

**'Current Science' project
Formative Evaluation report CS-1:
Visitors' Perceptions and Use of
Exhibits in 'Current Science Central'**

Low-Carb Craze

for the
**Science Museum
of Minnesota**
St. Paul, MN

**Research report prepared by:
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Formative Evaluation of 'Low-Carb Craze' Exhibits

Visitors' Use and Perceptions of exhibits at "Current Science Central"

Science Museum of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned to provide systematic feedback regarding visitor experience of the Low-Carb Craze exhibits (about nutrition and dieting) in Current Science Central. The principal issues to be investigated were about the interpretive experience:

- are visitors getting the idea that this is about current science information?
- do visitors perceive the information to be recent?
- are they learning any new information or not?

To address these issues, an evaluation strategy was developed that focused on people's perceptions of the content and reactions to the activities; specifically, adults and children in the target age group (10 to 12) were interviewed as they were leaving the area (after they had been observed using at least one exhibit component). The sample consisted of 60 children and 102 adults (some visiting with children and some visiting alone or with other adults).

Highlights of the findings

- ◆ Appeal and Use: The 10-12 year olds primarily used and enjoyed the quiz game and newscast exhibits, describing them as fun and cool. About half of these children (45%) only stopped at one of the ten exhibits, and half (55%) stopped at two or more exhibits. The quiz show also appealed to adults; and they engaged with a wider variety of the other components, including the "let's talk" board, the big video screen, the grocery panels, and the TV newscast. Adults talked about the interesting information, as well as the interactives, when asked what they liked about this exhibit area.
- ◆ Perception of Current Science: This exhibit area was organized around one topic (in contrast to the previous study of prototypes in which the interpretive content covered a variety of topics), and the vast majority of visitors described the purpose of this area as 'presenting information about diet and health.' Fewer visitors this time thought that the main theme of the exhibits was about current science (62% of adults, 47% of kids). However there was a common perception that the information was recent (within the last year), which might be an equivalent to defining it as 'current' science.
- ◆ Learning Outcomes: Most kids (73%) said the information was new to them, an opinion held by fewer adults (38%) who felt that they were already familiar with much of the information. However, 75-85% of kids and adults cited something they learned that was interesting, surprising, or memorable (section B.2). Adult's comments are content-rich, and they often mention some personal relevance of the information. Children's responses also reflect informative content although the answers don't tend to be as detailed as adult answers.

A. Which exhibits are people using?

OVERVIEW: According to visitors’ self-report of what they did in this area, about three-quarters of the adults and 55% of the kids used at least two exhibits.¹ The two most popular activities were the quiz game (50% of the visitors used it, equally popular among adults and kids) and the TV newscast (42% of the visitors did this, more use by kids). The patterns of use for most of the other exhibits differ among adult-only groups, adults with children, and 10-12 year olds. Adult-only groups were more likely than families or kids to stop at the big screen TV and the “Lets Talk” board. Adults (with or without children) were more likely than kids to stop at the grocery panel and the “Question for a Nutritionist” board.

What did you look at or do in this area?

		Adults <u>Only</u> (n=43)	Adults <u>w/ Kids</u> (n=58)	Kids <u>(10-12)</u> (n=60)
quiz game		46%	44%	58%
TV newscast	**	33%	35%	58%
graphic panels by grocery carts	**	37%	35%	12%
big screen TV	**	42%	28%	14%
“let’s talk” board	**	40%	28%	7%
website	++	7%	11%	22%
“question for nutritionist” board	**	23%	18%	0
activity table		7%	16%	14%
bulletin board above radio		12%	7%	2%
radio		0	9%	7%

Total number of exhibits used:

one	++	26%	26%	45%
two		30%	40%	22%
three or more		44%	34%	33%

** = Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between columns of numbers (e.g., on this page: between Adults visiting without children, Adults with children, and Children who were interviewed).
 ++ = Plus signs indicate a trend toward differences that may be intuitively useful, but where the difference was not quite statistically significant.

¹ These results differ from the timing & tracking study which found that adults were slightly more likely than kids to use only one exhibit. The overall pattern of use (i.e., order of most-used to least-used) is similar in the two studies.

B. Visitors' interest in the exhibits

B.1. Appeal of the exhibit components

OVERVIEW: Nearly all of the visitors talked about something they had enjoyed in this area. Kids liked the interactive “fun” (primarily the quiz game and TV newscast), and about 15% mentioned that the information was interesting in general. Adults were much more likely to mention the information (43%), and they also liked the interactive activities and the Post-it and Nutritionist Boards.

Tell me something you liked or enjoyed about what you did in this area?

	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Kids</u>
interactive, fun	31%	55%
Quiz game	23%	43%
TV newscast	12%	33%
Questions for Nutritionist	9%	2%
Let's Talk (post-it comments)	6%	2%
Volunteer Nutritionist Cart	3%	7%
Video on big screen	8%	0
other parts of the exhibit	9%	9%
interesting information:	43%	16% (in general)
(about low-carb diets)	(10%)	(0)
(about food pyramid, calories, nutrition)	(4%)	(0)
(about new studies)	(3%)	(0)
nothing really	3%	0

Sample of ADULT answers:

Interesting information

Hearing from the expert, the debate about Atkins

Finding out about low carb products-is it worth it?

Liked seeing the new food pyramid and counting calories

The fact that the exhibit is admitting that you actually do need carbs

Liked reading the articles about diets

I liked all of the new info about dieting

Learning aspect, interactive and current info

Enjoyed seeing how many calories for my weight

Cool, informational, food wise area

Articles were interesting

Informative, could see a lot of good points and ideas

All Atkins info, interested in info because of the contrary info

Provides info in healthy food, diet

Love that this tells kids what's good to eat

Facts on theories of carbs, hearing nutritionists point of view and science of what body does with carbs

Something you enjoyed / sample of adult answers (continued)

Interactive, fun

*Great hands-on area for kids
All, interactive, hands on, informative
Interactive stuff
Fun for kids*

Quiz Game

*Interact on the game
I enjoyed the rocket scientist game, it was informative
Quiz: interactive, informative, challenging
Quiz show-interactive and got them (nieces) involved
It was easy to play (quiz), kids can learn things
Liked that it got everyone involved
Quiz game, interactive is better
Game show, the questions weren't so easy
Game show, everyone could play together, great for families*

Nutritionist Questions & Lets' Talk

*Questions are interesting, list of peoples' questions and response from nutritionist
The comments people made
Looking at the ups and down on the low carb diet (post-it)
Post-it Lets Talk, there is some interesting commentary
Post-its, people were offering solutions and it got me to think about issues
Leave question for researcher, great to have visitors involved, Q&A, get response*

TV Newscast

*Fun to play on, see how a teleprompter works
Liked being on TV news, see it on TV, fun
Liked TV newscast, liked seeing myself on TV
Fun, interactive (TV news)
TV newscast, I'm interested in broadcasting
TV newscast, makes you think you're on TV
Watching kids do the newscast, info on dieting*

Other parts

*I enjoyed watching the video on nutrition
The special that was on TV, Q&A on board
Read the last supper board
The 50's billboard sign-it was funny that it doesn't apply
Billboard about 50's, website, the interactive stuff
The old fashioned show was the most interesting (screen)
Radio-in depth
News special on low carb diets (big screen)-it was very informative, broke it down to the average person*

Something you enjoyed / sample of adult answers (continued)

Activity table, the brochures and food pyramids were interesting
Computer website, interactive informative fun
I thought it was great how you put fake food out so you can see portion sizes
Info woman gave me, the nutritionist
Thought demo was good, nutritionist

Sample of KID answers:

Interactive, fun, cool

That 3 people can play at the same time (quiz)
Liked that you can have fun
Fun to play with family
Was pretty cool, liked how it was different than other stuff in museum

Quiz game

How the game was fun to do with other people
I like playing games, it was fun
I liked that it was interactive (quiz), I like a challenge
Quiz game, I like learning, having fun
It's kind of fun to answer questions
Trying to beat my mom at playing the game
Liked the quiz show, it was hard

TV Newscast

TV newscast-you could actually see yourself & it was like a show
Newscast, it was just neat
Liked seeing and hearing myself on TV
I liked how it actually had a story to it (newscast)
Liked talking on the screen and seeing myself
Doing the news, liked being on TV

Other parts

Interesting to see what people say, doctors advice
Volunteer, like experiments
Really liked the TV newscast and reading the Last Supper Board with mom
Sugar display (portions), how much sugar is in something
*Liked where you put post-it notes up, people say really dumb stuff like they play video games
and eat Doritos all day*
Liked the activity thing, the monster
Website, dinosaur game was cool
Playing with plastic food, playing restaurant

B.2. Interest in the information

OVERVIEW: About three-quarters of the kids and 85% of the adults were able to cite specific information that interested them in this exhibit area. Kids were most interested in the information that is relevant to their lives and eating habits – facts about sugar, soda & candy, the suggested daily caloric intake for an average 10 year old, and the fact that most kids do not have physical education in school (note that most of these tidbits came from the quiz game). Adults mentioned that there was useful/relevant information for them on a wide variety of topics from low-carb diets to the new nutrition guidelines to warnings about “fad” product labels and costs.

Tell me something you saw or read that was interesting or surprising or that you’ll remember later?

	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Kids</u>
something relevant to me, I’ll use the info	22%	11%
carbs aren’t all bad/lo-carb diets aren’t good	22%	4%
new products, costs, marketing	17%	6%
new food pyramid	15%	4%
amount of calories we need	12%	9%
grocery list, healthy eating	11%	6%
obese Americans, kids don’t have gym	9%	15%
Nutritionist questions & answers	6%	0
it talked about carbs & diets	6%	6%
portion sizes	5%	6%
sugar, soda, candy	5%	25%
net carbs, complex carbs	4%	2%
fat	3%	6%
Diabetes	3%	4%
other (film, last supper, newscast, etc.)	7%	15%
don’t know, nothing really	14%	23%

Sample of ADULT answers:

*Comment cards-people asking questions, nutritionist answering them, low carb question – is it OK to replace regular foods w/ low carb? No b/c they often replace it with proteins
It (TV news) was very realistic, I didn’t know that the HDL went up in low carb dieters,
watch out for fad foods*

I can’t believe its \$5.19 for a loaf of low carb bread, if you do your homework, there’s a comparable product for less

That diet pop was OK for kids, I would have thought that it was bad for kids, about the change in the food pyramid, food groups, its good they changed it

Net carbs, not sure what they are, will try to look it up to find out more

That the average ten year old needs 23 hundred calories per day

That people spend a lot on diets and weight loss products

*Lean muscle mass and diabetes, eating right and exercise can reduce the risk of diabetes,
caught my eye, trying to be more aware of health issues*

Something you saw that was interesting / sample of adult answers (continued)

The adding exercise to the food pyramid, there is no FDA label for low carb
The stuff on diabetes, you have to have the gene, you can't just get diabetes from eating a lot of sugar, food pyramid-how olive oil is unlimited, that's good since I use it all the time
That 250 thousand people are on the low carb diet, I didn't think it was that popular
The Krispy Kremes article, a lot of people think that low carb diet is just a fad
I'll probably mention that the museum displays this kind of stuff
How Ralph's lack of pep may be because of his diet, it shows that it may be your diet in the way you feel
That Atkins diet was bad, grocery list was good, took pictures so I can use it as a guide when shopping
Info on low carb foods, didn't know what net carbs were, that net carbs subtract from blood alcohol sugar, that don't affect blood sugar, not to be counted, counting carbs and foods that claim to be low carb
On the last supper board-bread was a symbol for Christians
The good and bad about carbs, too many carbs slow down absorption of calcium in body
That only 18% of kids attend phys ed, I thought it was mandatory for school age kids, about calories to lose weight
The fact that you have an exhibit on low carb diet, I already knew that it wasn't good for you and I love bread, the food pyramid-that your body needs everything
The grapefruit balance approach, how to balance your diet, eat better, what to eat, starting to eat healthier foods, no more grilled cheese and fries
The pros and cons of low carb diet, the change in the food pyramid, the exercise, that carbs aren't bad
That they were discrediting the Atkins diet, that its not a good source of nutrition
Dietary recommendations, shows that scientists think they know what's going on, shows how much they don't know, with the constant changes
Surprised that a show that old was being shown, good for kids to see but they seem more interested in computer stuff, show probably doesn't make sense to kids now but made more sense to me than all this new carb stuff
Fact that the museum is talking about the Atkins diet, I'm from Ireland and it is big there I know a lot about it just by what friends say or what I read, two-thirds of Americans are overweight, getting other people to think and post their own ideas is a great idea
Portion tips, compare to actual objects, actual objects versus ounces, Atkins so popular, compare Atkins w/ low fat diet for a year
How small portions people should be eating, very informative, nutritionist had good stuff to say, I knew there were new ideas about olive oil being healthy but didn't know that a new food pyramid was out, finding out how much 5 ounces is, or how much you should be eating, makes it concrete
Just the many articles that have been written surprise me, that there is such a focus on carbs these days, I'll probably ask my friends whether or not they've fallen off the low carb bandwagon
I thought I could have more calories, it's time for me to get on the treadmill

Something you saw that was interesting / sample of adult answers (continued)

Don't have to walk a minimum of once a day for exercise, walking 5 days a week is fine, doesn't have to be everyday

Fats and carbs are good for you, Atkins hype, bad carbs & good carbs to seek out, brochures, planning for young child, adults trying to diet, guide to healthy eating

Good fat, bad fat, good fat isn't talked about as much, store bought stuff had bad fat, sometimes we rely too much on these products

Funny that 4 yr old boy could drink too much milk

How much sugar is in a soda, how much we really consume, I can't believe how much sugar is in stuff, I will be more conscious of what I eat

Talked about Atkins diet, thought they were advocating it, read more and found out that eating a balanced diet is key, new pyramid has exercise at the bottom, I'm trying the Dr. Phil diet, so we will probably talk about comparison to Atkins

Not regulated, news clip about how low carb food is not regulated, calculation on graphic panel, will take info, pay attention to kids and how many calories they're taking in a day

Harder than I thought, difference between simple and complex carbs

Phys Ed facts, I didn't know as much as I thought, 9 yr old got more right

Why diet pop is not good for you, chemicals in the pop aren't as good for you as water

Watching old clip of what they used to think 5 food groups were and how things have changed, interesting to think about new pyramid they're coming out with, how they may chg base of pyramid to not include carbs at the bottom, I like balance of exhibit, get both sides of the issue

Ketchup, how much sugar is in one cup

Interesting to see peoples comments about eating junk food vs. healthier food people think it's easier to eat junk food than healthy food

Sample of KID answers:

I liked looking at the background, we weren't really reading, just having fun its mostly talking about low carbs and low calories

People in suburbs eat more than in cities

it was different than other exhibits, has to do with everyday people

It was something about diabetes, not really sure what they said about it

I listen to Garrison on the radio, it was interesting, people are having bigger portions

Pop-surprised pop had so much sugar, didn't know before, black & white movie "eat for your health"

Some of the questions were hard, like the ones about candy, I thought they would say that you cant have any candy

The question "what happens if you eat too much?" I found out what would happen

It was about fat, fat is not good for you

A half cup of beans have more fiber than bread or raw carrots, kids my age need more calories

The number of kids not in phys ed class, kids do not get obese from candy

Some grapefruit cost more than others, that regular sugar was healthier than brown sugar

Something you saw that was interesting / sample of kid answers (continued)

How much people think they know but they don't, I knew a lot already

In science class I will be able to talk about the things I learned here

Complex carbs, what they are, complex carbs are harder to digest

Learned how to count how many calories you should have a day, how many calories for my age and being active

That ketchup has more sugar than pop or yoghurt, how much calories a ten year old needs per day

That newscasters read when they talk, and I learned about the food pyramid in different places, that it (food pyramid?) is different than ours

Surprising 20 tbs of sugar in juice

*Surprising sugar in drink, portion of cheese is not much =size of battery
tell parents about sugar content*

How much people like to eat chocolate, didn't know that people will pay more money for special bread

That kids aren't taking gym class

Try and shoot good stuff for the monster to eat, cookies were not good for him

That Americans are obese, I kind of already know that, that steak is only supposed to be the size of playing cards

That you should eat healthy, not be a couch potato, interesting things about carbs here, I can't think of an example

Some fat is good for you, some of the other questions were interesting but now I can't remember

Fiber is healthy for you, there is more fiber in whole wheat bread than white, brown sugar & honey healthier than white sugar, but not sure if I got that right

Carbs are not bad

People in suburbs weigh more than people in cities, didn't know that thing about sidewalks pasta is good for you

You guys consider diet stuff to be science, weird because I like science, found out some stuff about diabetes

The average ten yr old needs 23 hundred calories, seems like a lot

Whole carb thing, how much carbs we serve and take in

Some nutritionists don't say all candy is bad for you, all fat isn't bad for you

Kids can get fat from watching TV commercials

What kind of food you should have, [pointed to shopping cart], you should have wheat and every kind of food in each group

Interest in the information (continued)

OVERVIEW: The top reason people cited for being interested in the information here was that they want to know how to eat healthier. Kids also liked learning something new and having fun. Adults also mentioned learning, keeping up-to-date, and having friends on low-carb diets.

Why was that interesting? Why does that matter to you?

	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Kids</u>
I want to eat healthy / be healthy	21%	32%
interest in science, learning in general	14%	9%
relevant to my career, my friends	11%	2%
I like to keep up-to-date	10%	4%
learned something new, surprising	9%	15%
truth about products, shopping	9%	0
I diet	6%	0
American problem with obesity	6%	0
fun, cool	5%	17%
other	1%	2%
don't know, doesn't matter to me	0	2%

Sample of ADULT answers

Looking for ways to save calories

It's never really explained by the news, we just listen to the advertisers

I'm on the low carb diet and that would make me happy

Save money, if you're looking for low carb products, its usually more costly

Surprised by answer that diet pop was ok for kids. Have daughter concerned about health issues

Learning new things in a fun way

Because if Diabetes runs in your family it doesn't mean you will have it

Always trying to learn more on health and healthy eating

I'm glad that diabetes doesn't run in my family

Commercials are very powerful

I try and watch my weight

I think it might be a fad, and article suggested that stuff like having bad breath will deter people

To be more aware of your eating habits

It is in the news a lot, as a woman i like to keep up on that kind of stuff

It's everywhere, the low carb craze

Its just interesting that bread was used as a symbol for Christians, I like bread

Nutrition & health, its very important to me

It's something that you hear about and its just not good for you

Good to point out to kids so they can eat healthier

Because America is getting fat

I'm a big health person, like to watch what I eat, good for people who don't know

Why was that interesting? sample of adult answers (continued)

*You can see how things have changed, to keep up with information
Consider diet, shock to realize how ridiculously large portion sizes are
Lot of people don't take into account portion size, labels and the way they equate
Informing people that balance in diet is important, nutrients from food that you need
Like my children to eat healthy
Implanting in kids minds eat healthy and not eat sweets
Good advice
Trying to remember right things to buy at my age, hard to know what to buy
They change things all the time
I'm curious about this stuff, I have a lot of friends who diet this way
Misconception, advertising gone bonkers
Because my friend's mom is diabetic and I always wanted to know how she got it
I want to lose weight
Think about my daily intake of calories
Kids don't get enough exercise at home and they're not getting it in schools either, all kids
want to do is play computer
Don't shop for low carb foods
Daughter doesn't drink enough milk
Kids in school today are going to grow up fatter
Know people on those diets
I'm a dietetic technician, always looking for new things to teach people
Shows what people are being taught, how media can turn people's minds and influence them*

Sample of KID answers

*It doesn't really matter yet, I'm still too young to think about that
Learn about
I like sugar, too much is not good
Because I like candy
Want to be on TV, movie star
I thought that they might be obese from candy
I didn't know that stuff, it will probably help me make better choices
Because you wouldn't know what was bad for you
I should know how much to eat and how active I should be
So I can be a healthier person
I drink juice and pop a lot, but mom buys sugar free
I drink a lot of juice, play sports so eat a lot of fruit
I don't see why all of a sudden bread is bad
You don't want to be unhealthy when you grow up, you want to be fit
If I can't eat candy then there's no point to life, but you should watch the carbs
Because I learned something new
Heard person on carb diet say carbs are bad, I like carbs
It was surprising, they usually want you to eat fruits and veggies
Food, body needs it to be healthy*

C. Did visitors see “Current Science” here?

C.1. Perceived purpose of the exhibits

OVERVIEW: About 40% of adults felt that the main purpose of this area was to present current science information, but a higher proportion saw it as topic-driven, e.g., ‘to present information about diet and health.’² The majority of kids also chose this purpose; only a small percentage of children (13%) thought this exhibit area was about current science.

What do you think is the purpose of this area (this collection of prototype exhibits)?

(2 choices allowed)

		Adults <u>Only</u>	Adults <u>w/ Kids</u>	<u>Kids</u>
	<u>First choice only:</u>			
To present more information about diet and health		56%	48%	65%
To present current information about science that’s happening now	**	42%	37%	13%
To create a bunch of activities that 2 or more people can do together		0	11%	17%
A preview area for a future exhibit that will be bigger		2%	4%	5%
	<u>1st + 2nd choice:</u>			
To present more information about diet and health	++	93%	77%	82%
To present current information about science that’s happening now	**	74%	54%	47%
To create a bunch of activities that 2 or more people can do together	**	16%	23%	40%
A preview area for a future exhibit that will be bigger		7%	21%	15%

² The proportion who chose ‘current science’ is dramatically lower than in the previous study of prototype exhibits about various topics (75% of adults and 65% of children selected ‘current science’ as their first answer). The organizing theme of ‘current science’ takes a back seat to the subject matter.

C.2. Perceived newness of the information

OVERVIEW: Two-thirds of the visitors (kids and adults) believed the information in this exhibit area was new (coming out within the past year).³ Adults recognized the low-carb diets as a new thing, whereas kids were unaware of this fad. About half of the kids said that almost all of the information was new to them, while only 14% of the adults felt this way (results shown on the next page). However, at least three-quarters of the adults said they saw *something* new to them.

In this exhibit area, how old or new do you think the information is?

	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Kids</u>
in the last 6 months	38%	33%
within the last year	29%	33%
1-2 years ago	14%	17%
longer than 2 years ago	13%	8%
don't know	6%	8%

An example?

Atkins diet, low-carb craze	43%	2%
Food Pyramid, nutrition info	11%	12%
exhibit looks new, wasn't here before	6%	12%
articles, studies	8%	2%
dieting information	2%	10%
new products, advertising	4%	3%
I expect museum to keep current	2%	2%
other specific example (website, video, TV show, panels)	7%	8%
other/unclear (it looks old, stuff I learned in school)	5%	20%
blank, don't know	16%	30%

³ These results are pretty similar to the previous study of prototype exhibits (79% of adults and 74% of kids thought the information was recent/within the past year).

Perceived newness of the information (continued)

An example? Analyzed by how new the information is

(combined adults & kids)

	<u><6 mos</u>	<u><1 yr</u>	<u>1+ yrs</u>
Atkins diet, low-carb craze	13%	10%	5%
Food Pyramid, nutrition info	2%	4%	6%
exhibit looks new, wasn't here before	6%	1%	1%
articles, studies	2%	2%	1%
dieting information	2%	1%	2%
new products, advertising	2%	2%	0
I expect museum to keep current	2%	0	0
other specific example	2%	1%	4%
(website, video, TV show, panels)			
other/unclear	3%	3%	4%
(it looks old, stuff I learned in school)			
blank, don't know	<u>3%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>3%</u>
Total:	36%	31%	26%

How much of what you saw here was new to you?

	<u>Adults</u>		<u>Kids</u>
almost all of it	14%	**	52%
more than half	23%		21%
less than half	35%		23%
almost nothing was new	27%		4%

D. Characteristics of the sample

OVERVIEW: The majority of visitors contacted in this summer sample have been to SMM before (63%, similar to previous studies), and more than half were family groups (57%). There were slightly more women than men and more boys than girls.

	<u>Adults</u>
<u>Familiarity with SMM:</u>	
first-time visitors	37%
visited once or twice before	33%
visited 3+ times	29%

<u>Group composition:</u>	
adult-only	43%
family w/ any preschoolers	16%
family with only school-age children	42%

<u>Age of adult interviewed:</u>	
18-29	29%
30-39	26%
40-49	21%
50-59	13%
60+	11%

<u>Gender of adult interviewed:</u>	
man	42%
woman	58%

	<u>Kids</u>
<u>Age of child interviewed:</u>	
ten	37%
eleven	32%
twelve	31%

<u>Gender of child interviewed:</u>	
boy	63%
girl	37%