respondents' families were at least partially or totally opposed to vaccination.

² Note that the numbers in this graph do not sum to 100% due to rounding.