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Factors influencing the public's choice of eye doctors

Abstract

A questionnaire was developed to sample a general population in order to ascertain the relative importance of factors influencing the choice of an eye doctor. The questionnaire also sampled knowledge and personal preferences with regard to eye doctors. Of the 160 respondents 38.8% have been to an optometrist, 13.1% to an ophthalmologist, 34.4% had been to both. 1.9% were not sure, finally 11.9% had never been to an eye doctor. The strongest drawing factor leading to a choice of an eye doctor was that he stays current in his field. This population also shows a low reliance on the media, including the yellow pages, to make their choice. The majority of the respondents have no preference in terms of the eye doctor's age or gender, and those who solely visit ophthalmologists tend to be more loyal. Finally, basic knowledge of an optometrist includes an underestimation of schooling required, as well as not being sure what vision therapy involves.

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Willard B. Bleything

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PUBLIC'S CHOICE OF EYE DOCTORS

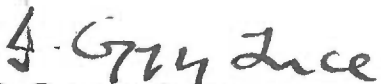
BY


D. Gregory Luce
Diane D. Robbins-Luce

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the
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Adviser:
Willard B. Bleything, M.S., O.D.
Dean of Optometry

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PUBLIC'S CHOICE OF EYE DOCTORS


D. Gregory Luce:


Diane D. Robbins-Luce:


Willard B. Bleything, M.S., O.D.:

BIOGRAPHY

D. Gregory Luce was born in Grass Valley California and spent his school years traveling the globe as a dependent of the U.S. Air Force. Upon graduating high school in Roseville, CA he entered undergraduate studies at California State University, Sacramento. After receiving a Bachelor of Science in Pre Physical Therapy he was accepted to Pacific University College of Optometry in 1986. Upon receiving a Doctor of Optometry degree in May 1990, he plans on entering private practice in the Portland metro area.

Diane D. Robbins-Luce was born in Northridge California and moved to Benicia California (in the west San Francisco Bay area) in 1970. Upon graduating from high school there, she attended California State University at Sacramento. She studied there until 1985 when she received a Bachelor of Arts in Biology. After working as an optometric assistant, she was accepted to Pacific University College of Optometry in 1986. She plans on entering a group private practice in the Portland metro area upon graduation in May 1990.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to first thank Dean Willard Bleything for his wise input throughout the design and interpretation of this thesis. Barbara Frew deserves a special thanks for her guidance in the design of the questionnaire. We would also like to thank Monica Arvizu for assisting in the collection process.

ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was developed to sample a general population in order to ascertain the relative importance of factors influencing the choice of an eye doctor. The questionnaire also sampled knowledge and personal preferences with regard to eye doctors. Of the 160 respondents 38.8% have been to an optometrist , 13.1% to an ophthalmologist , 34.4% had been to both, 1.9% were not sure, finally 11.9% had never been to an eye doctor. The strongest drawing factor leading to a choice of an eye doctor was that he stays current in his field. This population also shows a low reliance on the media, including the yellow pages, to make their choice. The majority of the respondents have no preference in terms of the eye doctor's age or gender, and those who solely visit ophthalmologists tend to be more loyal. Finally, basic knowledge of an optometrist includes an underestimation of schooling required, as well as not being sure what vision therapy involves.

INTRODUCTION

In order to establish and secure a patient base, an eye care practitioner needs to institute a marketing plan to promote his services. Whether the plan is founded simply on enhancement by increased referrals, or based on the print media, there are very few private practitioners who would dispute the need for some type of marketing strategy. The reality is, most private practitioners have little background in marketing, are limited by a tight budget and have the need to know how to spend their money most effectively. Are his current marketing strategies useful, or is too much money being spent in areas of least importance? To be most cost efficient, a plan has to be narrowed to the main drawing factors so a succinct marketing strategy can be developed and instituted. Generally, the goal of this project is to determine what is important to the public as they choose their eye doctor so we may better understand how to promote our practice and profession.

Specifically we wish to determine...

...how many people go to an optometrist, ophthalmologist, or both and how often? Rienecke and Sternberg have shown based upon a Gallup Poll Survey that 52% of adults have an eye exam every two years.¹

...the most important drawing factors and reasons which lead them to choose their eye doctor. According to Nussenblatt, 34% reported recommendation from a friend or relative, 19% referral from a health care professional, 8% location and 5% the yellow pages.²

...if there are differences in doctor loyalty between the three groups of patients. According to the Nussenblatt patients changed doctors for the following reasons; 38% moved, 14% were dissatisfied with the service, 10% cited inconvenient location and 8% were due to high cost.²

...the percentage of patients with eye care insurance. It has been shown that 22% have it versus 78% that do not.¹

...basic public knowledge of optometrists and optometric services. The area of public knowledge concerning ophthalmologists and eye care, needs improvement, as shown by Winograd.³ Of the population surveyed by Bennett, 68% knew that both optometrists and ophthalmologists were graduates of a four year professional degree program.⁴

...which media the respondents use when choosing an eye doctor. Previous work by Todd Kelsh of Pacific University has shown the yellow pages to be the public's favorite choice.⁵

...if patients have a preference of the doctor's age and gender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 160 people, 15 years of age and older, completed a questionnaire comprised of nineteen questions. The format, including the questions asked, is shown in Appendix A.

The survey was completed during one day. The researchers took advantage of a natural mixed population by conducting the survey on a parade route in the downtown Portland Oregon area during the Portland Rose Parade of June 1989. This method was chosen due to the popularity of the event for a large range of socioeconomic levels and its non selective nature of "admission-not-required" to attend. The event also created a less biased selective process due to the casual dress of the spectator population. Multiple surveys attached to clipboards were passed out among the crowd at one time. This method was chosen to expedite the sampling process while supplying subjects with privacy to complete the questions. A random selection of approximately every fifth person was instituted to prevent similar responses of family or group members. A brief introduction of the questionnaire and the instruction set listed on the questionnaire itself (Appendix A) was presented to the subjects. The researchers were in close proximity to answer individual questions. The socioeconomic profile obtained was designed to allow comparisons to the latest available Census Bureau estimates of the regional distribution of the population.⁶

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics of the sample population, including percentages of responses, are listed for all three categories; those who visited the optometrist, ophthalmologist, and both.

Age ranges are as follows (figure 14):

	optometrist	ophthalmologist	both
15-20 years	3.2%	4.8%	3.6%
21-30 years	35.5%	14.3%	12.7%
31-40 years	30.6%	14.3%	27.3%
41-50 years	17.7%	42.9%	30.9%
51-60 years	3.2%	14.3%	12.7%
61-70 years	6.5%	0%	10.9%
>70 years	0%	0%	0%

Most are female; (66.1%) of the optometry population, (66.7%) of the ophthalmology population and (61.8%) of the population that goes to both, versus male (33.9%) of optometry, (33.3%) of ophthalmology and (38.2%) of both. (figure 15)

The numbers living in their household are (figure 17):

	optometrist	ophthalmologist	both
One	9.7%	4.8%	18.2%
Two	53.2%	57.1%	27.3%
Three	16.1%	4.8%	18.2%
Four	16.1%	19.0%	25.5%
Five	3.2%	9.5%	5.5%
> Five	1.6%	0%	1.8%

Occupations are (figure 12):

	optometrist	ophthalmologist	both
Clerical	12.9%	23.8%	9.1%
Farmer	0%	0%	0%
Homemaker	4.8%	9.5%	7.3%
Laborer	3.2%	0%	0%
Management	8.1%	14.3%	14.5%
Professional	27.4%	14.3%	40.0%
Retired	9.7%	9.5%	5.5%
Sales	9.7%	9.5%	3.6%
Service Fields	4.8%	0%	5.5%
Student	9.7%	4.8%	7.3%
Trades & Crafts	8.1%	9.5%	3.6%
Other	1.6%	4.8%	3.6%

The highest attained education level is as follows (figure 13):

	optometrist	ophthalmologist	both
Attended high school	3.2%	4.8%	0%
High school graduate	11.3%	38.1%	10.9%
Attended college	51.6%	4.8%	40.0%
College graduate	29.0%	52.4%	40.0%
Other	4.8%	0%	9.1%

Income level of household is as follows (figure 18):

	optometrist	ophthalmologist	both
\$0 to \$10,000	3.2%	0%	3.6%
\$10,000 to \$20,000	14.5%	0%	9.1%
\$20,000 to \$30,000	25.8%	9.5%	12.7%
\$30,000 to \$40,000	17.7%	9.5%	18.2%
\$40,000 to \$50,000	11.3%	28.6%	12.7%
\$50,000 to \$60,000	8.1%	14.3%	16.4%
> \$60,000	14.5%	23.8%	23.6%

Ethnic background of respondents shows most are whites; (90.3%) of the optometry population, (76.2%) of the ophthalmologist population and (90.1%) of the population who saw both, followed by blacks (4.8%) of optometry, (4.8%) of ophthalmology and (1.8%) of both. See figure 18 for other ethnic backgrounds represented.

Zip codes covered Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties of the state of Oregon, and Clark county of the state of Washington.

RESULTS

1. The distribution of total responses is shown in figure 1 displayed as percentage of subjects who visit an optometrist (38.8%) an ophthalmologist (13.1%) and both (34.4%). The remainder were either not sure who they visit (1.9%) or have not been to either (11.9%).
2. When asked how often they went to an eye doctor, figure 2 shows of those who exclusively visit an optometrist, (30.6%) go every year, (32.2%) every two years, (12.9%) every three years, and (25.8%) greater than every four years. Of those who see ophthalmologists, (19.0%) go every year, (38.0%) every two years, (28.6%) every three years, and (14.3%) greater than four years. Those who visited both go more often, (30.9%) every year, (50.9%) every two years, (9.1%) every three years, and (9.1%) greater than four years.
3. Patient loyalty (returning to the same doctor) is higher for those who visit ophthalmologists (76.2%) and both (76.4%), than those who just visit optometrists (50.0%). (figure 3)
4. When polled if they had some form of vision insurance, more people have coverage than do not. Among optometrist's patients, (58.0%) have coverage versus (41.9%) not covered. Among ophthalmologist's patients, (76.2%) with coverage versus (28.6%) without. Of those who visit both, (67.3%) with coverage versus (32.7%) without. (figure 4)
5. When the subjects were asked how many years of college and professional school an optometrist completes there is a general trend towards answering six years, among all groups. Those who visit optometrists (37.0%), those who visit both (38.2%), and those who visit ophthalmologists (28.6%) believing six years. (figure 5)
6. When asked if they knew what vision therapy was, among those who visit both (41.8%) responded yes, among those who visit an optometrist (22.6%) knew. Of those who only visit ophthalmologists (23.8%) knew. (figure 6)

7. When the subjects were asked to rate how strongly factors listed in question 7 attracted them to a particular office, the trends are as follows:

Of those who only visit optometrists, the trends showing the greatest importance (mean 4.19 s.d. 1.03) are, doctor stays current in his field. This was followed by a wide variety of frames (mean 3.92 s.d. 1.23), referral by health care professional (mean 3.69 s.d. 1.23), ample parking (mean 3.58 s.d.1.39) and referral by a friend or relative (mean 3.44 s.d. 1.14). The areas which rate as least drawing factors are, location in a shopping mall (mean 1.89 s.d.1.06), the doctor sends newsletters (mean 2.13 s.d. 1.11), and an office located near public transportation (mean 2.31 s.d.1.42). (figure 7a)

Of those who solely visit ophthalmologists the areas of importance are very similar, doctor stays current in his field (mean 4.30 s.d.1.00), referral by a friend or relative (mean 3.47 s.d.1.43), and ample parking scoring (mean 3.60 s.d.1.43). Having a wide variety of frames to choose from drops to (mean 3.16 s.d.1.53). Similarities are also present for least drawing factors. The doctor sends newsletters scoring (mean 1.67 s.d..94), location in a shopping mall (mean 1.70 s.d. .90), one hour glasses dropping to a score of (mean 2.21 s.d. 1.28), and available hours also dropping to (mean 2.30 s.d. 1.46). (figure 7b)

Those who visit both felt more strongly that the most important drawing factor is that the doctor stay current in his field (mean 4.36 s.d.1.05), followed by referral from a health care professional (mean 3.94 s.d.1.13), and a large variety of frames scoring (mean 3.67 s.d.1.35). Referral by a friend or relative scores (mean 3.35 s.d.1.34), and ample parking scores (mean 3.36 s.d.1.39). The least drawing factor is again, location in a shopping mall scoring (mean 1.56 s.d. .93), and newsletters being sent to the home (mean 1.91 s.d.1.08). It is interesting to note that this group is unique, showing a score of (mean 1.93 s.d.1.08) for one hour glasses service. (figure 7c)

8. When requested to list the most important reason for their choice of an eye doctor, the subjects list many reasons, some of which are included in the previous drawing scale question. General categories were created for the responses. (figure 8)

Among those who visit an optometrist, no answer is the most prevalent (22.58%), followed by recommendations (17.74%), personality of doctor (14.52%), quality of care (12.90%), insurance carrier (11.29%), price of services (8.06%), reputation of doctor (4.84%), and location (3.23%). Also listed are, emergency, parking facilities, contact lens prescription given to patient, and good follow-up care(1.6%).

The most prevalent answer among those who solely visit an ophthalmologist is recommendation (38.10%), followed by quality of care (19.05%), personality of doctor (14.29%), insurance carrier (9.52%), no answer (9.52%), location and reputation both (4.76%) response. No other reasons are listed for this group.

Recommendations also received the highest percentage of responses among those who visit both eye care professionals (40.00%), followed by quality of care (18.18%), no answer (14.55%), insurance coverage (12.73%), and personality of doctor (10.91%). A response of (5.45%) for both reputation of doctor and location of facilities. A response of (1.82%) for price and convenience as seen before in the optometry grouping. As well as a (1.82%) response for the doctor's age, gender and high tech. equipment used.

9. Concerning which media was used when choosing an eye doctor a strong trend towards the "none" category is evident, (67.7%) for optometrists, (90.5%) for ophthalmologists, and (83.6%) of those who visit both. (figure 9)

10. For eye doctor preference, male versus female, all groups express that it generally does not matter, (83.8%) of those who visit optometrists, (95.2%) of those who visit ophthalmologists, and (85.5%) of those who visit both. (figure 10)

11. For eye doctor preference, younger versus older, a similar trend as above concentrating in the does not matter category, (83.8%) of those who visit optometrists, (80.9%) of those who visit ophthalmologists, and (90.9%) of those who visit both. (figure 11)

SUMMARY

The survey was conducted by three optometry students polling 160 people 15 years of age and older. The sampling procedure was designed to approximate an adult population of a major metropolitan area. Comparison with statistical abstracts from the U.S. Bureau of Census revealed that our population sample had a higher percentage of females than the normal population. The education level obtained by the subjects was also higher than the normal population, possibly due to the nature of the task required to complete the questionnaire.⁶ Also present is a bias towards a skewed population of professionals, which does not match education and income levels in the normal population mix. The respondents income levels are higher for those who visit ophthalmologists and both professionals, whereas levels of income for those who see optometrists exclusively are within the range of the Census tabulations.⁶

The major elements garnered from this study are:

1. The most important factor that draws a person to choose an eye doctor is that the doctor stay current in his field. Other important factors include referral from other health care providers, and a friend or relative. Also, adequate parking and a wide variety of frame selection showed more importance.
2. The least important factors that draw a person to choose an eye doctor are that the office is located in a shopping mall/store front location and that newsletters are sent to the home.
3. When requested to give the most important reason they chose their eye doctor over another eye doctor, the most popular response is recommendation, followed by quality of care, then personality of the eye care professional.
4. A majority of respondents do not use the media to choose an eye doctor.
5. Patient loyalty is higher for those who visit ophthalmologists (76.2%) and both (76.4%) than those who visit optometrists (50%).
6. When the subjects were asked how many years of college and professional school an optometrist completes there is a general trend toward a response of six years for all groups, however, there are as many responses of four years as eight years.

7. In general, most subjects do not know what vision therapy is, and those who think they do tend to visit both professionals.

8. Of the subjects polled, it generally does not make a difference if the eye doctor is male, female, older or younger.

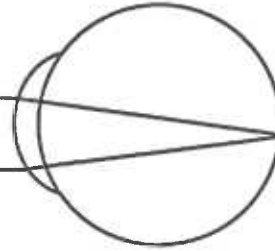
The results of this project both support and differ from prior works. The main point gleaned from the study, that the doctor stay current in the field has not been previously reported. It is important to note that recommendation from a friend or relative still leads as the actual mode patients use. Our results support a low use of the yellow pages for choosing as shown by Nussenblatt²; however, they are still used for location determination as shown by Kelsh⁵. More people have vision coverage than previously mentioned, possibly due to the recent trend of employers offering more comprehensive insurance packages. Patient knowledge of optometry is unfortunately low. This is also true for ophthalmology as Winograd³ and Bennett⁴ have shown. Finally, this research did not establish why patients who visit ophthalmologists are more loyal than those who visit optometrists. It would be worthwhile to discover how they cross compare.

Concluding Statement: By knowing what the factors are that lead the public to choose a particular eye doctor, the task of marketing becomes more efficient. After the target market has been identified and a practitioner has ascertained what the market area perceived needs are, the plan becomes more feasible and focused. In addition, by defining these factors, the presence of voids in service become apparent. Before this project was completed no one had determined that the most important drawing factor was that the doctor stay current in the field. Knowing this can be useful for promotion purposes, by announcing to established patients and the community how the doctor has attended continuing education and has procured the latest instrumentation in the field. It is imperative to emphasize that the least important drawing factors, such as location in a shopping mall, are just that. They may or may not act as deterrents, and as such should not be ignored in a marketing scheme.

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PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
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This research is being conducted by optometry students under the supervision of a member of the faculty. It is designed to gather information that will help eye doctors better serve the public's needs. Your opinions and views are important to us.

Thank you for your participation.

1. Have you ever been to any of the following? (please check all that apply)
 - optometrist
 - ophthalmologist
 - not sure which
 - none (please skip to question number 12)

2. How often do you go to an eye doctor?
 - every year
 - every 2 years
 - every 3-4 years
 - over 4 years

3. Do you generally go to the same eye doctor every time?
 - yes
 - no (please explain why not)_____

4. Do you have some kind of insurance coverage for your vision care?
 - yes
 - no
 - not sure

5. How many years of college and professional school do you think an optometrist completes?
 - 2
 - 4
 - 6
 - 8
 - not sure

6. Do you know what vision therapy is?
 - yes
 - no
 - not sure

(next page)

7. In your choice of an eye doctor, please rate the following factors in terms of how strongly each draws / attracts you to that office.

1 = not strong to 5 = very strong

Circle the appropriate number rating after each factor

	not strong			very strong	
	1	2	3	4	5
Eye doctor attended a well known college	1	2	3	4	5
Eye doctor stays current in the field	1	2	3	4	5
Eye doctor sends newsletters to your home	1	2	3	4	5
Office is in a shopping mall / store front location	1	2	3	4	5
Office is in a medical / clinic / office building	1	2	3	4	5
Office is located near your work	1	2	3	4	5
Office is located near your home	1	2	3	4	5
Office has weekend hours	1	2	3	4	5
Office has evening hours	1	2	3	4	5
Office has early morning hours	1	2	3	4	5
Office accepts major credit cards	1	2	3	4	5
Office has good parking	1	2	3	4	5
Office is located near public transportation	1	2	3	4	5
Office has wide variety of frames to choose from	1	2	3	4	5
Office makes your glasses in about an hour	1	2	3	4	5
Office recommended by a friend or relative	1	2	3	4	5
Office recommended by another health care professional	1	2	3	4	5

8. What is the most important reason you chose your eye doctor over another eye doctor?

9. Which of the following media did you use when choosing your eye doctor?

(please check all that apply)

- Yellow Pages
- T.V.
- Radio

- Mail
- Newspaper
- None

(next page)

10. Do you prefer your eye doctor to be:

- female
- male
- does not matter

11. Do you prefer your eye doctor to be:

- younger
- older
- does not matter

12. What is your occupation?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmer | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Fields |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laborer | <input type="checkbox"/> Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Trades and Crafts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

13. What is your education level? (please mark the highest attained)

- Junior High Graduate
- Attended High School
- High School Graduate
- Attended College
- College Graduate
- Other _____

14. What is your zip code? _____

15. What is your age?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15 - 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 51 - 60 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21 - 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 61 - 70 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 31 - 40 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70 and over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 41 - 50 | |

16. What is your sex?

- female
- male

17. What is your ethnic background?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alaskan Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-Non Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White-Non Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign National |

(next page)

18. What is the number living in your household?

- 1
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5
- More than 5

19. What is your household income?

- \$0-9,999
- \$10,000-19,999
- \$20,000-29,999
- \$30,000-39,999

- \$40,000-49,999
- \$50,000-59,999
- \$60,000 and over

Thank you for your time.

Your responses will enable us to better inform eye doctors of your vision care needs.

Pacific University College of Optometry

Figure 1, Total responses: Ever been to

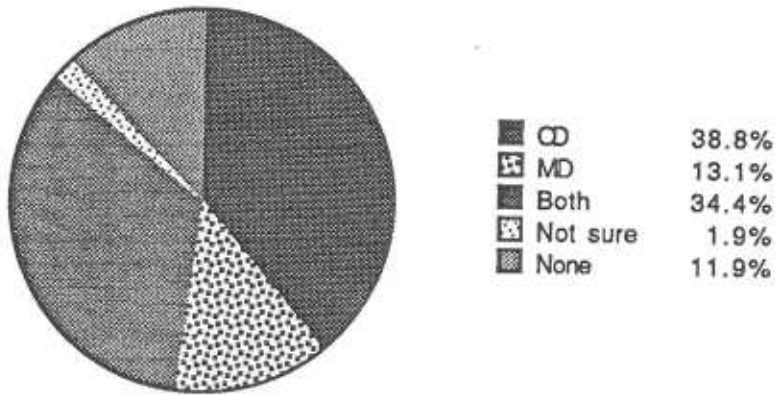


Figure 1: Percentage of population that have been to an optometrist, ophthalmologist, both, were not sure and neither.

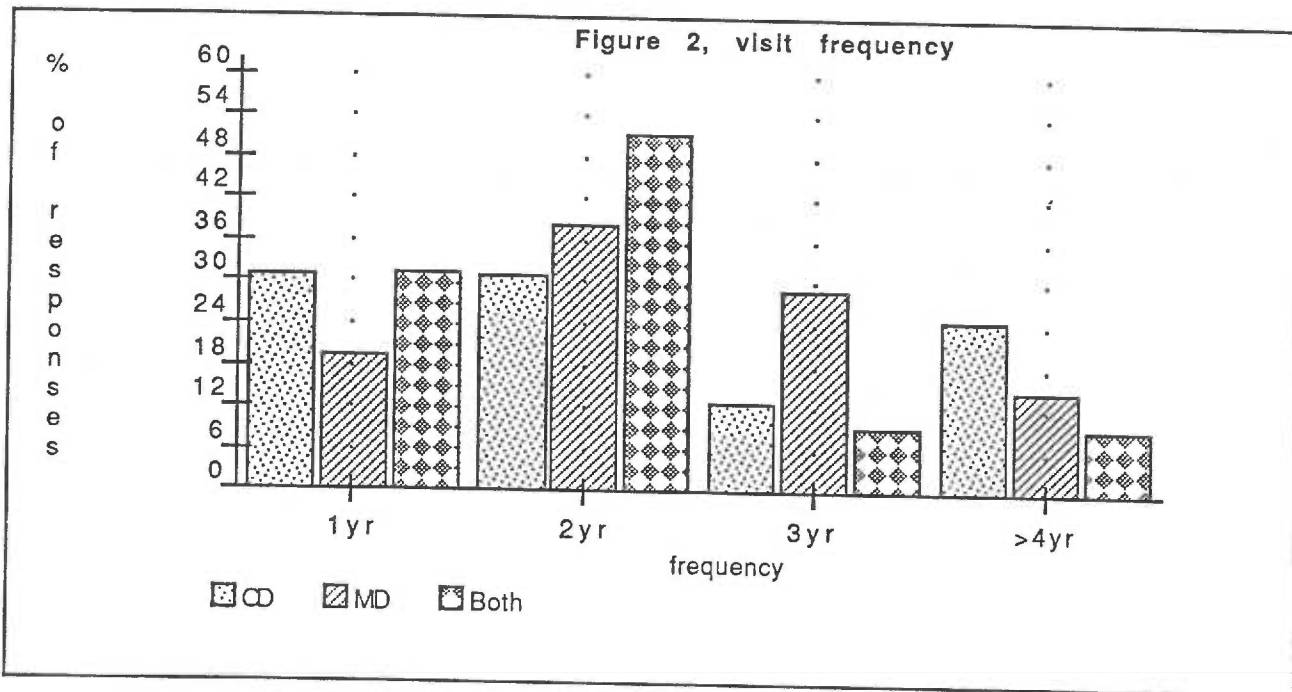


Figure 2: Percentage of population that go to their respective eye doctor every year, every two years, every three years and greater than every four years.

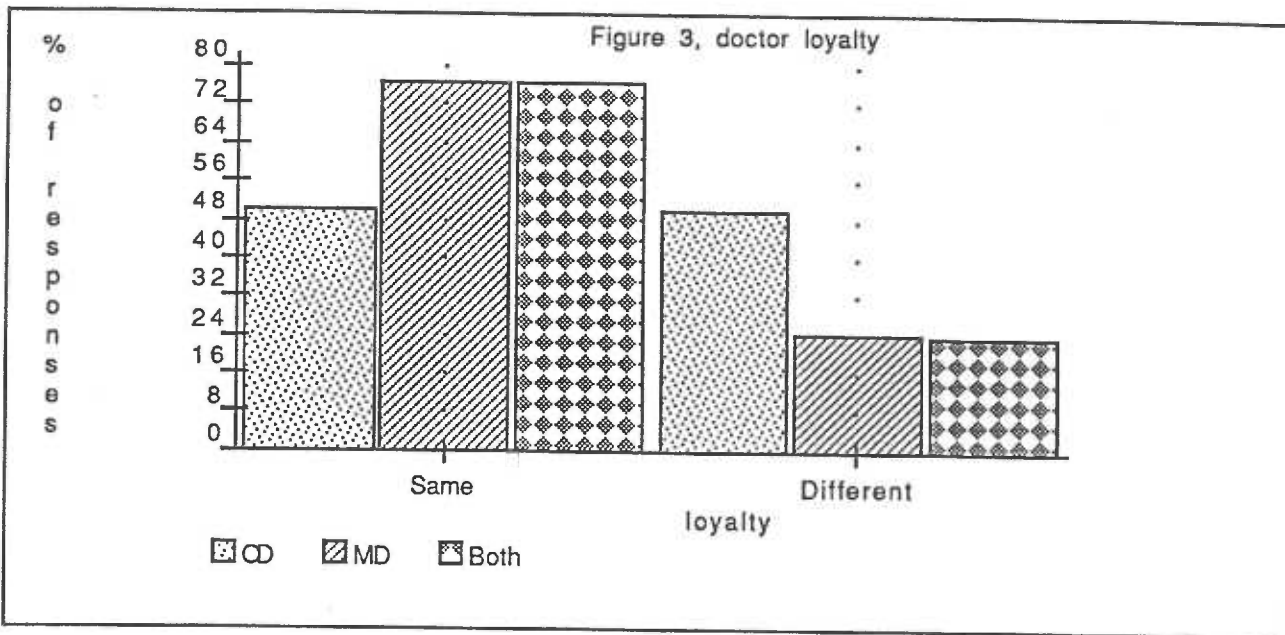


Figure 3: Percentage of population that visit the same or go to different eye doctors.

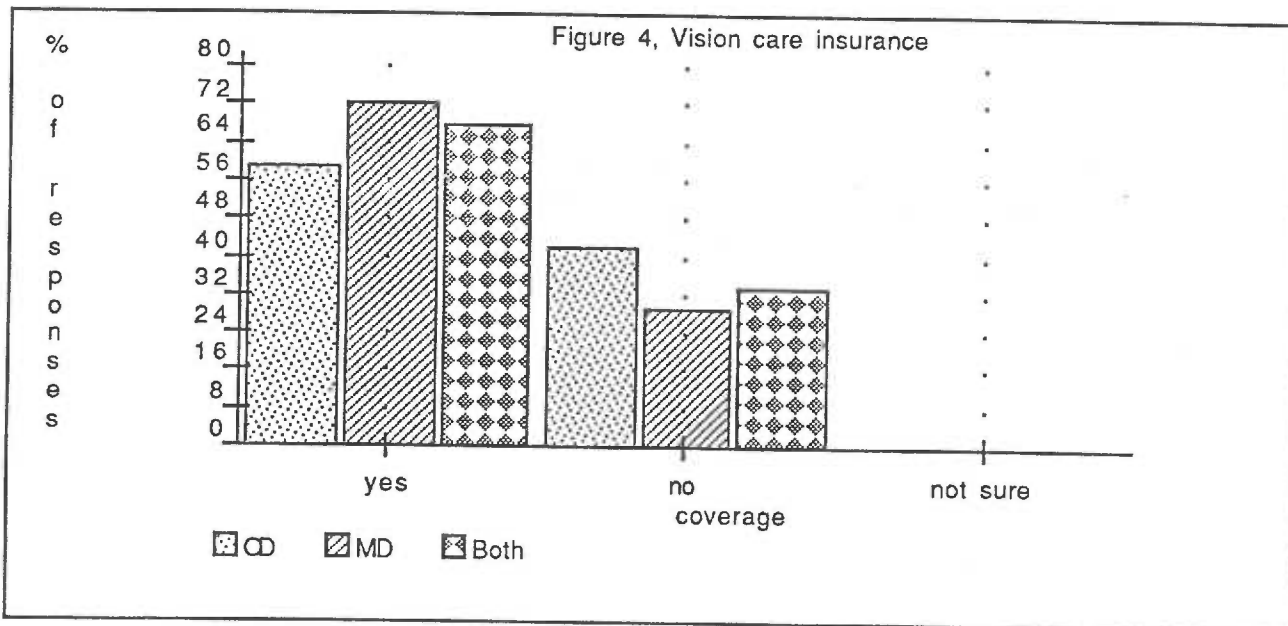


Figure 4: Percentage of population that have vision care insurance.

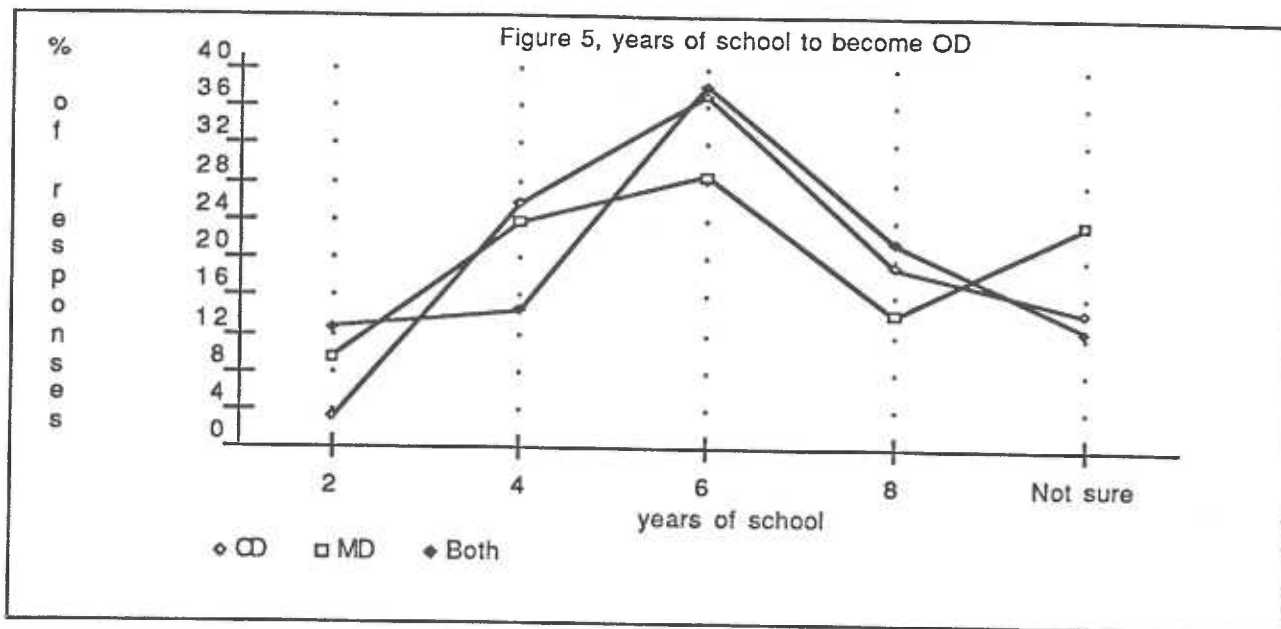


Figure 5: Percentage of population that think it takes 2 through 8 years of college to become an optometrist.

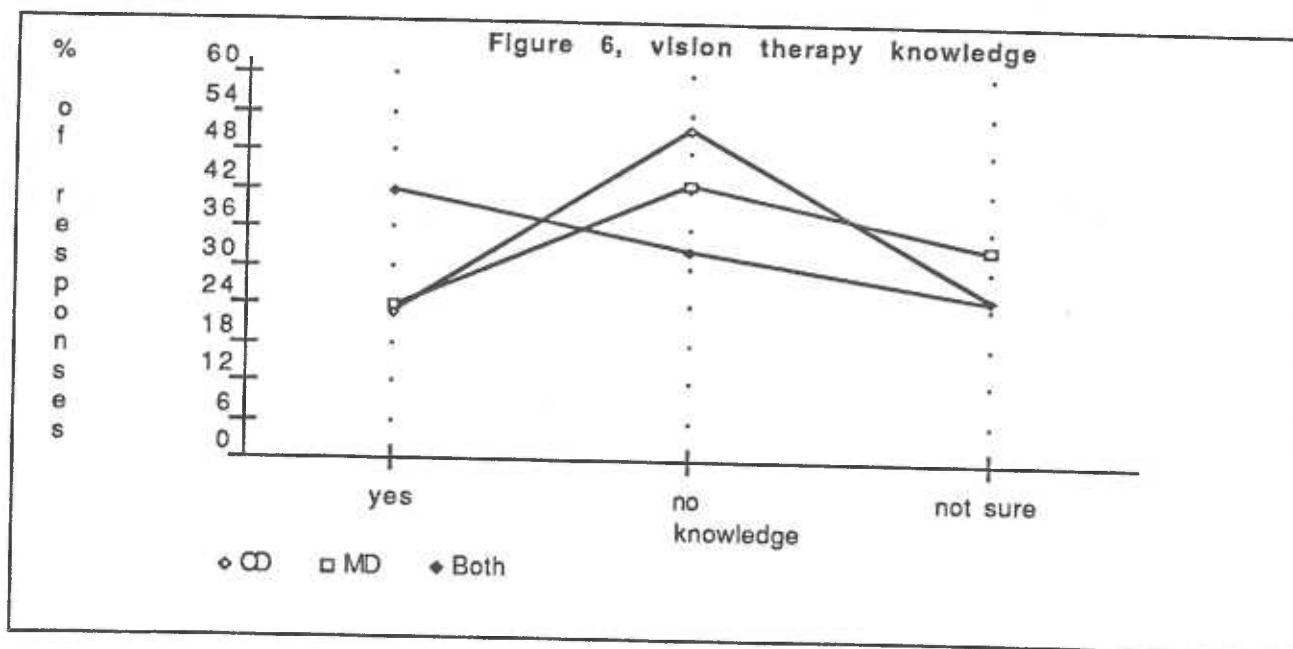


Figure 6: Percentage of population that know what vision therapy is.

Figure 7a, Factors of optometry

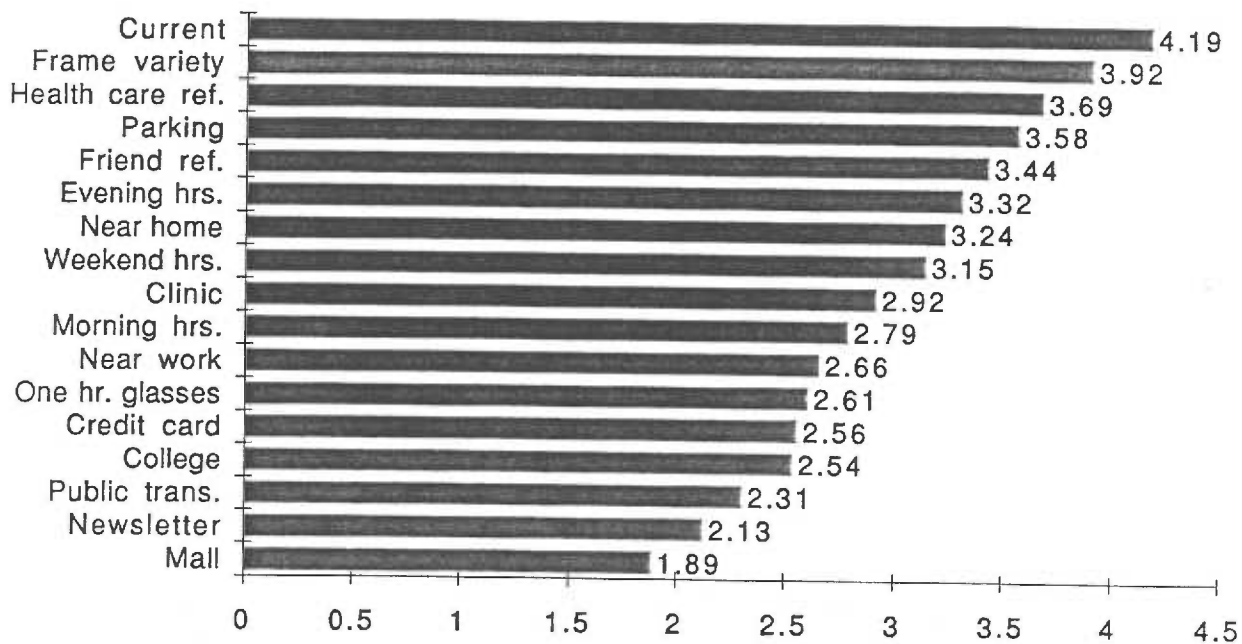


Figure 7a: Factors that influence the public to choose an eye doctor, rated from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) for the population that visit optometrists.

Figure 7b, Factors of ophth.

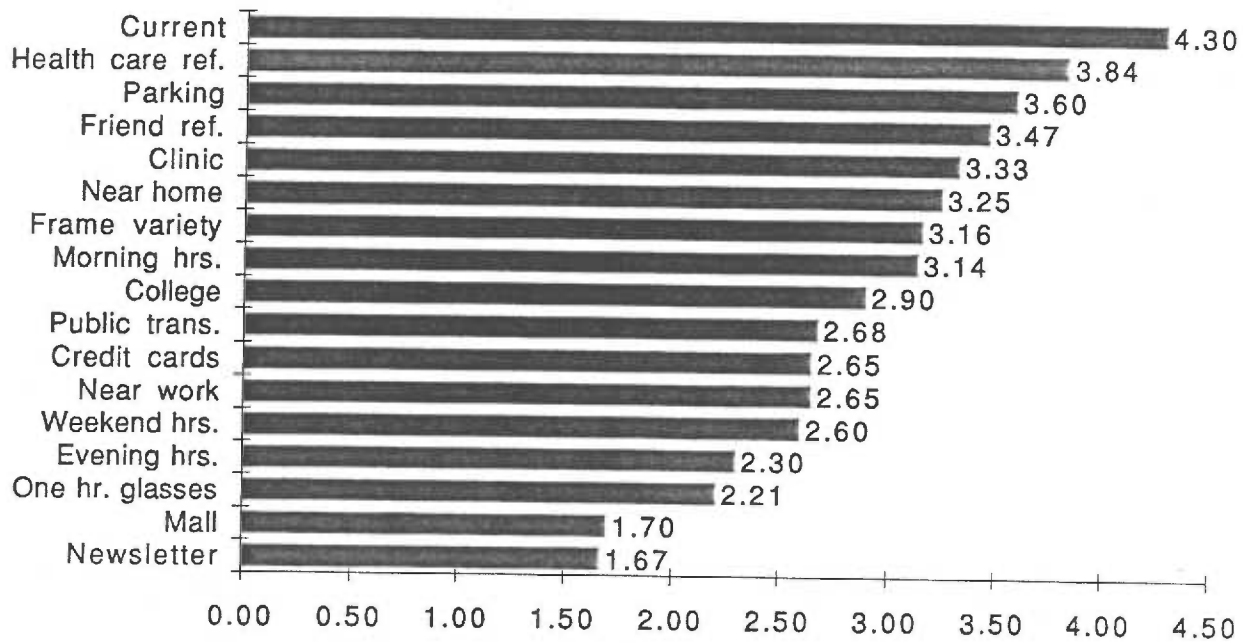


Figure 7b: Factors that influence the public to choose an eye doctor, rated from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) for the population that visit ophthalmologists.

Figure 7c, Factors of Both

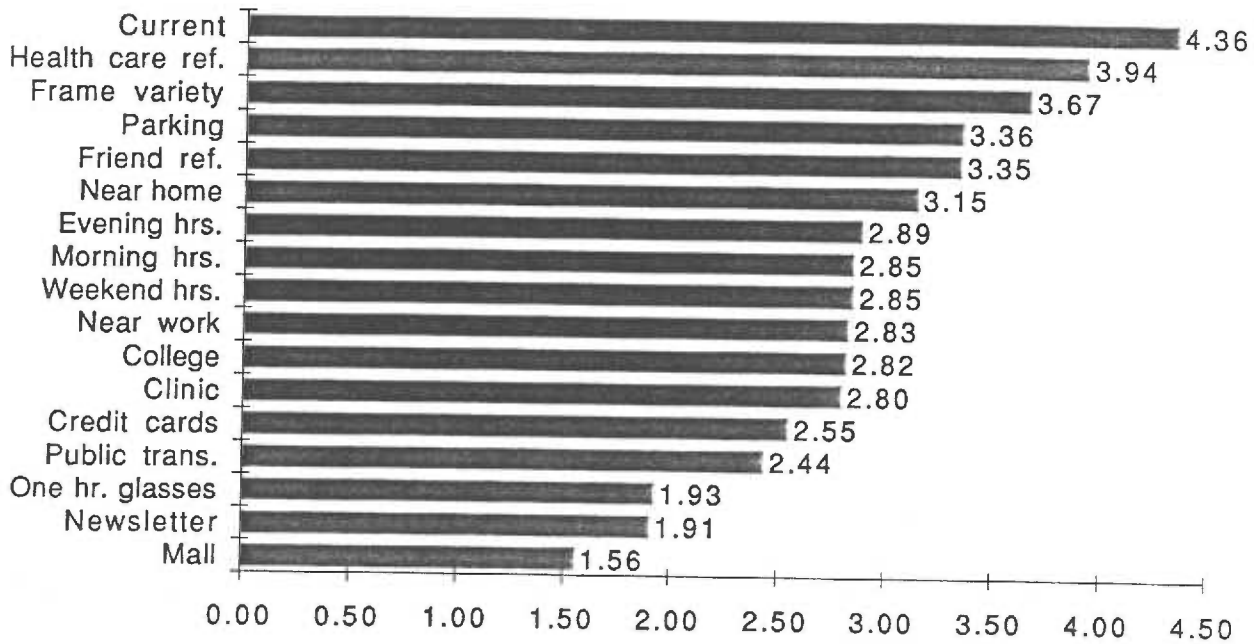


Figure 7c: Factors that influence the public to choose an eye doctor, rated from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) for the population that visits both practitioners.

Figure 8, Reasons for choice

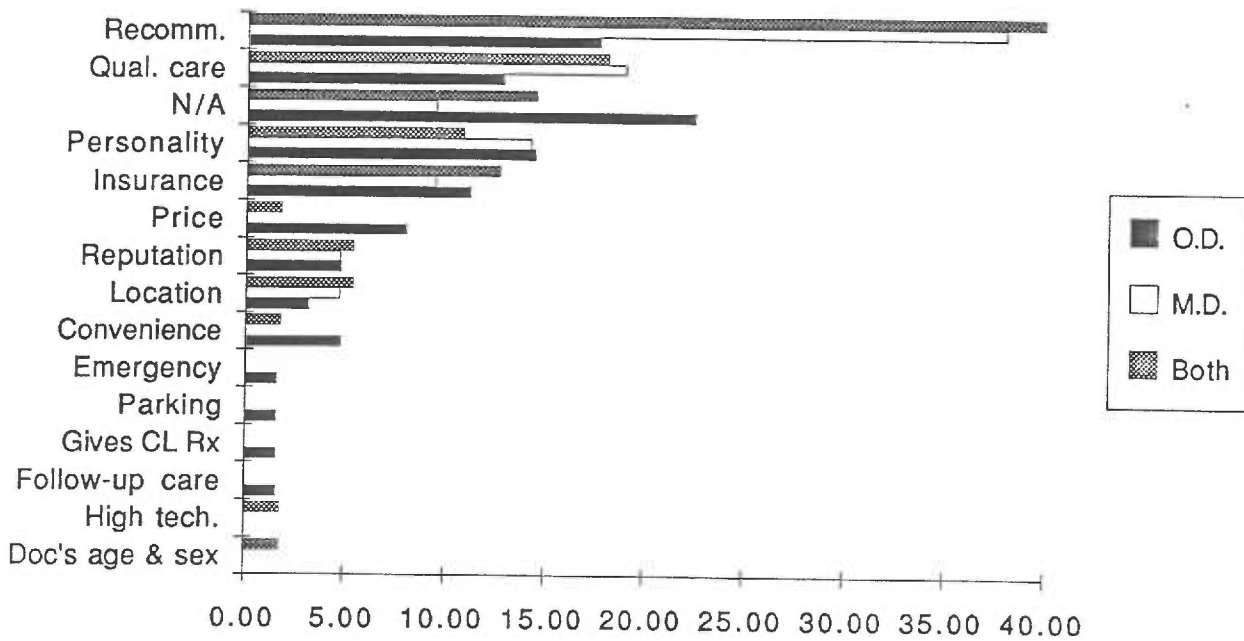


Figure 8: Percentage of responses for the actual method used to chose an doctor.

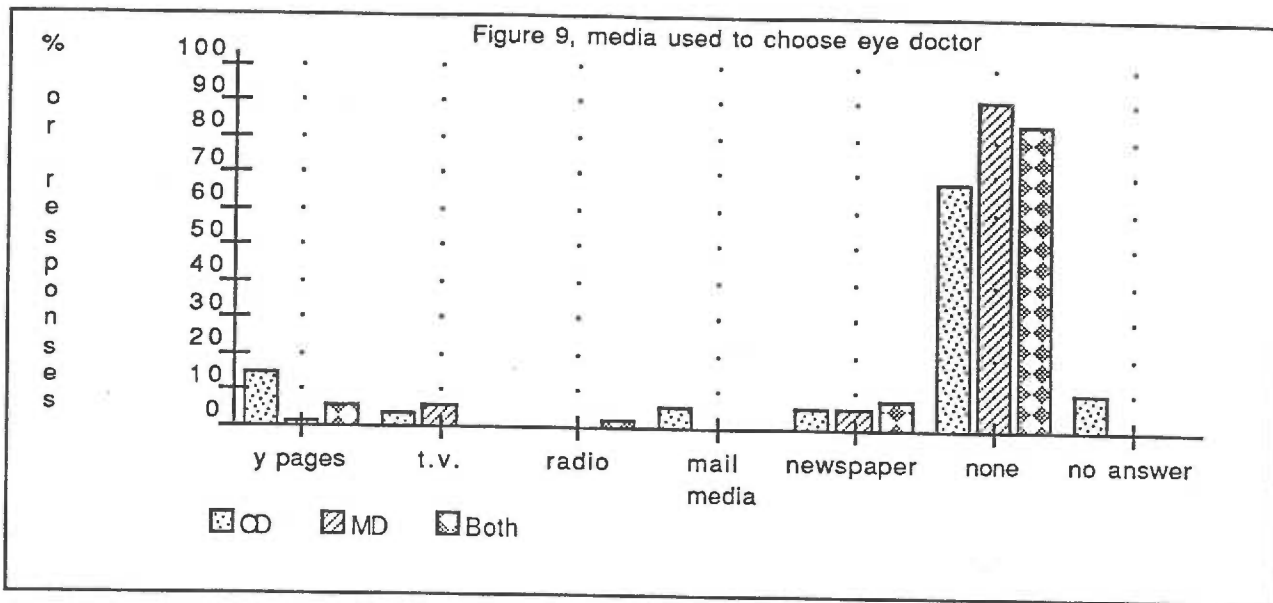


Figure 9: Percentage of population that use various media to choose an eye doctor.

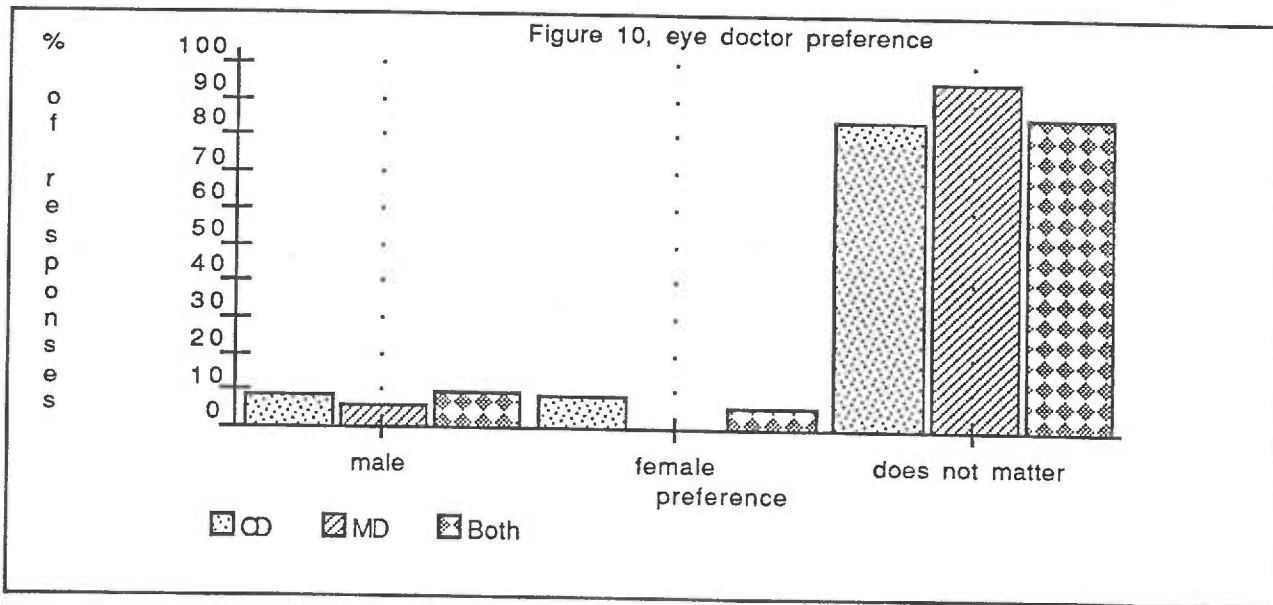


Figure 10: Percentage of population that prefer a male versus a female eye doctor.

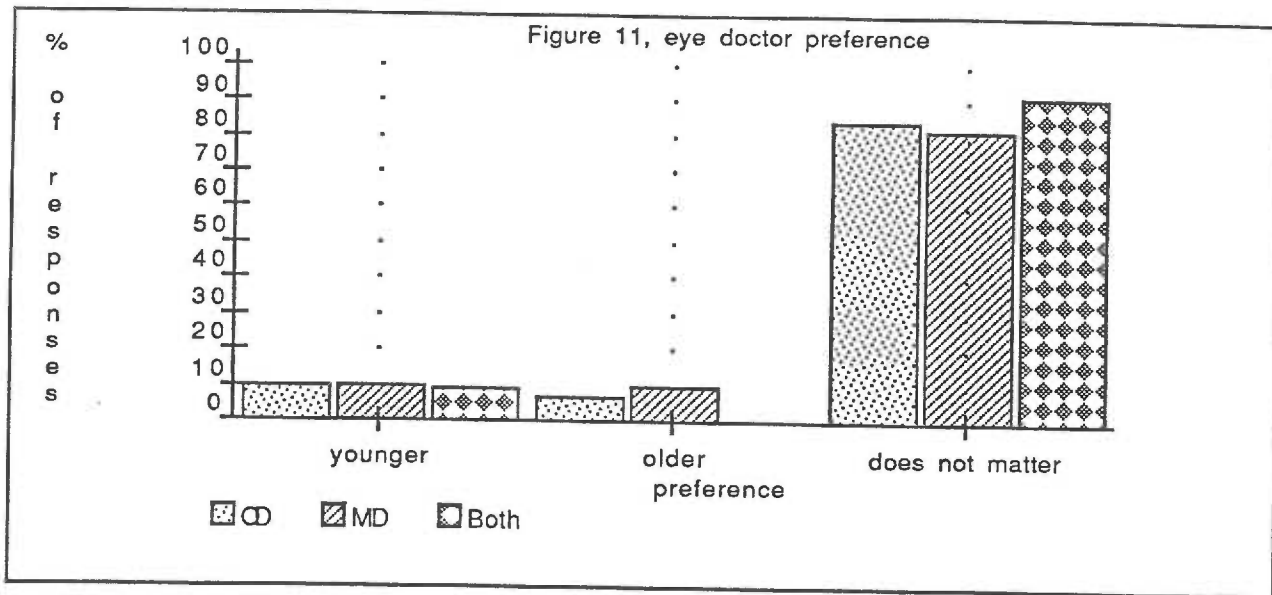


Figure 11: Percentage of population that prefer a younger versus an older eye doctor.

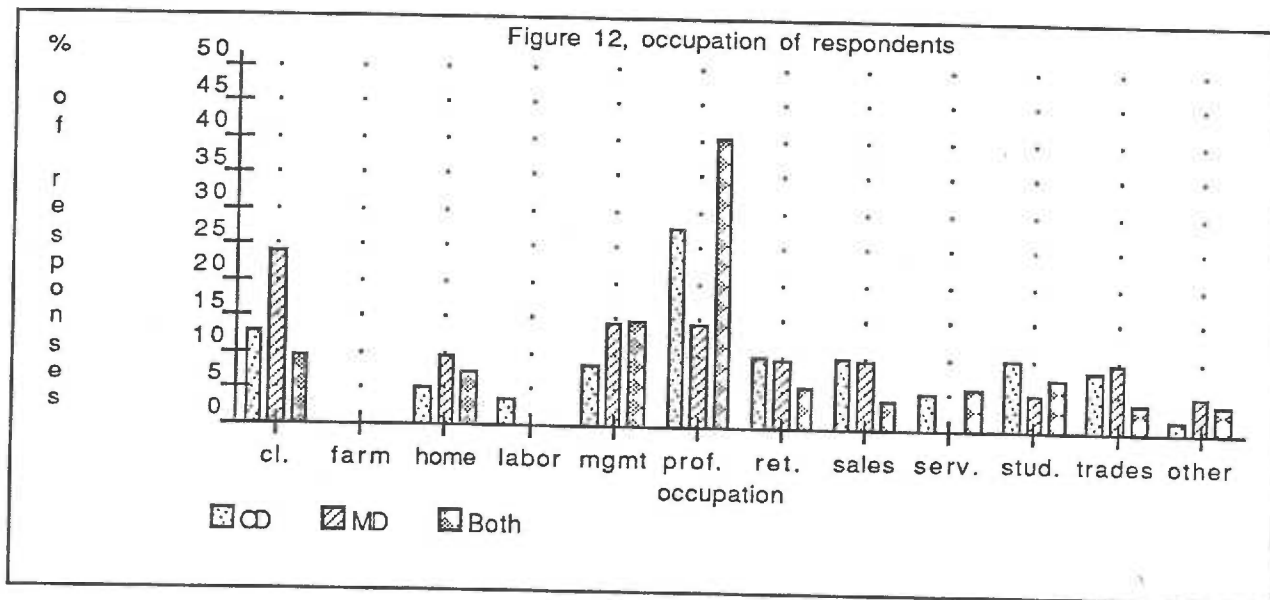


Figure 12: Percentage of the population's occupations; cl. (clerical), farm (farmer), home (homemaker), labor (laborer), mgmt (management), prof. (professional), ret. (retired), serv. (service), stud. (student).

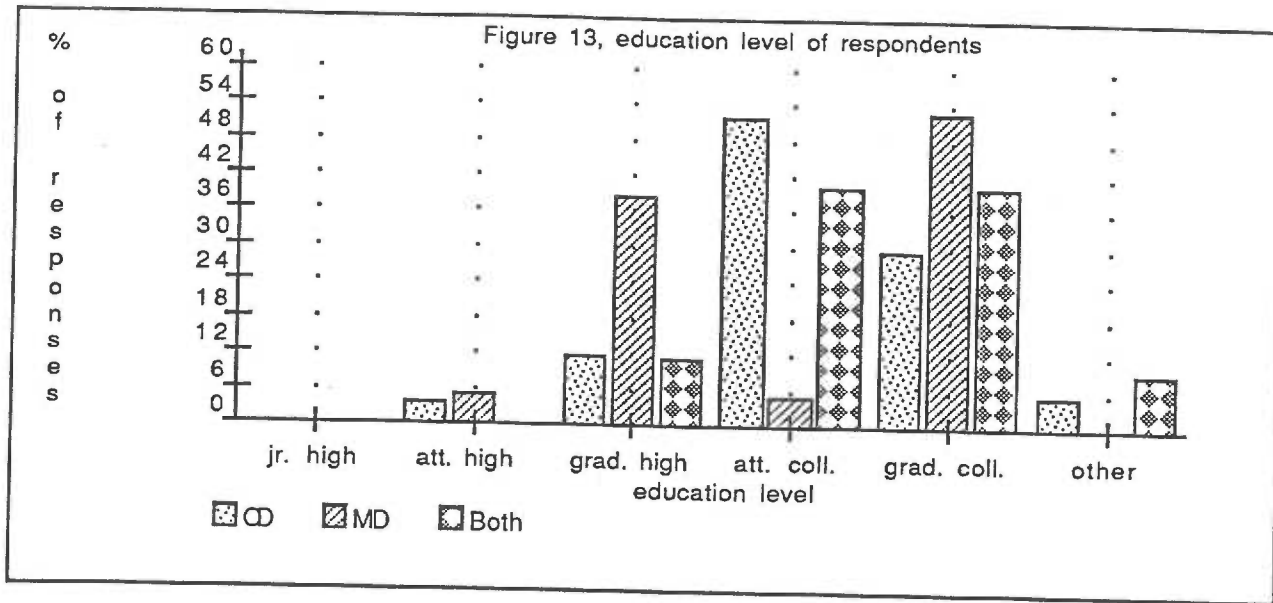


Figure 13: Education level attained by the populations.

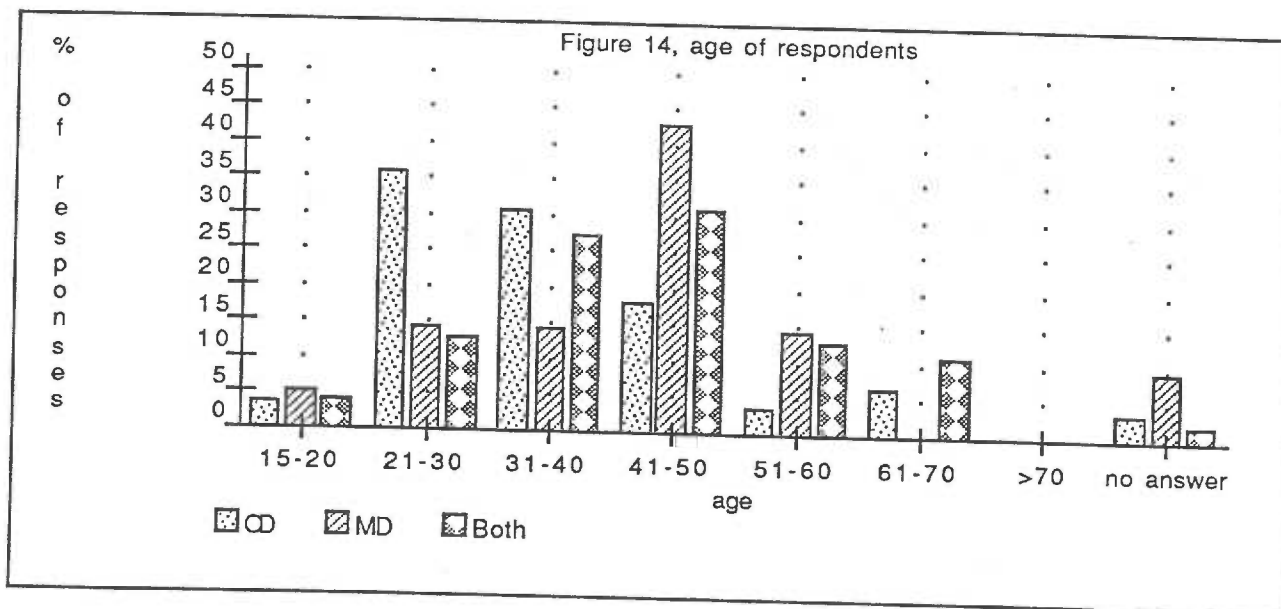


Figure 14: Percentage of population's age.

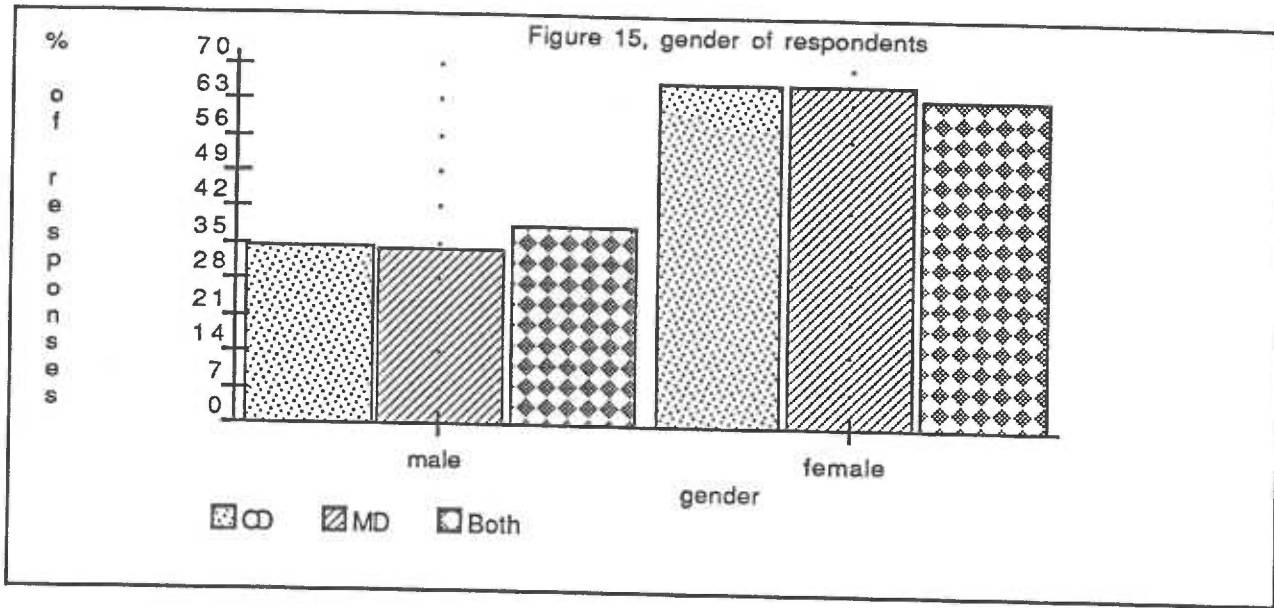


Figure 15: Percentage of population's gender.

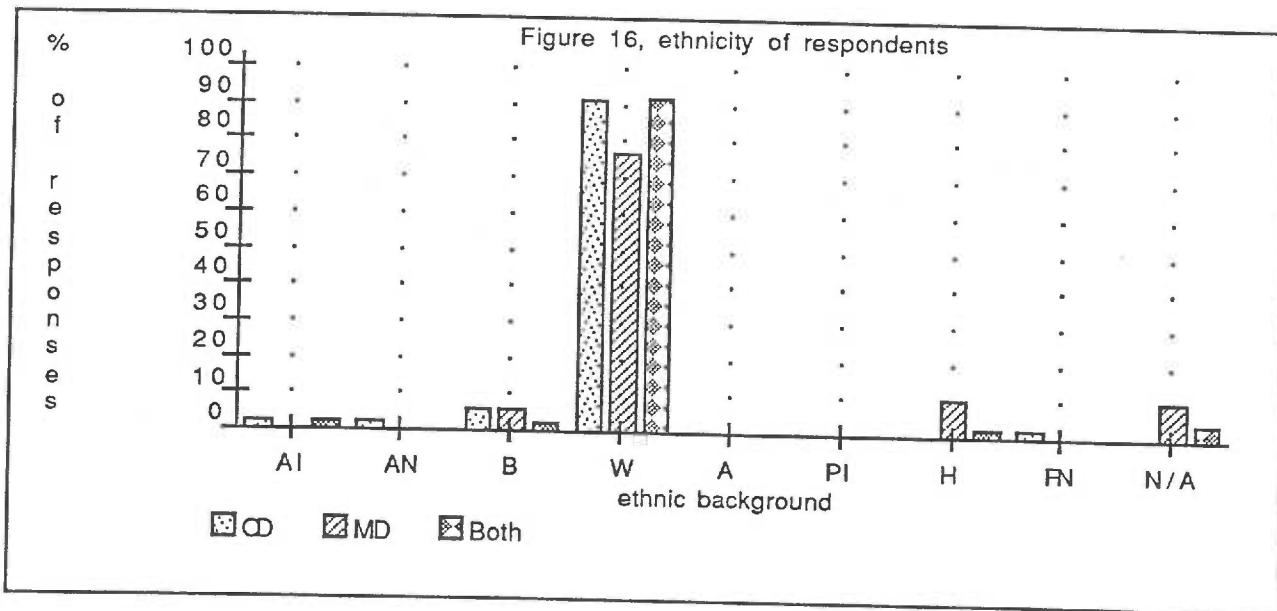


Figure 16: Percentage of population's ethnic background; AI (American Indian), AN (Alaskan Native), B (Black), W (White), A (Asian), PI (Pacific Islander), H (Hispanic), FN (Foreign National).

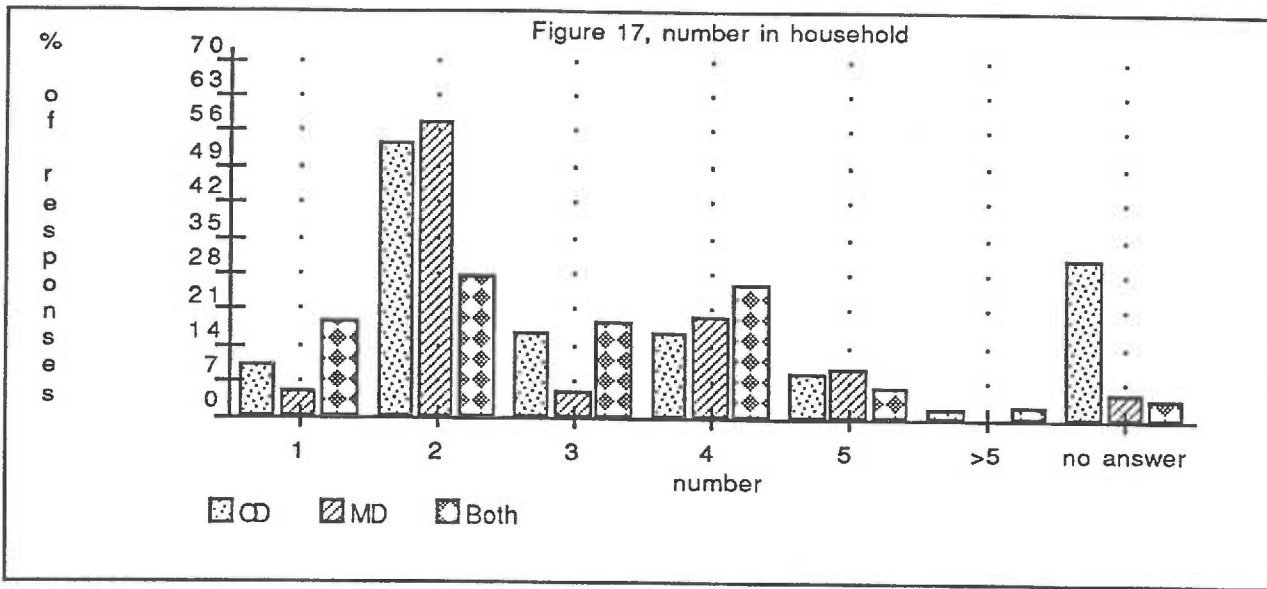


Figure 17: Percentage of population's household number.

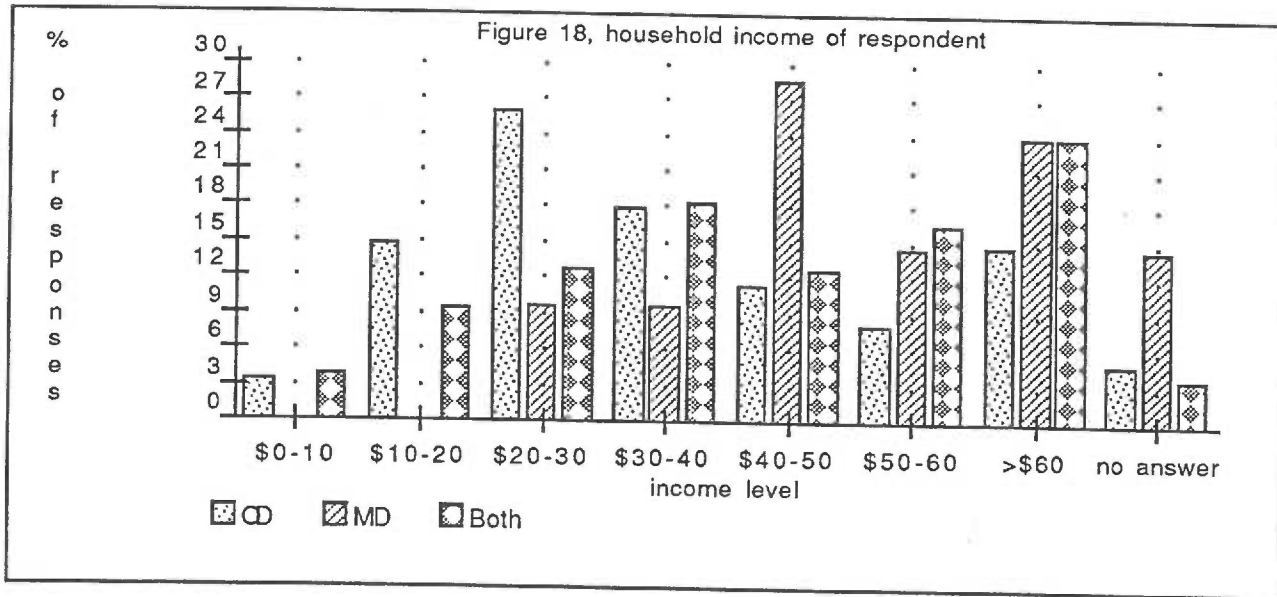


Figure 18: Percentage of population's household income.