Utilization of HINTS Questions to Gain Understanding of College Students' Risk Perceptions

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BACKGROUND

Each year approximately 68,000 adolescents and young adults (AYAs), people between the ages of 15-39, are diagnosed with cancer. To better understand AYA's perceptions of cancer, preventive behaviors and awareness of cancer, the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) administered a survey including nine items from the 2007 HINTS instrument to college students (aged 18-24).

METHOD

The LAF survey was administered online and on 10 college campuses (N = 679). The LAF sample's demographics and answers were compared to the HINTS dataset. Of the full HINTS dataset, only the data for those between the ages of 18 and 24 were pulled (N = 354).

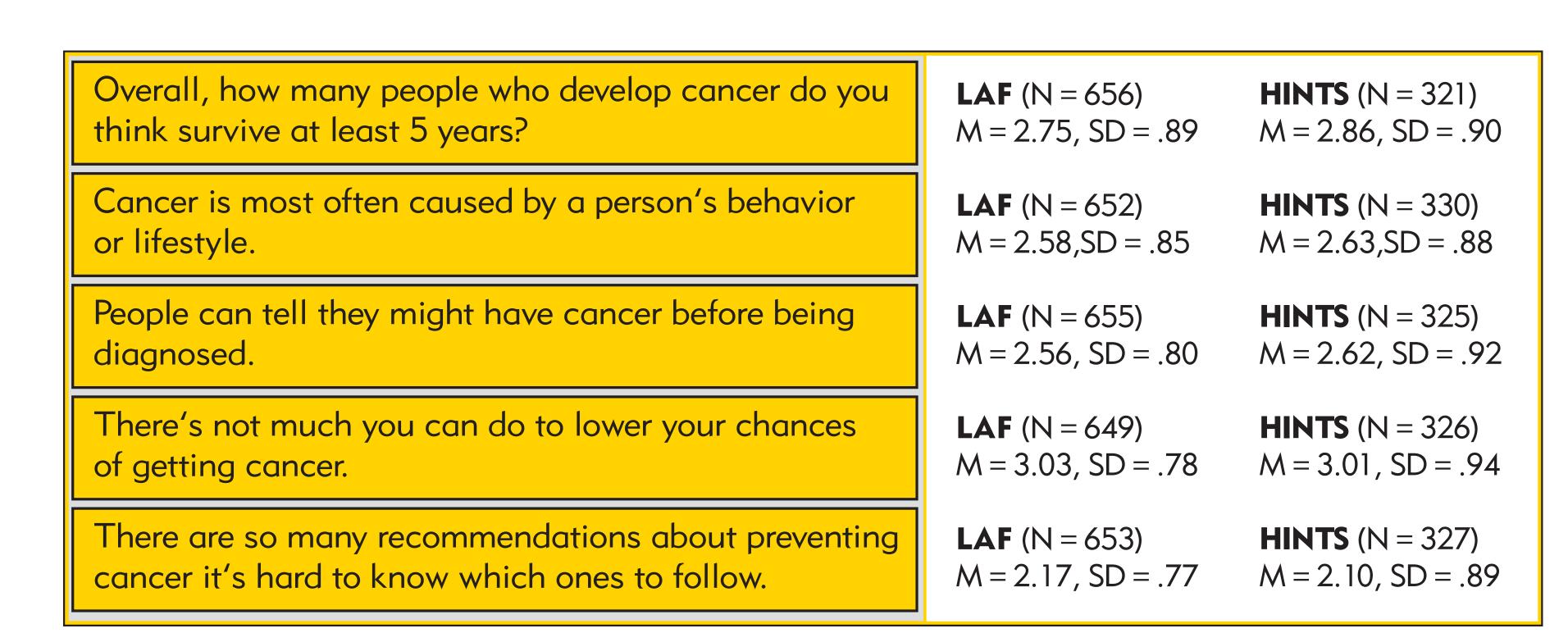
RESULTS

Demographics

The LAF population had significantly more males than the HINTS population (LAF = 53% male, HINTS = 38% male; t(734.8) = 4.671, p < .001), was significantly younger (LAF M = 20.2, HINTS M = 20.9; t(560.6) = 5.545, p < .001) and was significantly more insured (LAF = 90% insured, HINTS = 71% insured; t(448.1) = 4.485, p < .001). Both surveys' respondents were mostly Caucasian/White (LAF = 70% white, HINTS = 52% white).

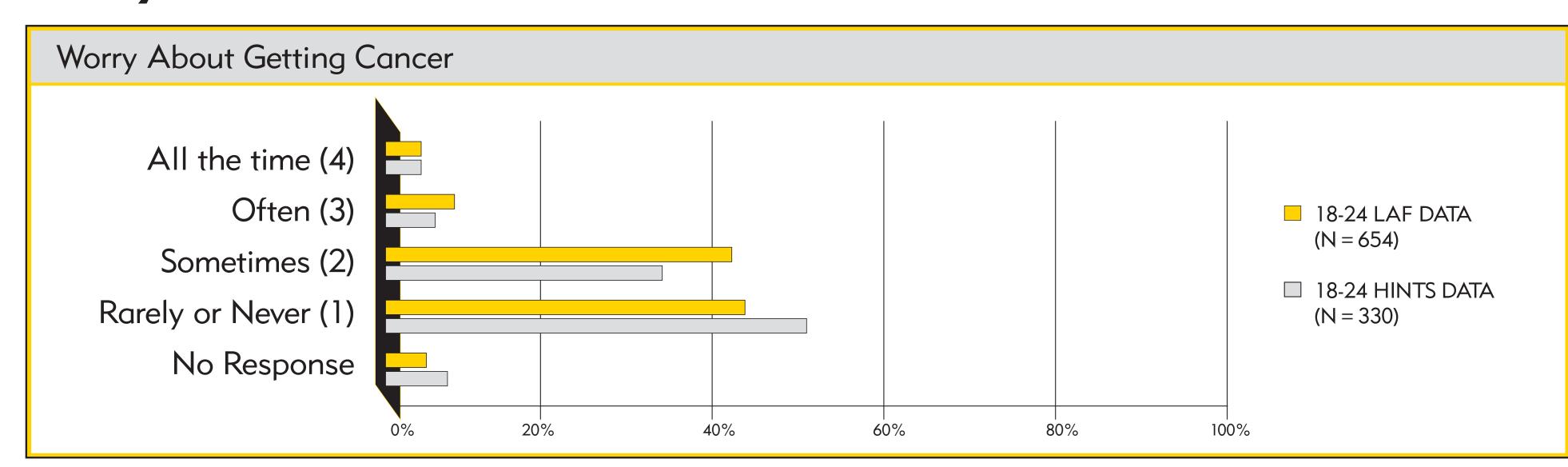
HINTS Survey Items

The two groups did not significantly differ on five of the nine items from the 2007 HINTS instrument.



The two groups differed significantly (p < .05) on four of the nine HINTS items administered:

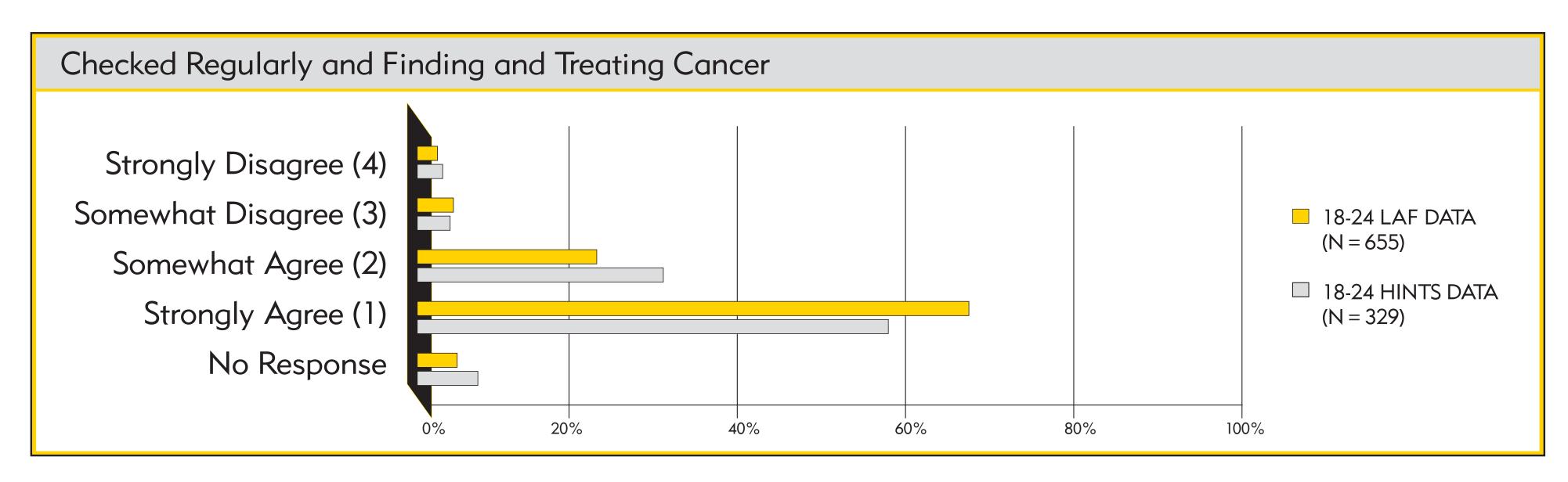
Worry about Cancer



LAF survey respondents tend to worry about getting cancer more often than HINTS survey respondents (LAF M = 1.66, SD = .713; HINTS M = 1.53, SD = .693; t(982) = -2.731, p < .01).

Regular Checkups

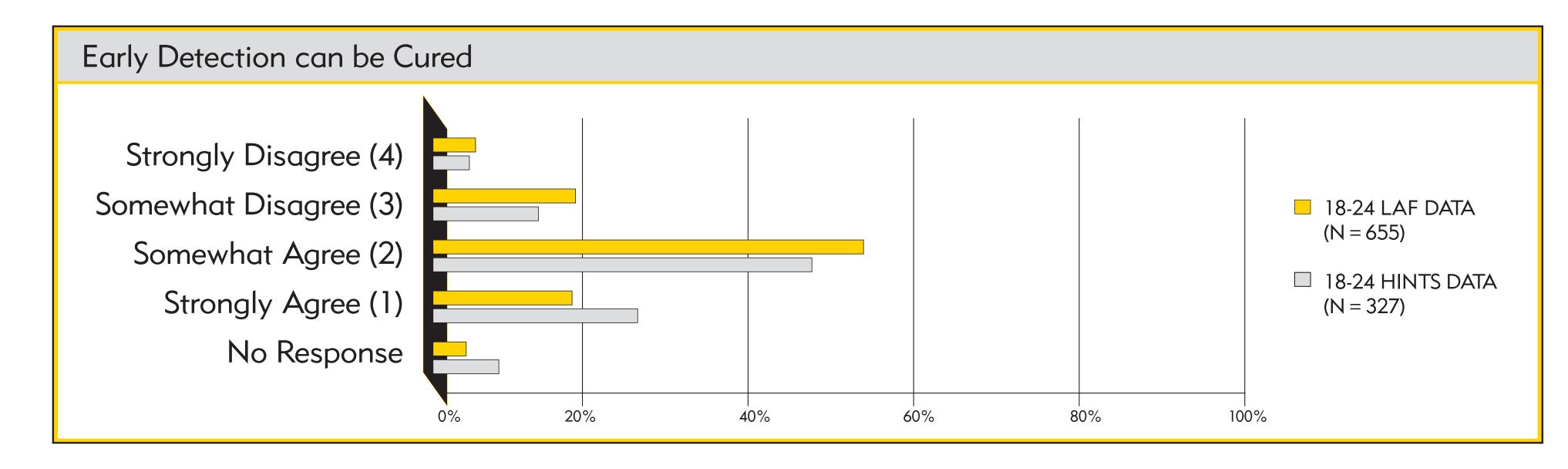
On this item, they were asked if they agreed that "getting checked regularly for cancer helps find cancer when it's easy to treat."



LAF survey respondents agreed more strongly than the HINTS survey respondents (LAF M = 1.33, SD = .56; HINTS M = 1.44, SD = .62; t(606.89) = 2.549, p = .01).

Early Detection

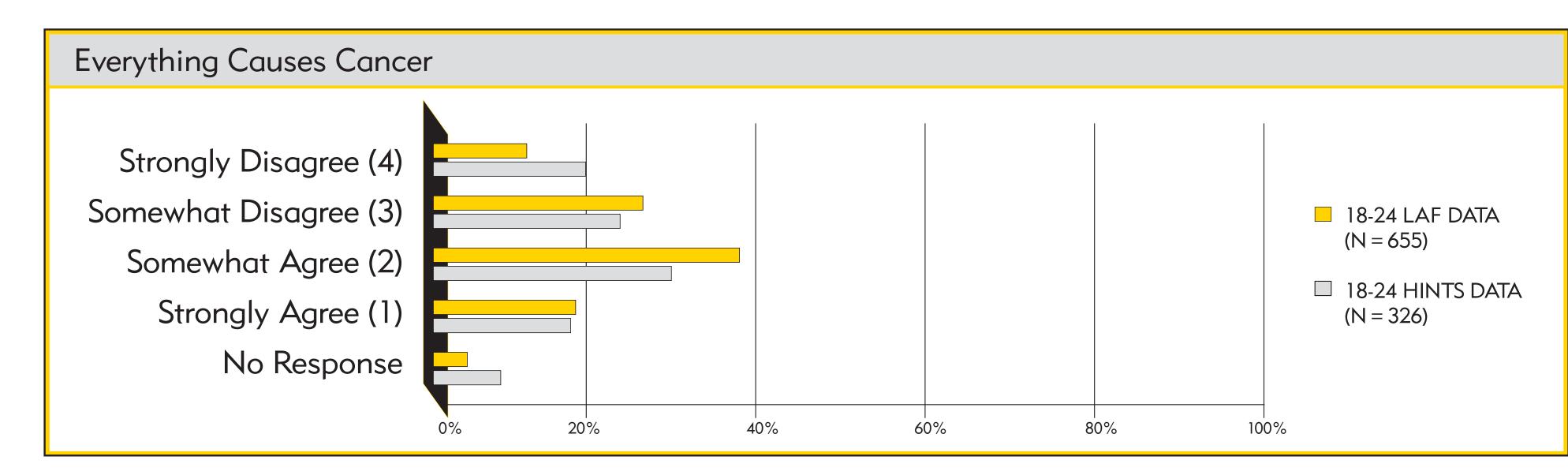
On the item "Cancer is an illness that when detected early can typically be cured," LAF respondents significantly differed from the HINTS respondents.



More of the HINTS respondents tended to agree with the statement than the LAF respondents (LAF M = 2.11, SD = .76; HINTS M = 1.94, SD = .78; t(980) = -3.322, p = .001).

Causes of Cancer

"It seems like everything causes cancer" differed significantly between the two surveyed groups.



LAF respondents more often agreed with this statement than the HINTS respondents (LAF M = 2.36, SD = .93; HINTS M = 2.51, SD = 1.03; t(591.3) = 2.218, p < .05).

CONCLUSIONS

The population surveyed by the LAF was more likely to indicate the importance of screenings than the HINTS population. However, they were less likely to agree that when detected early, cancer can be cured. They were more likely to think that everything causes cancer as well as to express worry about cancer. Both groups similarly indicated concerns and confusion about warning signs, recommendations for preventing cancer and the role one's lifestyle has in causing cancer.

Given the disparity faced by this population, these findings have important practical considerations for health promotion and present a unique informational opportunity for reducing the unequal burden of cancer for this traditionally underserved population.