



Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out
presents

A Complex Picture:
Results of a 2014 Survey of Adult Alumni of the Modern Christian Homeschool
Movement
Installment 8: Mental Health
February 1, 2016

Data analysis provided by:



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The first installment, which includes a description of the survey methodology, can be found [here](#).

The second installment, which focuses on demographic variables, is [here](#).

The third installment, which discusses academics and other non-academic educational aspects, is [here](#).

The fourth installment, focusing on food and health, is [here](#).

The fifth installment, on the topic of religion, is [here](#).

The sixth installment, discussing respondents' current families and careers, is [here](#).

The seventh installment, which describes respondents' sexuality, 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.

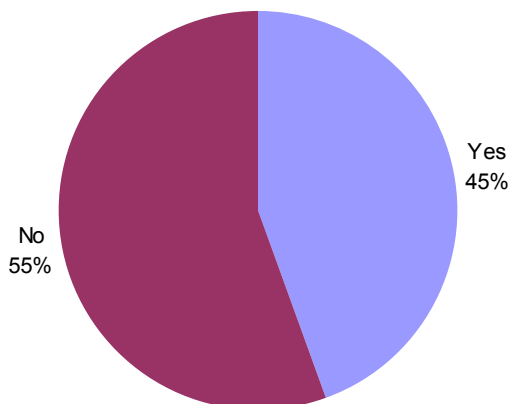
0. Introduction to Installment 8: Mental Health

In this installment, we discuss respondents' mental health histories, including the mental health conditions they have had, their families' attitudes towards mental health, and the prevalence of self-injury and substance abuse.

1. Diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health conditions

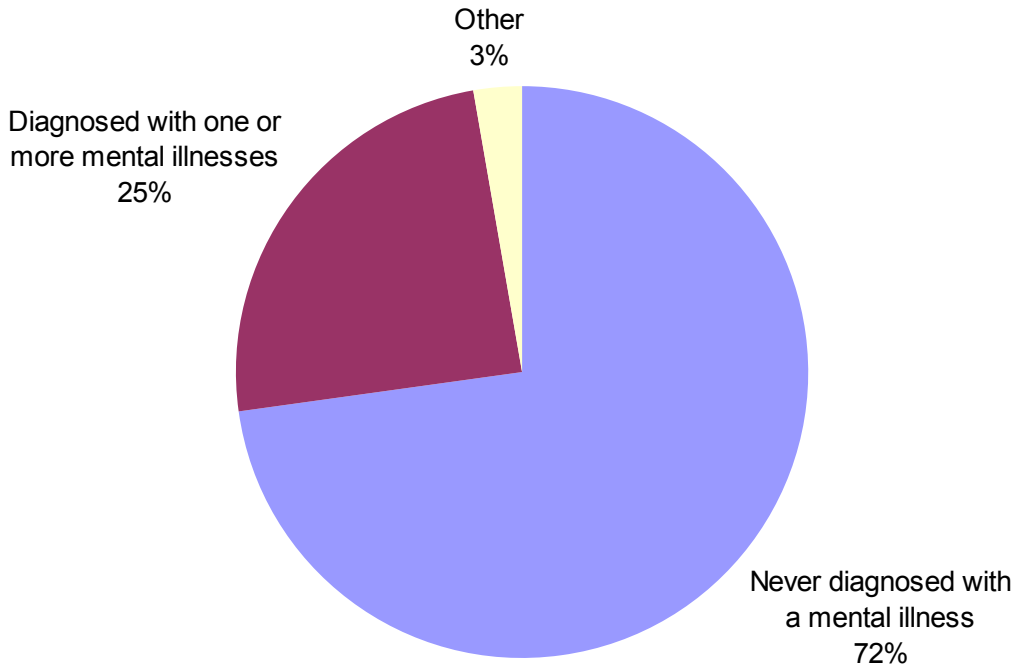
Nearly half of all respondents (45%) have had an appointment with a therapist.

Figure 1: Have you ever had an appointment with a mental health counselor/therapist?



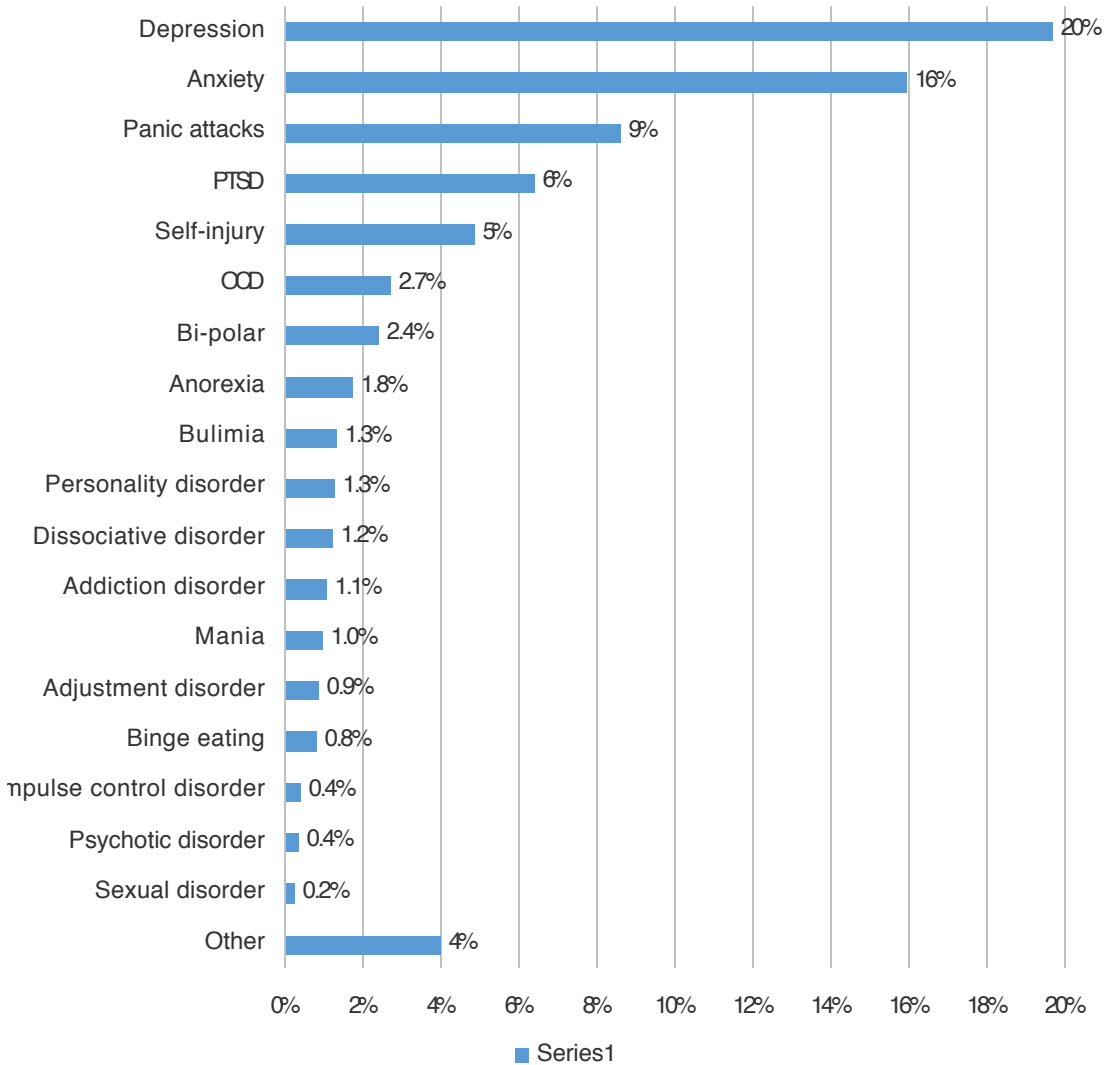
The survey contained two questions about mental health conditions the respondent may have had: (1) whether the respondent had any mental illnesses that had been *diagnosed by a professional*; and (2) whether the respondent had any mental illnesses that had *not* been diagnosed by a professional (e.g. that were self-diagnosed, diagnosed by clergy or family members, etc.). Figure 2 shows that 25% of respondents had been diagnosed with a mental illness by a mental health professional.

Figure 2: Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental illness by a mental health professional?



The most commonly reported diagnosed mental health conditions were depression (nearly 20% of all respondents), anxiety (around 16%), panic attacks (around 9%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (approximately 6%). Figure 3 shows the mental health conditions respondents reported being diagnosed with. Note that the values do not sum to 100% because respondents were allowed to select multiple options.

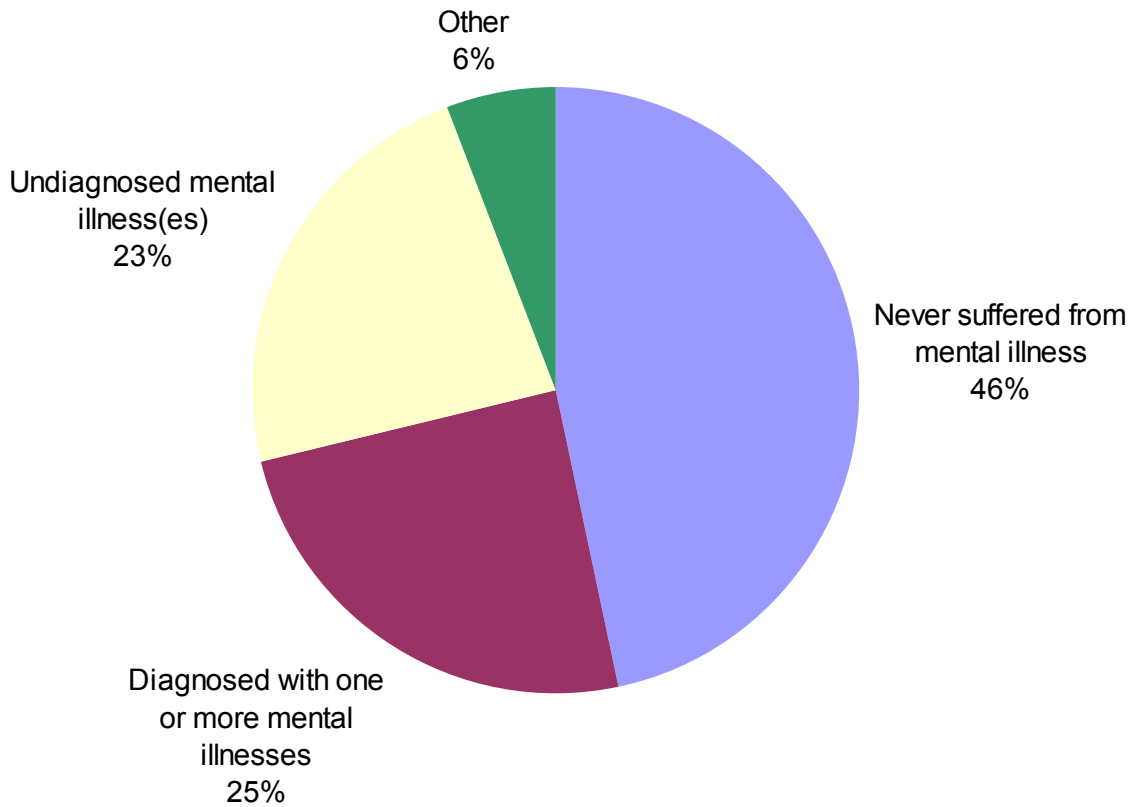
Figure 3: Respondents' diagnosed mental illnesses



In addition to those respondents who have been diagnosed, we now will also consider respondents who believe they have mental health conditions that have never been diagnosed. When these respondents are included, the proportion of respondents who report having experienced mental illness rises to 48%—that is, 25% diagnosed and 23% undiagnosed (Figure 4). This figure is comparable to the [lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders](#) in America (around 46%, according to a 2005 study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry journal).¹

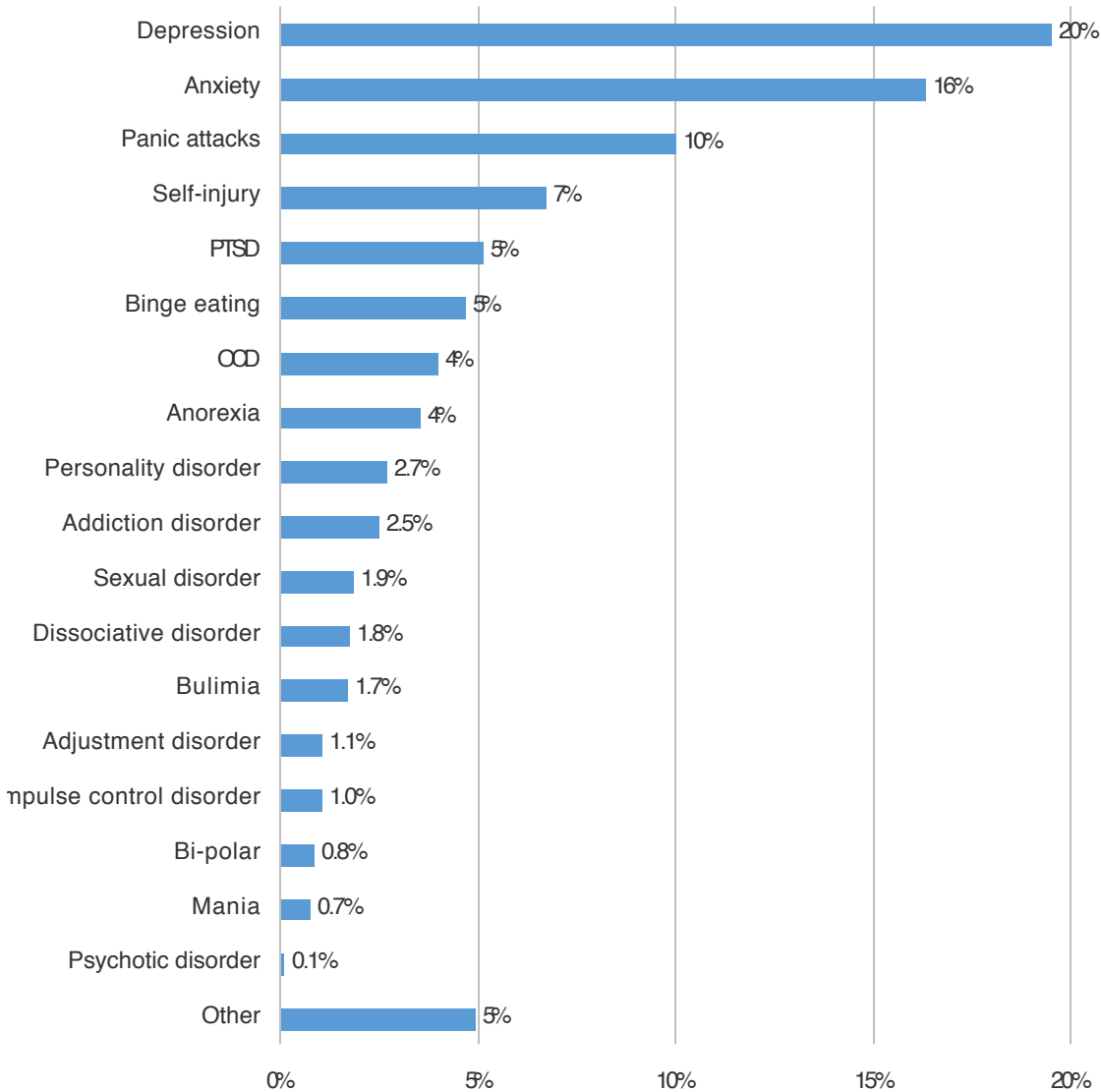
¹ Note that this study was conducted by screening the participants for past symptoms rather than by asking whether the participants had ever been diagnosed.

Figure 4: Do you have other mental health conditions which have never been diagnosed by a mental health professional?



The most commonly reported undiagnosed mental health conditions were very similar to those that were diagnosed, with a slightly higher occurrence of self-injury, OCD, and eating disorders (Figure 5).

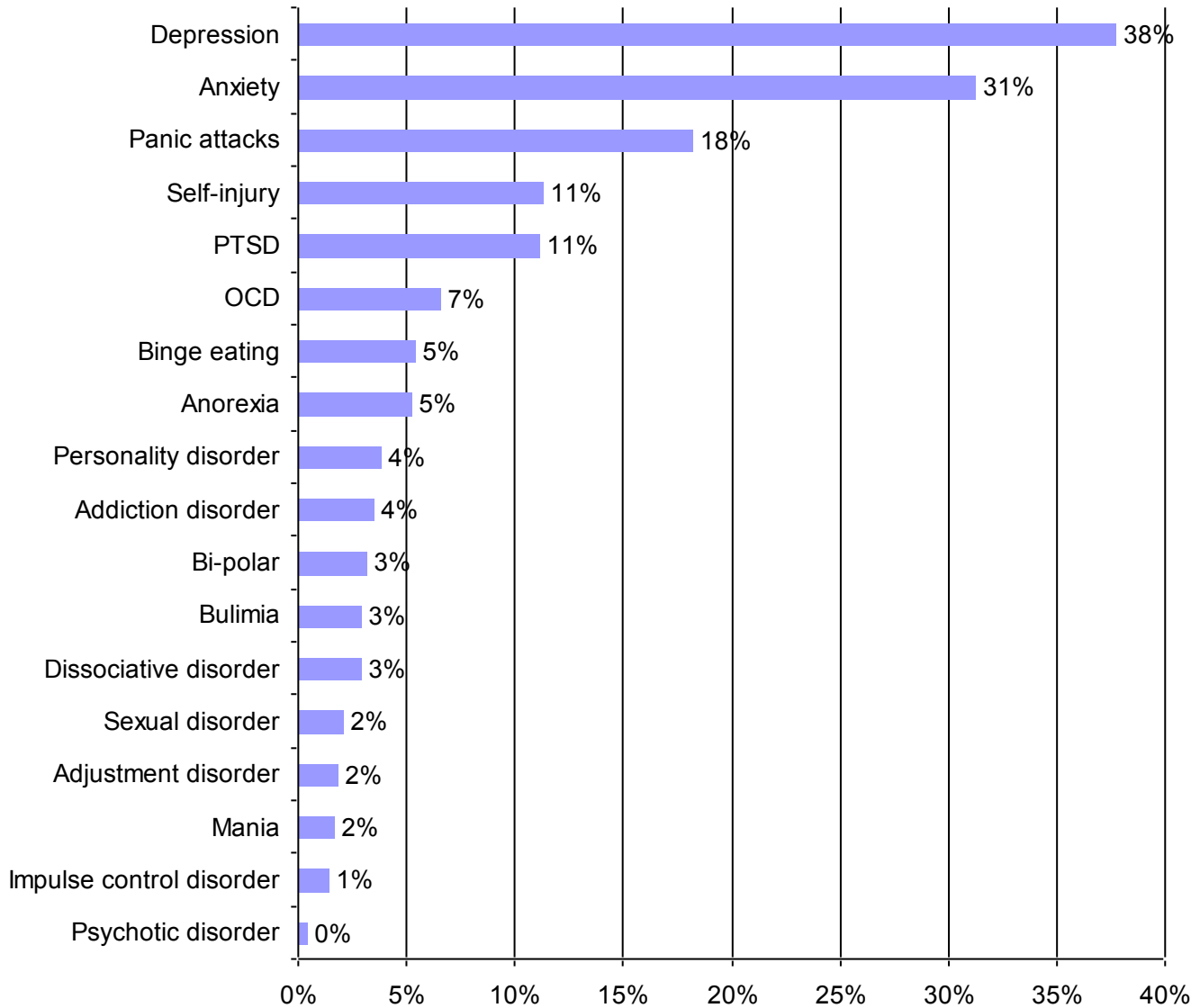
Figure 5: Respondents' undiagnosed mental illnesses



For the purposes of analysis, the reported diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions were combined to capture the incidence of the condition regardless of whether it was diagnosed (that is, a person was identified as having had a condition if they selected it under either of the two questions²). The most commonly reported mental health conditions in the combined data were depression (38% of respondents selected this answer choice for one or both questions), anxiety (31%), panic attacks (18%), self-injury (11%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (11%). Note that the values do not sum to 100% because respondents could select multiple options.

² This combination is taken to be a proxy for whether a respondent had ever displayed symptoms.

Figure 6: Respondents' diagnosed and undiagnosed mental illnesses



Respondents had a higher prevalence than in the [general population](#) of mood disorders (around 21% of the population), PTSD (7%), panic disorders (5%), and OCD (2%). This may be attributable to the fact that the survey respondents skew young and female (females are at greater risk of anxiety and mood disorders than males; prevalence of psychiatric disorders peaks around age 30-44).

2. Mental health in the family of origin

Figure 6 shows that, while only 14% of respondents reported that their parent or caregiver had been diagnosed with a mental illness by a mental health professional, a further 35% believed their parent suffered from an undiagnosed mental illness. Again, the sum of these figures (49%) is comparable to the national lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders (46%).

Figure 7: Did your parent(s) suffer from any mental illness(es)?

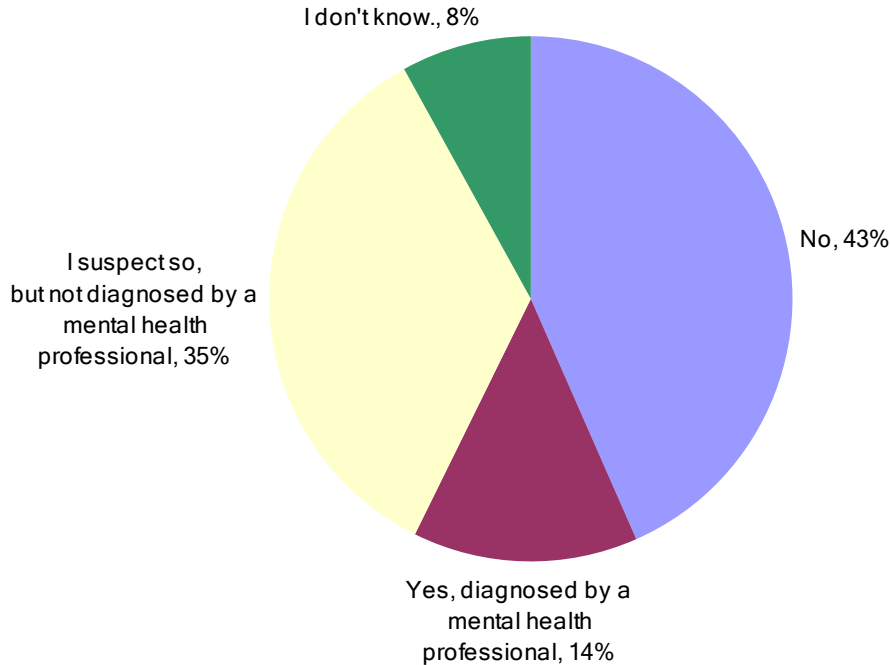
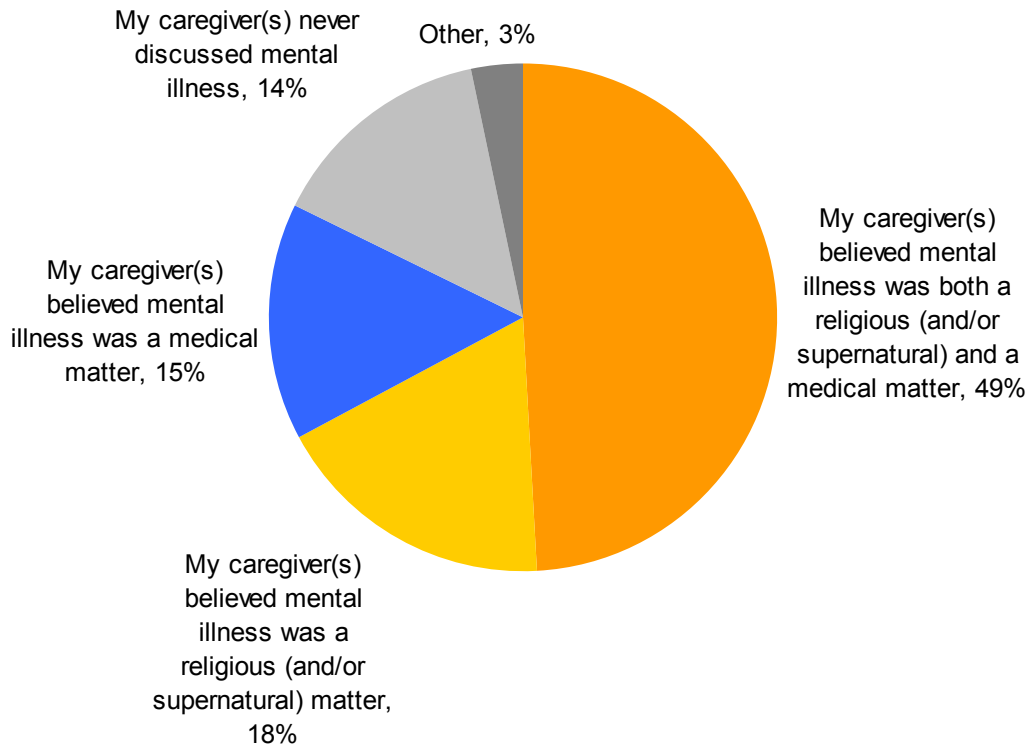


Figure 7 shows that more than one-third (67%) of respondents' parents believed that mental illness had a religious and/or supernatural cause (18% believed it was purely religious and/or supernatural; 49% believed it was partly religious and/or supernatural). Mental illness was never discussed in 14% of respondents' families.

Figure 8: What was your caregiver(s)'s view of mental illness?



These figures coincide with those found in [a 2008 study](#) (published in the Journal of Religion, Disability & Health) of attitudes toward mental illness among Christians; more than one-third of

participants in the study (36.5%) reported that someone at church had suggested their mental illness was the result of sin, and more than one-third (34.1%) reported that someone at church had suggested their mental illness was the result of demonic involvement.

Figure 8 shows that, of those respondents who experienced mental illness while being homeschooled, more than half reported that their caregivers were not aware of their illness. One in five survey respondents experienced mental illness while being homeschooled without the knowledge of a caregiver.

Figure 9: If you experienced mental illness while being homeschooled, was your caregiver(s) aware of that fact?

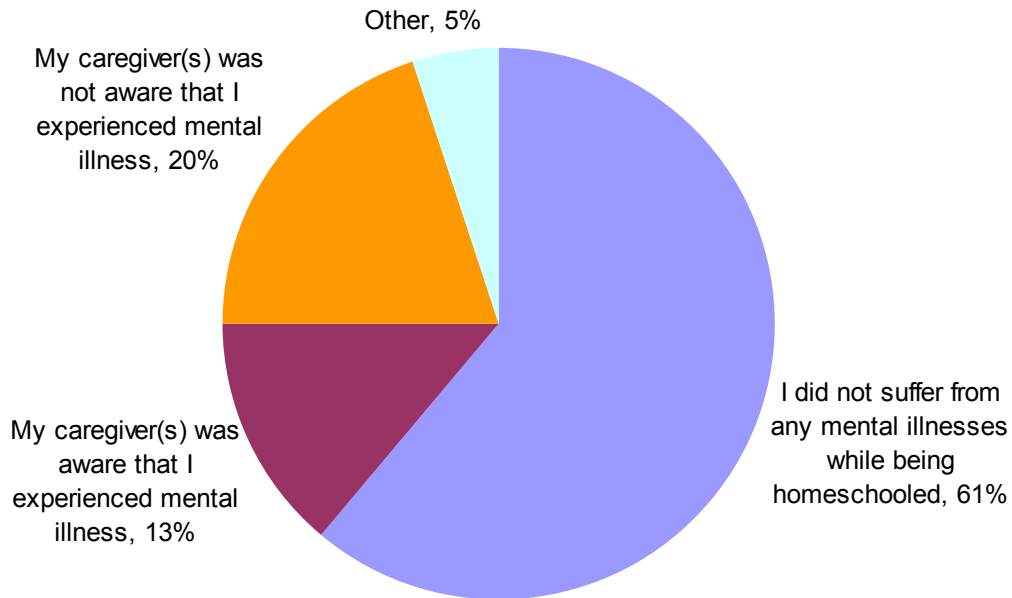
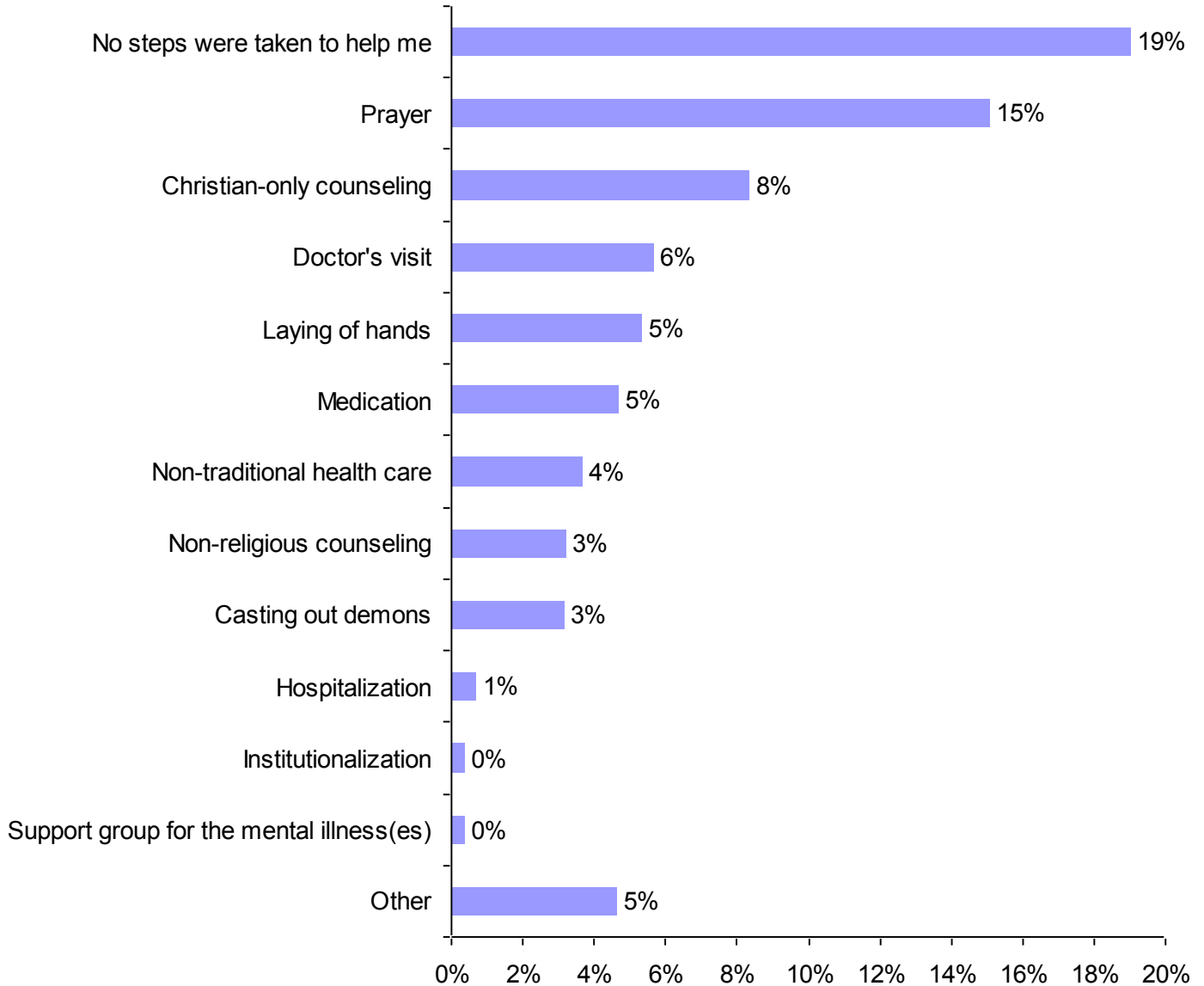


Figure 9 shows that mental health treatment for the survey respondents was very limited. Note that, in addition to those answers shown below, 62% of respondents answered 'I did not suffer from any mental illnesses while being homeschooled.' The values do not sum to 100% because respondents were allowed to select multiple answers.

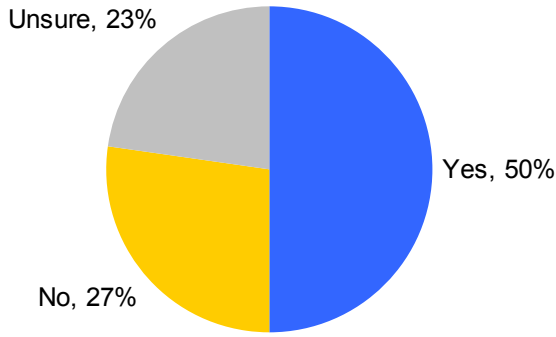
Figure 10: If you experienced mental illness while being homeschooled, what steps were taken to help you?



As shown in Figure 9 above, around one in five survey respondents experienced mental illness while being homeschooled but did not receive any form of treatment, even faith-based treatment. Only 5% of respondents ever received medication and only 3% ever received non-Christian counseling.

Half of respondents (50%) reported that their families would have been receptive to education about mental health (Figure 10), while over a quarter (27%) reported they would not have been, and the rest (23%) were unsure.

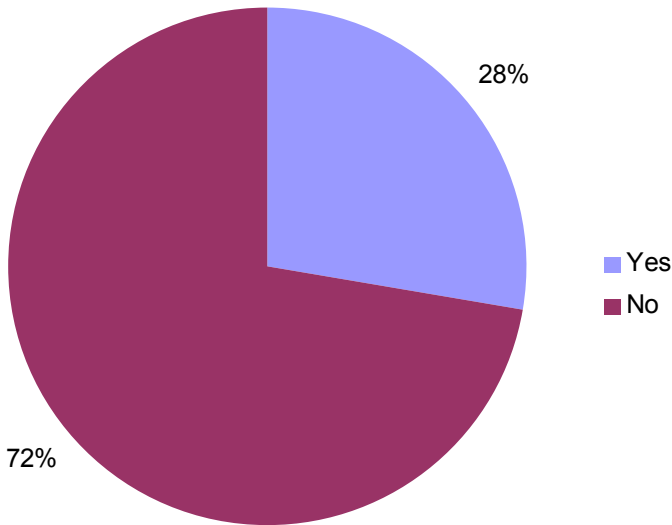
Figure 11: In your experience, would the adult(s) in your homeschooling environment (your parents, co-op leaders, etc.) have been receptive to education about recognizing and addressing mental health?



3. Self-injury

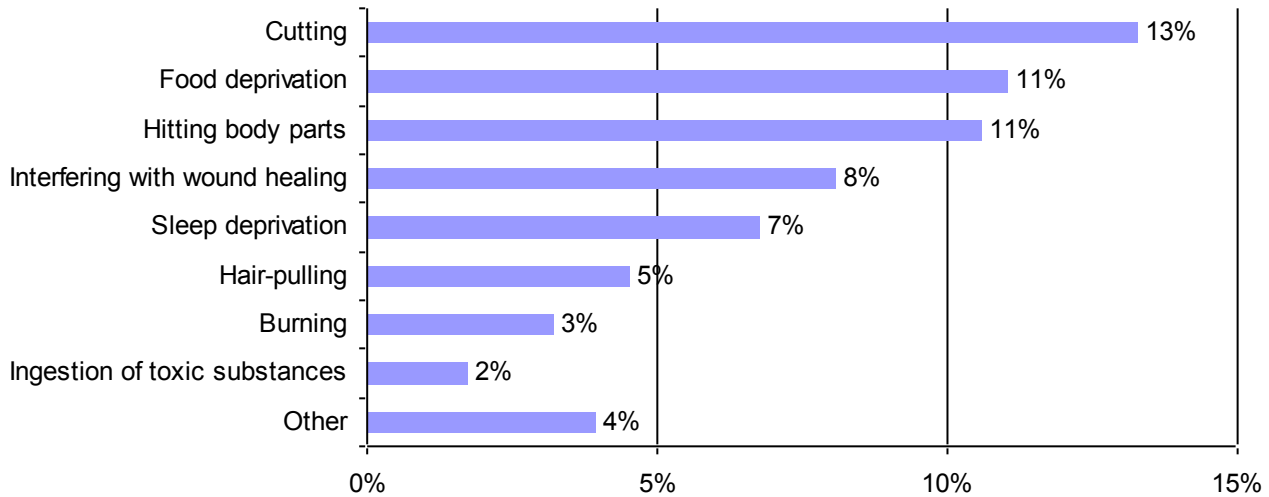
More than a quarter of survey respondents (28%) reported struggling with self-injury (Figure 11).

Figure 12: Have you ever struggled with self-injury?



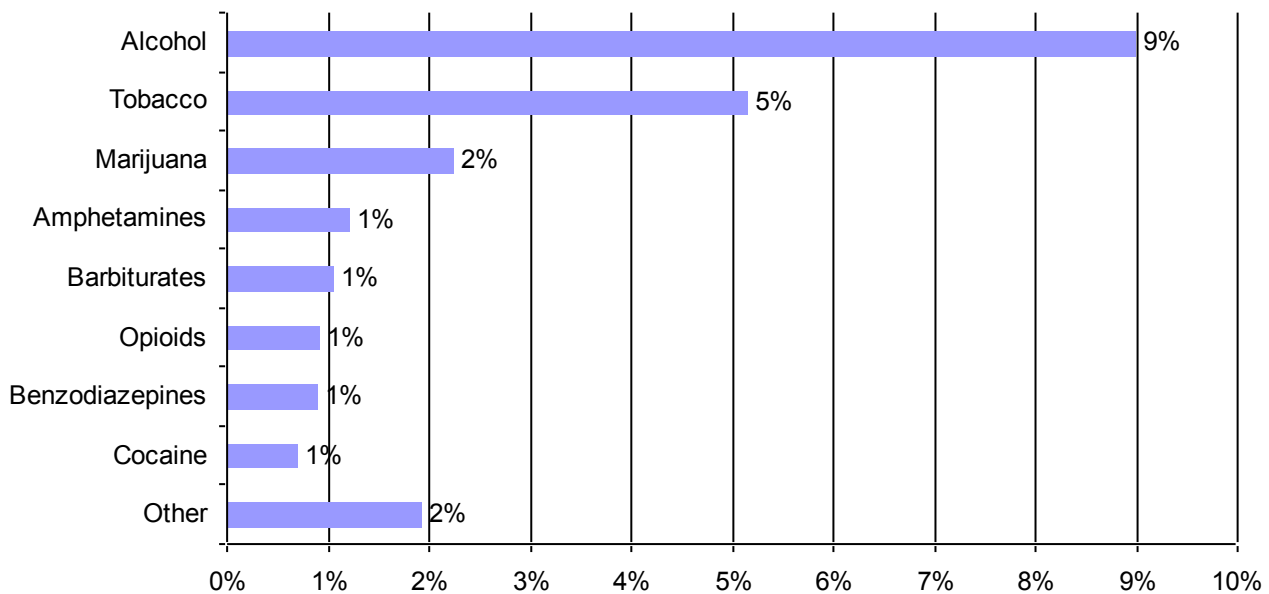
As shown in Figure 12 below, the most common types of self injury were cutting (13% of respondents), food deprivation (11%) and hitting body parts (11%).

Figure 13: Have you struggled with any form of self-injury?



Substance abuse had a fairly low incidence among the survey respondents—9% (around one in ten) reported that they had struggled with abusing alcohol, and smaller percentages had abused other drugs (Figure 14). Nearly 87% of respondents replied ‘I have not struggled with substance abuse.’ Note that the following appeared in the survey question: “In this context, ‘substance abuse’ means that you personally believe or feel that you used the substance in an unhealthy way or developed an addiction that you consider(ed) unhealthy.”

Figure 14: Have you struggled with substance abuse?



More than two out of five respondents (43%) had struggled with suicidal thoughts (Figure 14).

Figure 15: Have you ever struggled with suicidal thoughts?

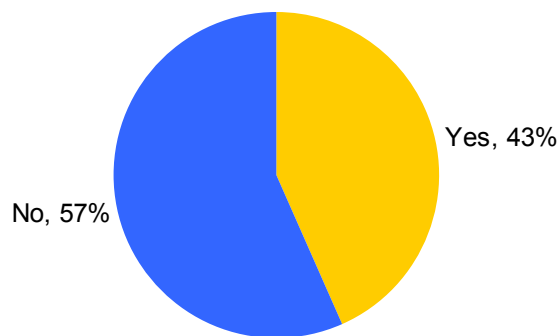
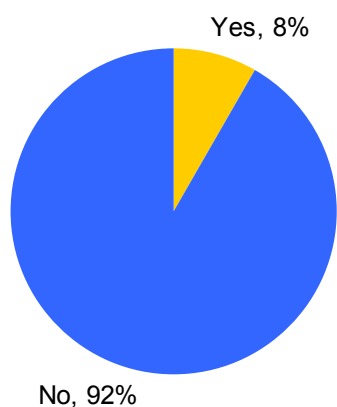


Figure 15 shows that about 43% of respondents, or nearly 1 in 2, had struggled with suicidal thoughts.

Figure 16: Have you ever attempted suicide?



These figures were somewhat higher than the [national lifetime prevalence](#) of suicidal ideation (around 14%) and suicide attempts (around 5%) in the general US population. This may be accounted for in part by the fact that the sample skews young and female (females are more likely to attempt suicide than males; younger people are more likely to attempt suicide than older people).

4. Conclusion

Survey responses to questions about mental health showed that around half of respondents had visited a therapist and around half had experienced mental illness, a figure roughly comparable with that of the general population. Mood disorders appeared to be considerably more common among the survey respondents than in the general population, affecting around 40% of respondents. About half of respondents reported that their parent or caregiver had experienced mental illness; attitudes towards mental illness in respondents' families of origin tended to ignore it or favor religious and/or supernatural explanations, and respondents obtained very little treatment—even faith-based treatment—for their mental health conditions while being homeschooled. Many respondents felt, however, that their caregivers would be receptive to education about mental health issues. Self-injury was a struggle for more than one quarter of respondents and more than two out of five had struggled with suicidal thoughts. Nearly one in ten had attempted suicide. The rates of mood disorders and suicide attempts may be attributable to the fact that the respondents skewed young and female.

