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INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, income disparities have been greatly exacerbated. Inflation has risen greatly, causing an 11% increase in food prices from 2021-2022 according to the Government Accountability Office (Office), as well as Vox (Kim).

Within healthcare, and general wellness, nutrition is often touted as a point of apex focus. Dietary choices play a large role in overall health, and so consideration of groceries and grocery habits is an important factor. However, based on the aforementioned price hikes, is it possible to push nutrition to every community? Would doing so continue to marginalize low income communities? It is with that preliminary that I state the purpose of this research project: To not only highlight the disparities within Fort Bend, but also make note of how they may affect nutrition. I am of the belief that income does widely affect nutrition.

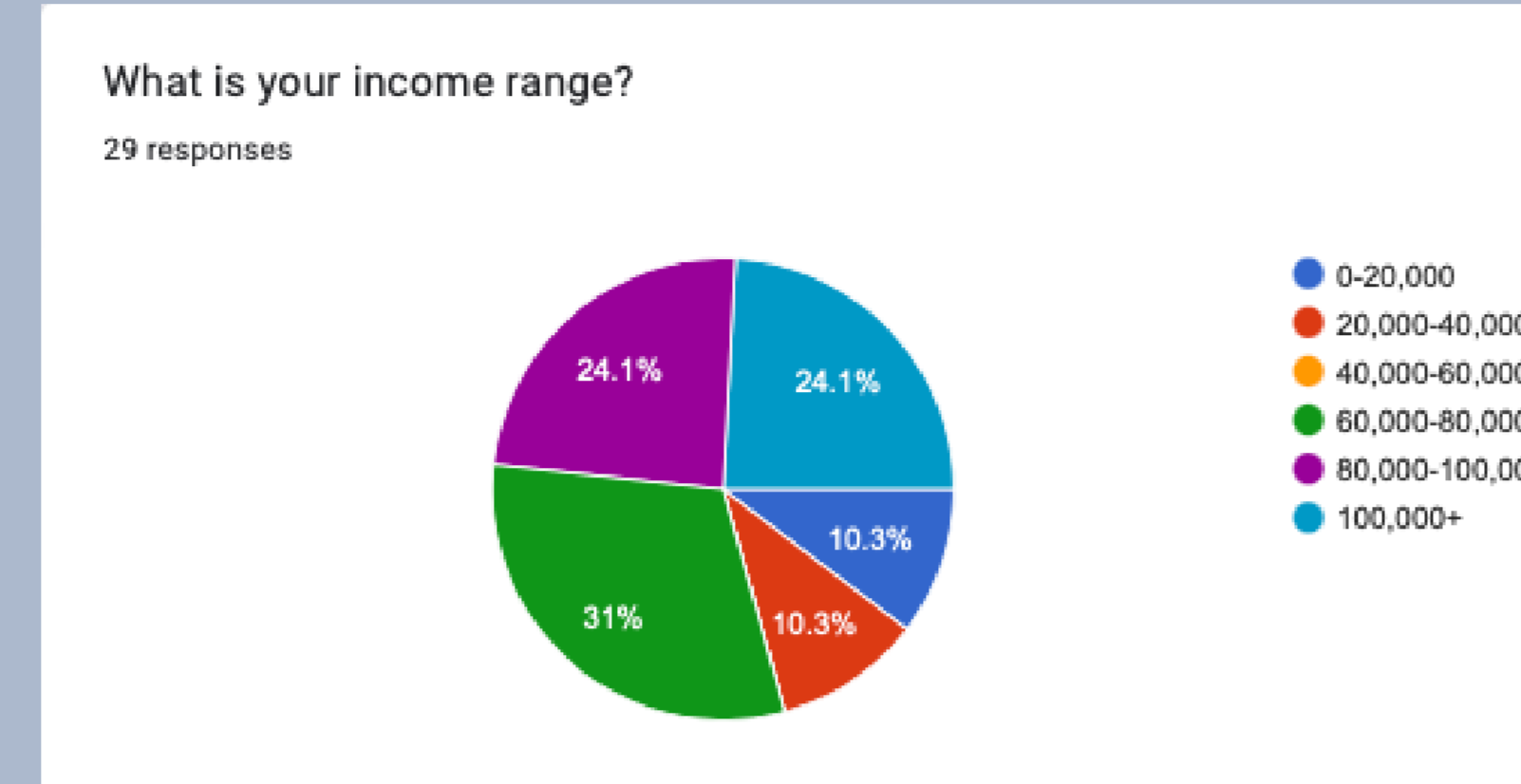
METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct this survey, I made note of asking the zip code of residents of Fort Bend County. This would provide a clearer picture as to their geographical location and would paint a larger picture later of whether the counties nutrition choices were being impacted by income. Furthermore, I asked where specifically survey respondents shopped for groceries, as well as what they considered when buying groceries.

This helped me understand what specifically went into food decisions varying on income range. In addition, I asked what role respondents played in grocery shopping, and what their household size was, to alleviate any discrepancies that may occur as a result of parental support or other support financially. Finally, I questioned which grocery stores shoppers found the cheapest, and if they'd faced food insecurity within the last 12 months.

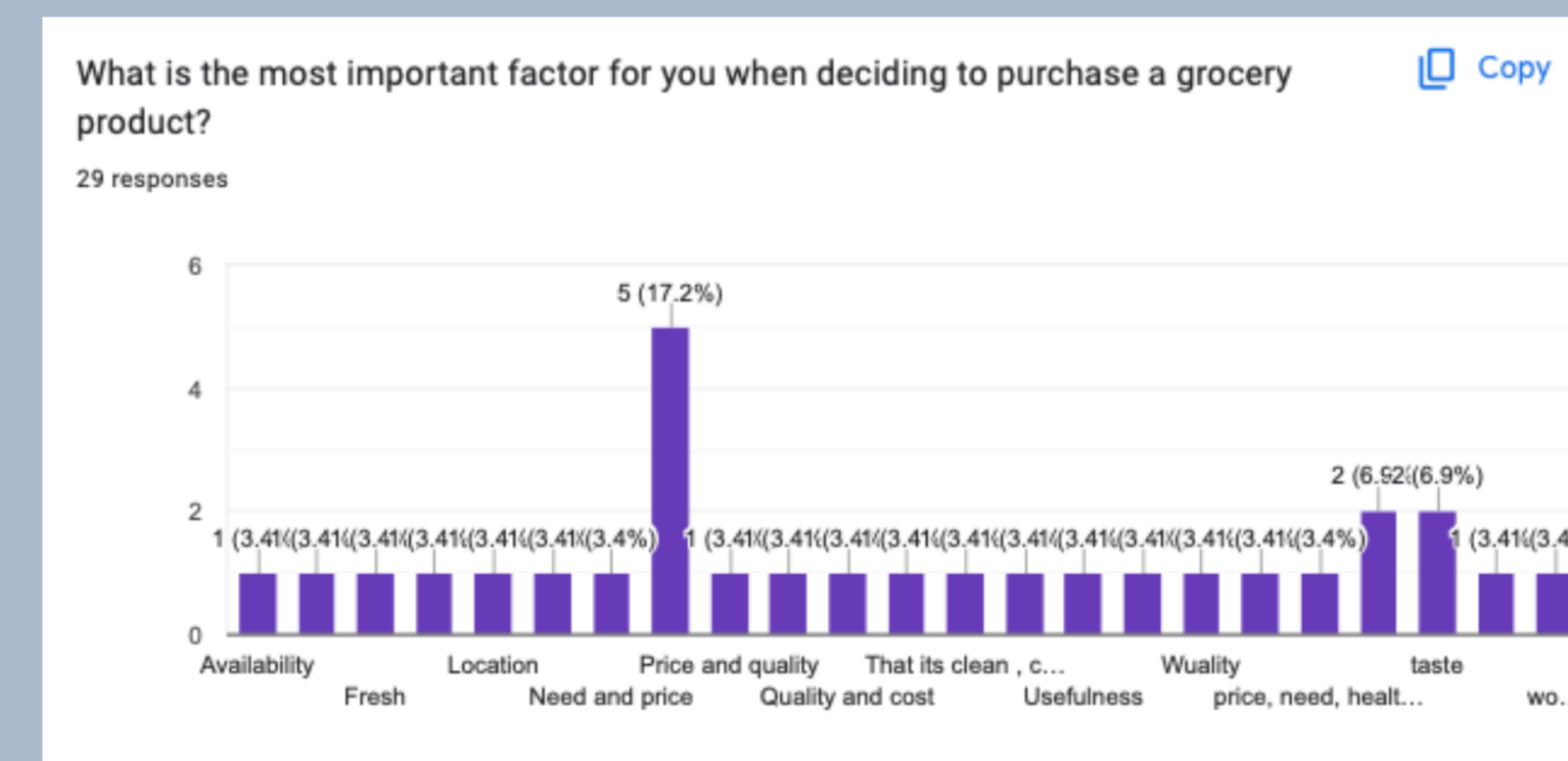
The survey was designed not only with objective, but also opinions in response to get an idea of Fort Bend's general demeanor regarding nutrition.

RESULTS



(Figure 1)

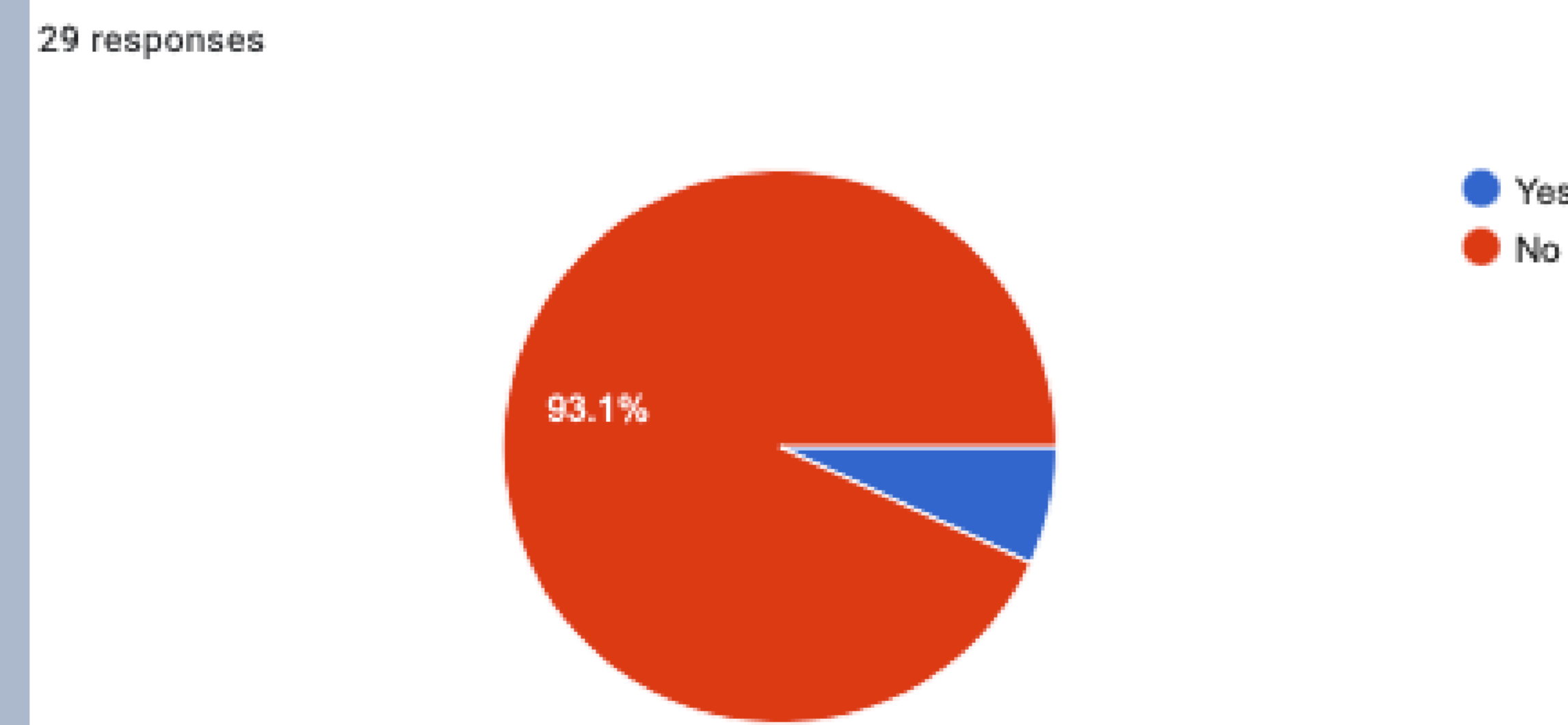
Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they were at or above 100,000 in income. This is likely skewed because Dr Nwachakor's office is in a more affluent area.



(Figure 2)

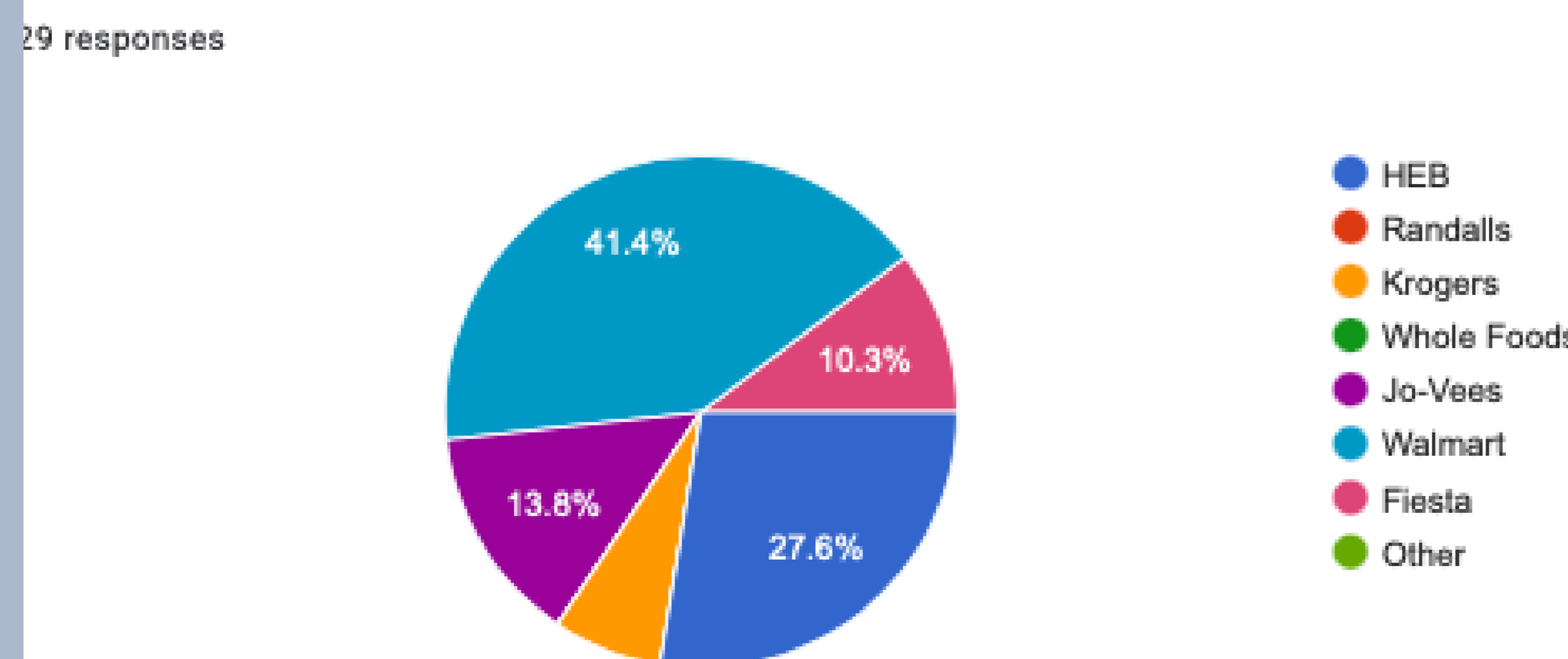
Of the 29 responses to a question regarding the most important factor to consumers when purchasing groceries, 7 (24%) answered that "price" was the most important factor for them, or listed price as one of their most important factors.

Was there any time during the last 12 months that you faced food-insecurity? (IE, inability to afford healthy food, going without food, only having a few options for food available, skipping a meal?)



(Figure 3)

Which of the following stores do you think is lowest priced?



(Figure 4)

DISCUSSION

As a summary, the data shown from a separate table, as well as the graphs listed here most emphasize that price is of concern when it comes to purchasing groceries, even among the upper income ranges, leading one to believe that cost has effected varying income ranges, especially when considered with the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on prices. A point of note that I'd like to make is the limited sample size of this survey, at 29 responses, and those responses mostly come from the ZIP codes near Thurgood Marshall High School, and how Dr Nwachakor's office experiences higher income frequenters. I'd also like to point out that the income of those respondents from Thurgood Marshall were significantly below the average income of Fort Bend county, as well as the median income of Fort Bend County. This further illustrates the income gap I theorized about earlier within the study. Fortunately, a majority of my respondents emphasized that they did not face food insecurity, but the 2 that did were both from Thurgood Marshall. Furthermore, both respondents listed "HEB" as their most inexpensive grocery store, and both had price related reasons for their shopping. With Jo-Vee's actually being the most inexpensive option, with HEB nearing the upper end of the listed stores, I believe price has played a factor in these experiences.

RESULTS

The survey results are mostly skewed as a result of Dr Nwachakor's clientele being from a higher income group (Figure 1), but price was still listed as the most important factor among respondents when looking for groceries (Figure 2). This leads to the consensus that among all income ranges, the cost of groceries is at the forefront for shoppers. For the sake of the survey, I took note of what stores were in higher income areas (Walmart, Randalls, Whole Foods, etc.) and stores generally in lower income areas (such as Jo-Vees and Fiesta), based not only on location, but general price of groceries as well. Fiesta was a point of reference for me, along with Jo-Vees, as that is where those within my ZIP code typically shop (local options). The grocery stores I listed are the primary grocery stores of Fort Bend, and by extension, Houston. Most of the respondents were within the 60,000-80,000 income range. I specifically asked respondents to tell me the grocery store they deemed the cheapest, while also keeping note of which grocery stores on average were actually cheapest. 41% of respondents answered that Walmart was the cheapest grocery store, which leads me to believe that perspective can ultimately be marred by income, as the cheapest grocery store on the list was actually JoVees, which is primarily constructed in lower income communities (Tomlinson).