

Discrepancies between health professionals' understanding and the evidence for sugars-related nutrition issues in Canada

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Introduction

- Media articles often focus on added sugars consumption as being responsible for rising obesity rates, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. US consumption statistics are often quoted to represent Canadian sugars intake.
- However, findings from systematic reviews and meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that sugars are no more likely to contribute to weight gain than other energy sources when compared on an isocaloric basis^{1,2}.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) guideline on sugars intake recommends limiting “free sugars” to less than 10% energy based on evidence related to dental caries, not obesity or other chronic diseases³.
- Consumption of total added sugars in Canada is estimated to be approximately 11% of energy intake and modestly declining as a percentage of total calories⁴.

Purpose

Health professionals are relied upon to communicate accurate sugar-related scientific information to the general public and to the media. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess health professionals' perceptions regarding Canadian added sugars consumption in relation to obesity, as well as their understanding of the scientific basis of the WHO sugars guideline.

Methods

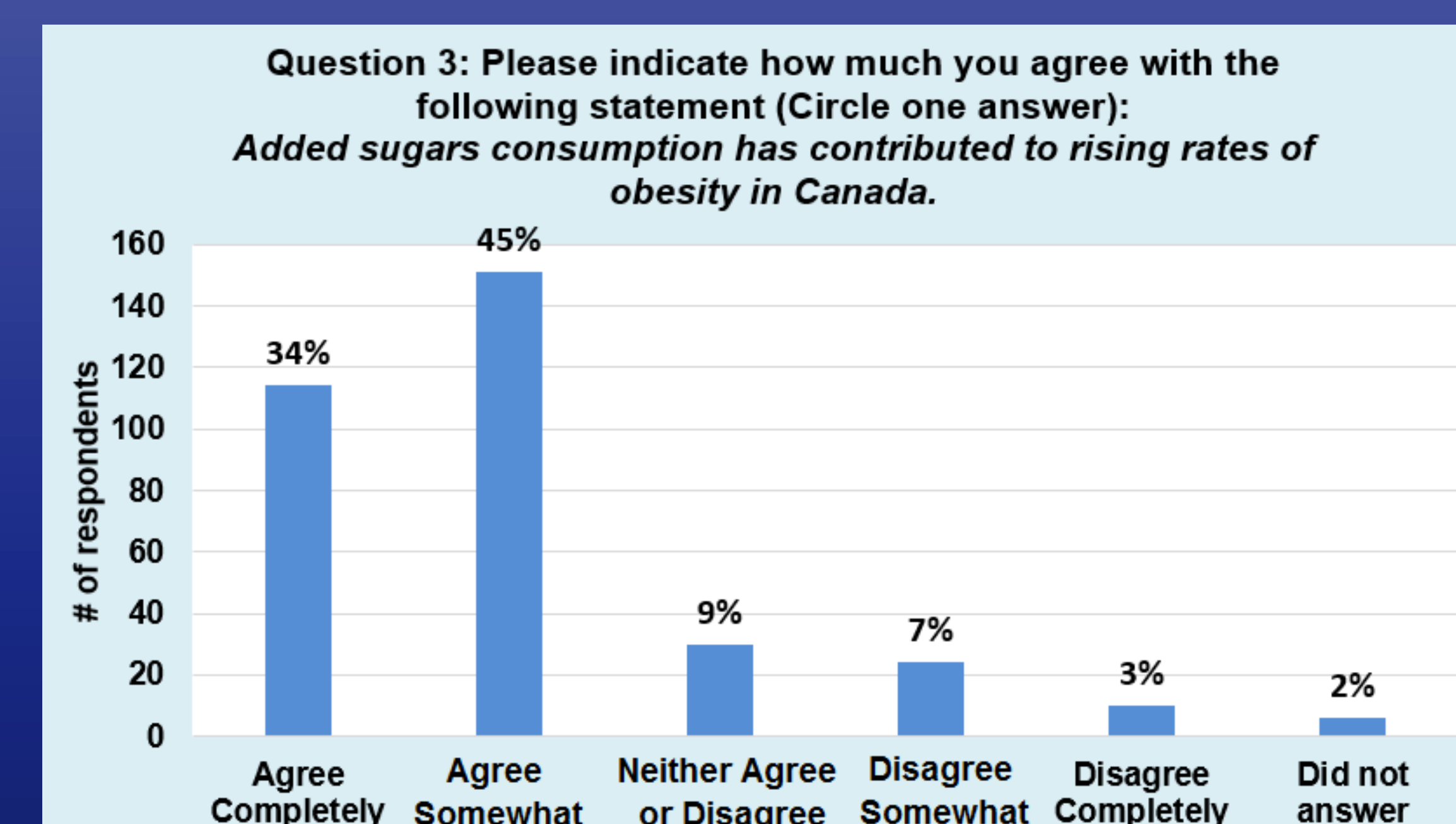
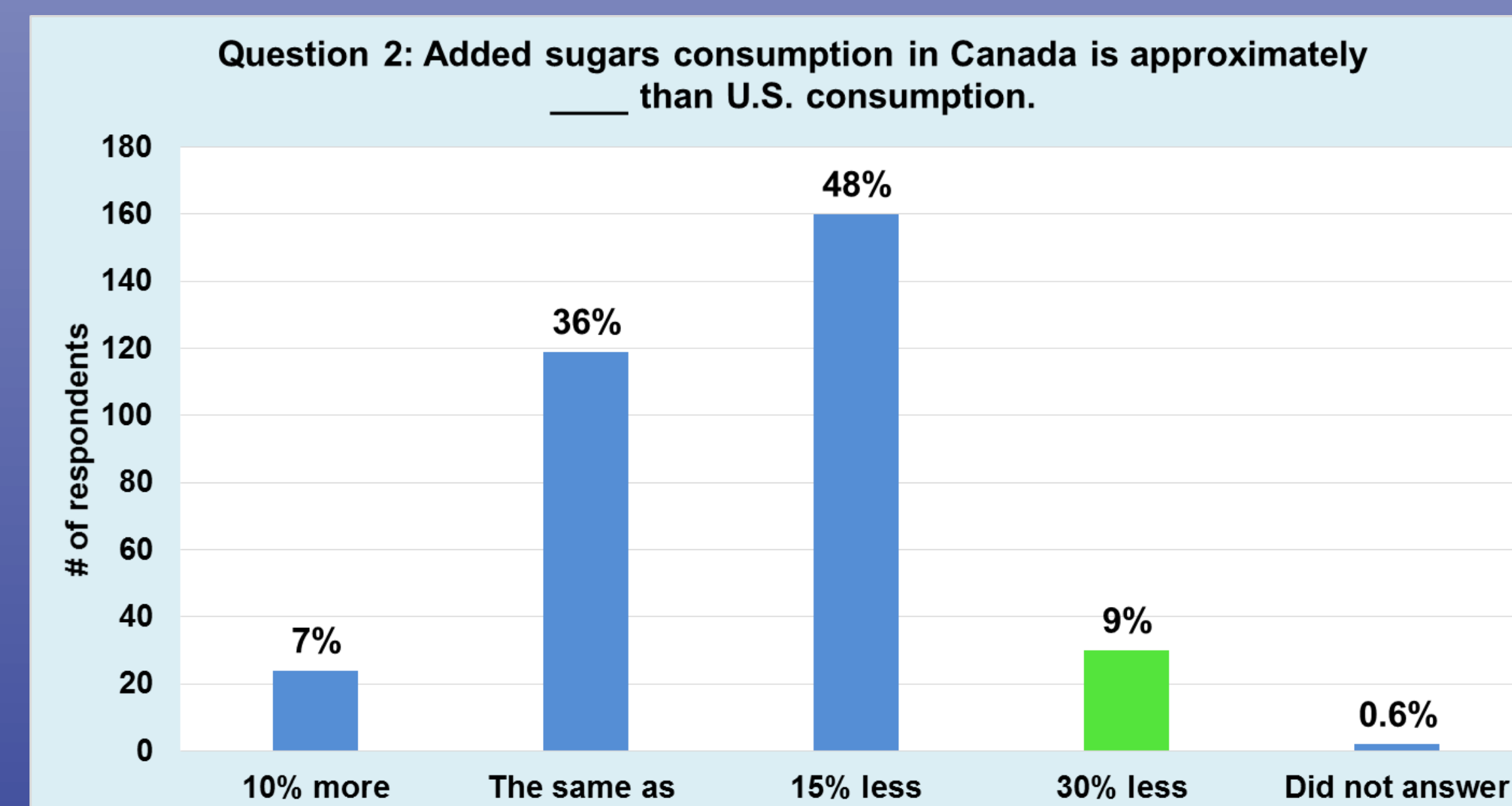
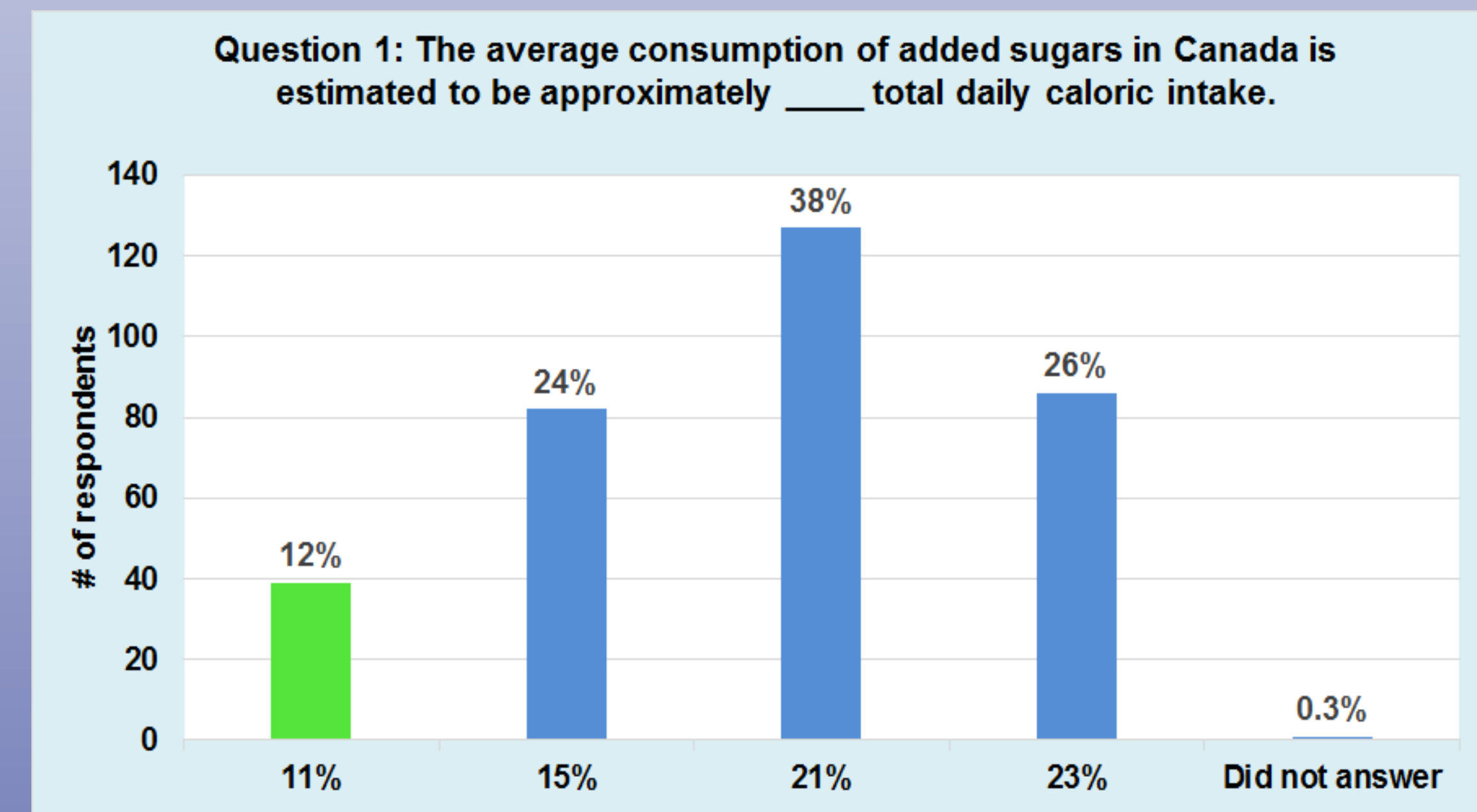
- A total of 355 health professionals, primarily dietitians, voluntarily completed questionnaires at two national conferences in 2014.
- Questionnaires were composed of five questions on topics pertaining to sugars consumption in Canada, sugars in relation to obesity, the WHO sugars guideline and the types of sugars naturally occurring in fruits and vegetables.

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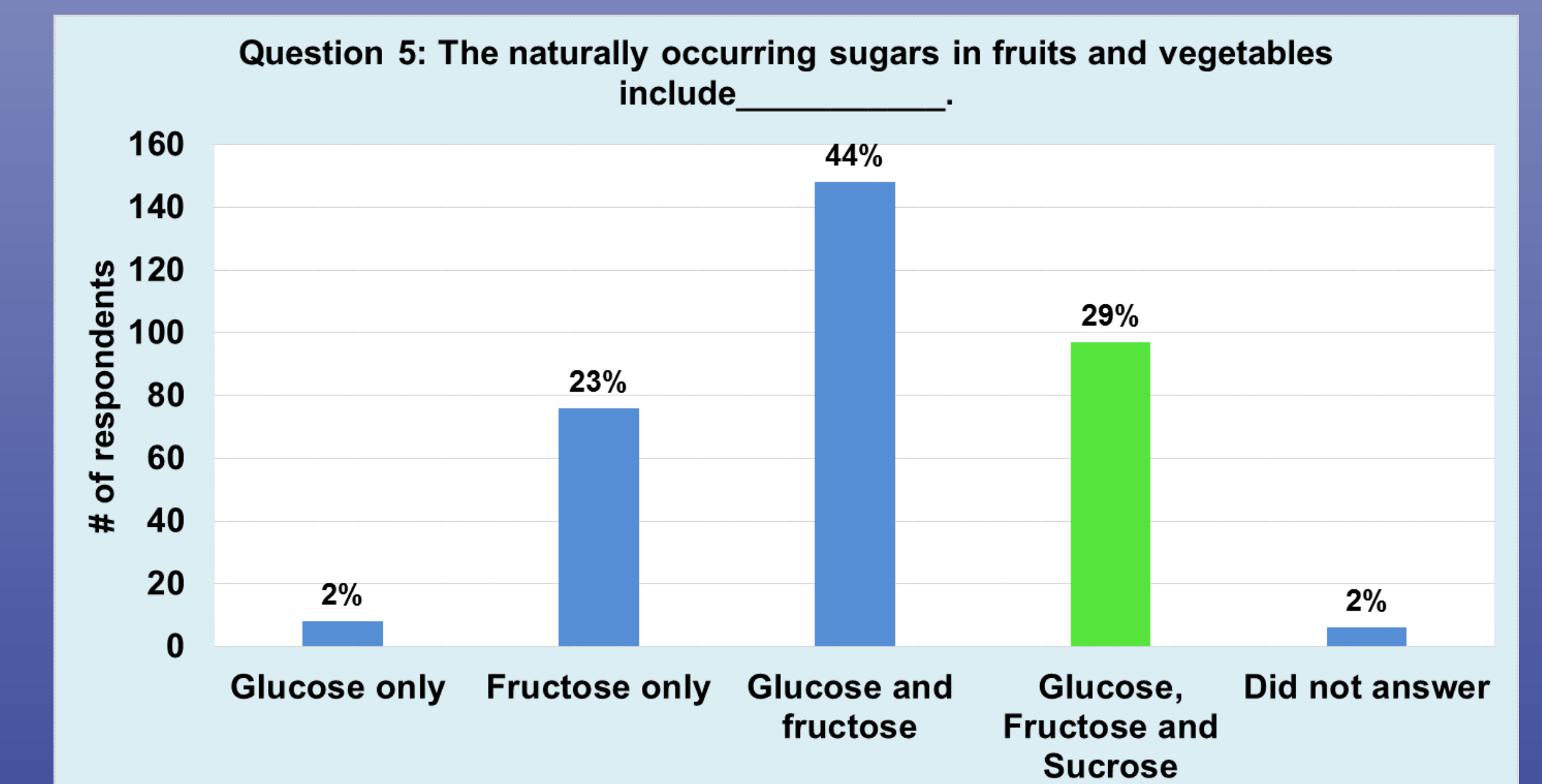
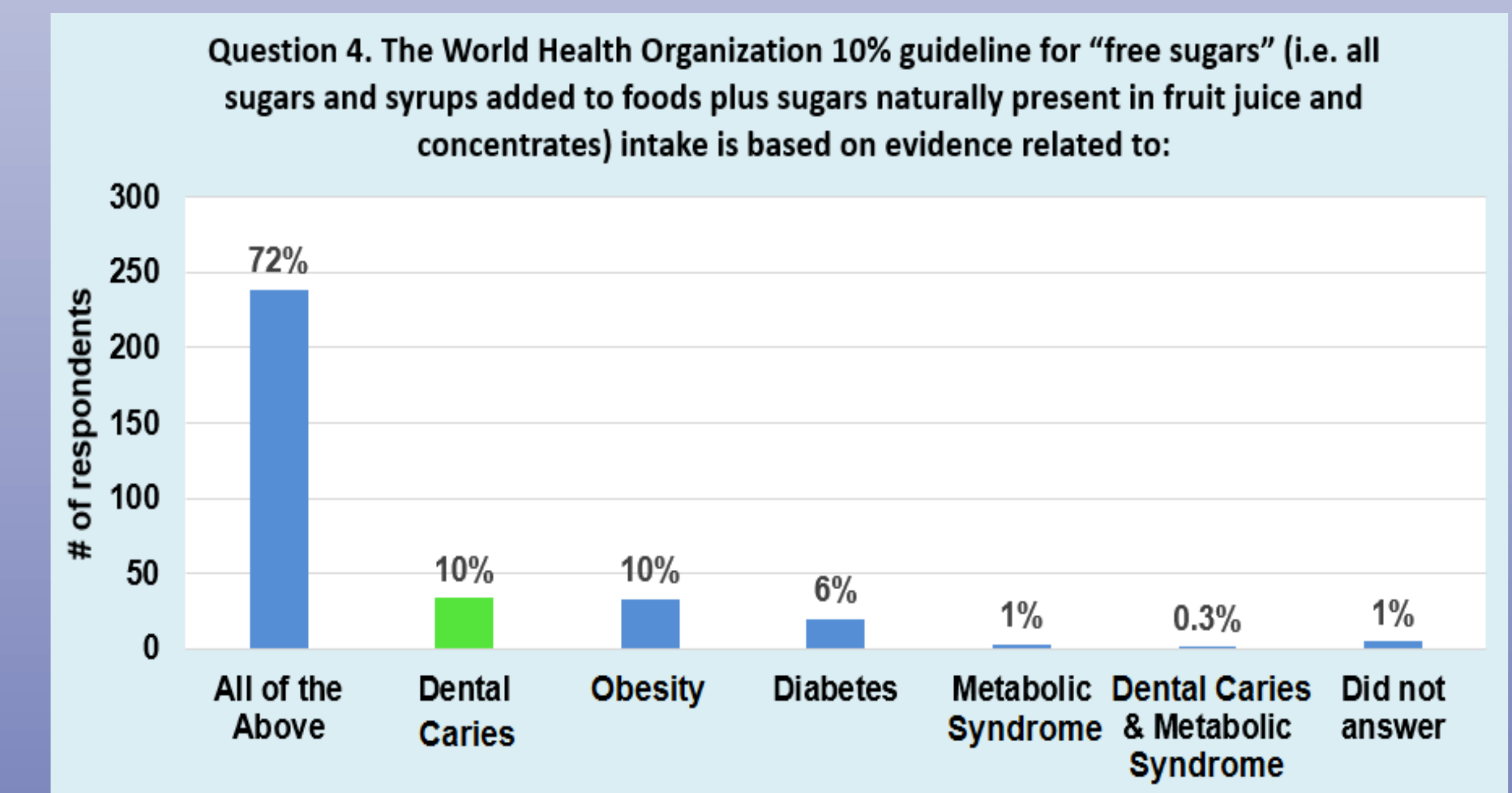
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Results



- Two-thirds (64%) of respondents thought added sugars contribute 21-23% of total energy intake –double the actual amount⁵.
- Very few (9%) respondents knew added sugars consumption in Canada is approximately one-third (30%) less than US consumption⁴.
- Over three quarters (79%) of respondents held the perception that added sugars consumption has contributed to rising obesity rates in Canada, while 10% disagreed with this statement.



- Only 10% of respondents correctly identified that the WHO 10% guideline for “free sugars” intake was based on evidence related to dental caries³.
- Almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents thought the guideline was based on evidence related to all of the listed options: obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and dental caries.
- Less than one-third (30%) of respondents knew that fruits and vegetables naturally contain sucrose in addition to glucose and fructose.

Conclusions

This qualitative survey among health professionals revealed a number of knowledge gaps on sugars-related topics. Further investigation in a larger population is warranted. Future research will also focus on best practices and strategies to help support communicating evidence-based information on sugars to the general public and the media.

References: ¹Sievenpiper JL et al. *Ann Intern Med.* 2012;156:291-304. ²Te Morenga L et al. *BMJ.* 2013;346:e7492. ³World Health Organization. *Sugars Intake for Adult and Children: Guideline.* 2015. ⁴Brisbois TD, Marsden SL, Anderson GH, Sievenpiper JL. *Nutrients.* 2014; 6(5):1899-912. ⁵Langlois K, Garriguet D. *Sugar consumption among Canadians of all ages. Stat Can. Health Rep.* 2011;22.