15 Fifteen Years Later:

Home-Educated Canadian Adults

A Synopsis

By Deani A. Neven Van Pelt, Ph.D.,
Patricia A. Allison, M.Ed.,
and Derek J. Allison, Ph.D.

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The Subject

Little is known of Canadians who were home educated as students, particularly as they compare to their Canadian adult peers who were educated in publicly-funded and private schools. Are they as engaged as their peers in democratic, cultural, and economically productive activities? How do their income levels and income sources compare? Are they more or less likely to pursue postsecondary education, to be involved in their communities, to be physically active? How do they evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of their home education experience? This study provides a demographic and lifestyle snapshot of these young adults and offers an initial description of some of the indicators of the outcomes of the first generation of home education in Canada.

How do they evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of their home education experience?

The study followed up with Canadian survey participants fifteen years after they first shared information about their home education practices, family demographics, and academic achievements (Ray, 1994). It describes their current education level, occupation, community participation, religious observance, income, life satisfaction, recreational pursuits, and family status, and compares these with those of the general adult population of Canadians in the same age group. We also asked graduates to reflect on their home education experience and how it prepared them for their future.

Study design

Following a 1994 study (Ray, 1994), over 800 families indicated that they would be interested in participating in further longitudinal study. The parents of these families were approached and asked to distribute questionnaires to their home-educated children. A total of 285 of the original families were found and 281 accepted the invitation.

The questionnaire included three types of questions: (1) items which have been used in studies of similar populations elsewhere, and can thus provide direct comparisons; (2) items which have been used in surveys of the population at large to address questions of lifestyle, achievement, satisfaction, and so on, and can thus provide direct comparisons with the public at large; and (3) items which were specifically constructed for this study to best address the questions under investigation.

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Results

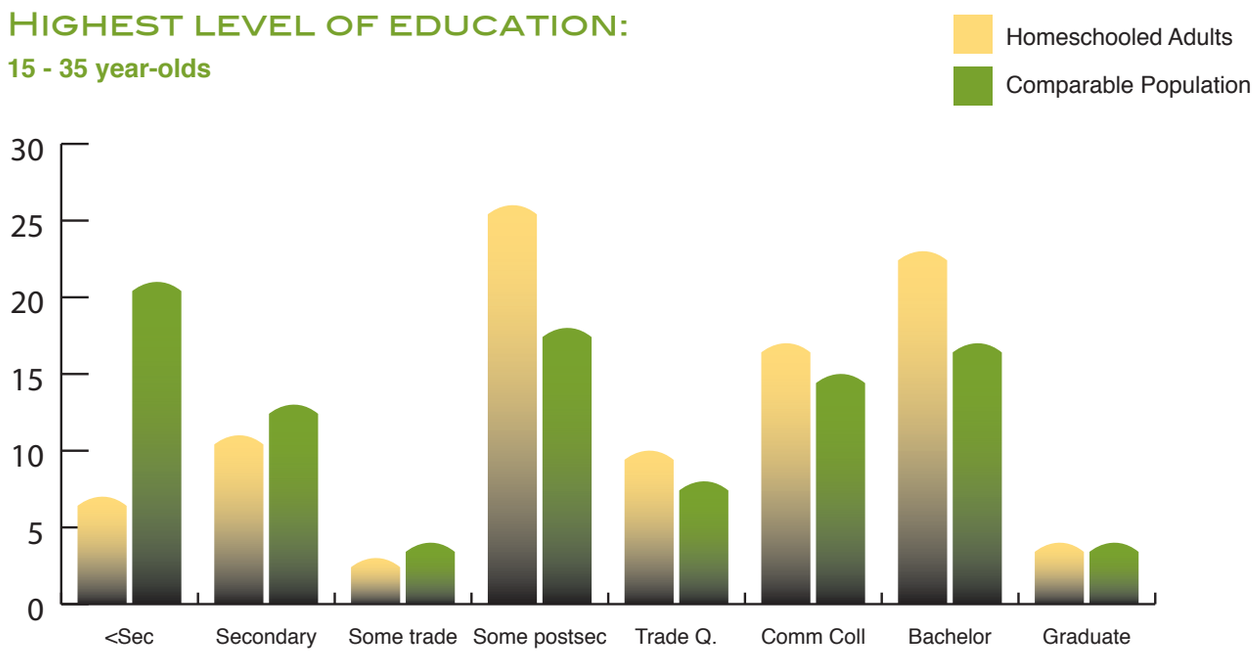
A total of 226 completed questionnaires were received, representing individuals from 128 families. The families ranged in size from one child to 14, with an average of four per family. Respondents ranged from 15 years of age up to 34 years of age, with a median of 23. The largest group (36%) currently lived in Ontario, and the next largest (28%) in Alberta. The remaining respondents were scattered across six other provinces, with the exception of a few who were living in the United States, Australia, or Mexico.

Education

When compared with the same age group of the Canadian population, home-educated adults were more likely to have undergraduate degrees, and equally likely to have graduate degrees. More home-educated adults held secondary education as their highest achievement to date, but far fewer had not completed secondary school, and most of those who had not yet completed secondary school were currently actively doing so. Overall, young adults who had been home educated had a higher academic education than similarly aged Canadians. This was particularly notable with respect to postsecondary education, where greater proportions of home education graduates had attained Bachelors' and graduate degrees.

Highest level of education:

15 - 35 year-olds



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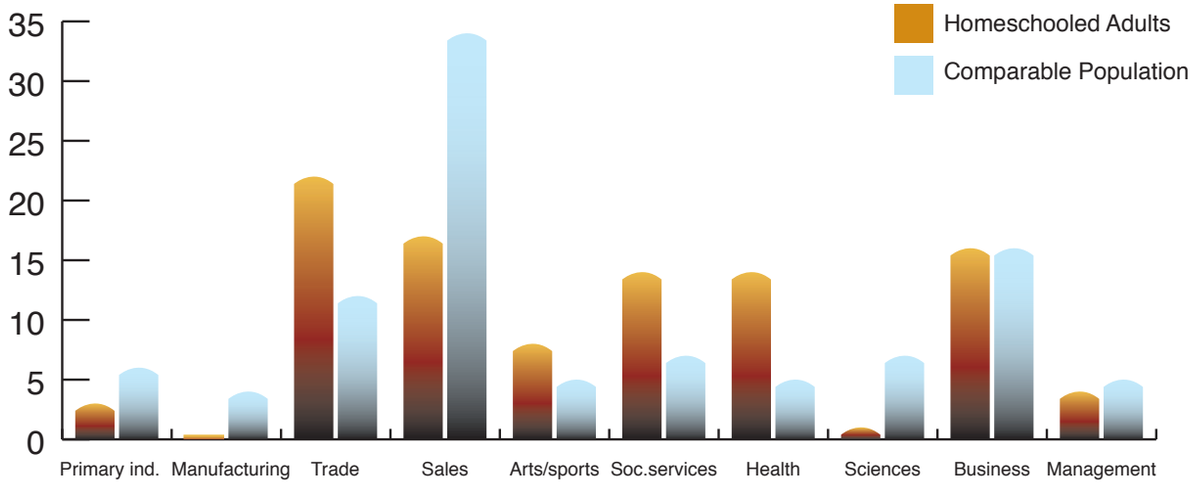
OCCUPATION:

homeschooled adults and comparable population



Occupation

Two respondents, both university graduates, were currently unemployed, and one-quarter (26%) listed their primary occupation as 'student' of one kind or another, making this the most common occupation. The second most common occupation (N=14; 7%) was 'homemaker.' Other occupations included nursing, teaching, and a variety of trades and professions. Home-educated adults were more likely to be engaged in health sector or social support occupations, such as education or religion, and more likely to be occupied in trades or performing arts than were the general population. They were less likely to be engaged in sales, or in processing and manufacturing.

Religious affiliation and observance

Most of the respondents (95%) were Christians, from many denominations, in comparison with only 60% in the general population. Religious beliefs were very important in the lives of three-quarters (76%) of our respondents, compared with only one-quarter (26%) of similarly-aged Canadians. The majority (74%) also reported attending religious services at least once a week, compared with 13% of the population. Religious observance in the home was even more frequent: 84% participated in religious activities at home at least once a week.

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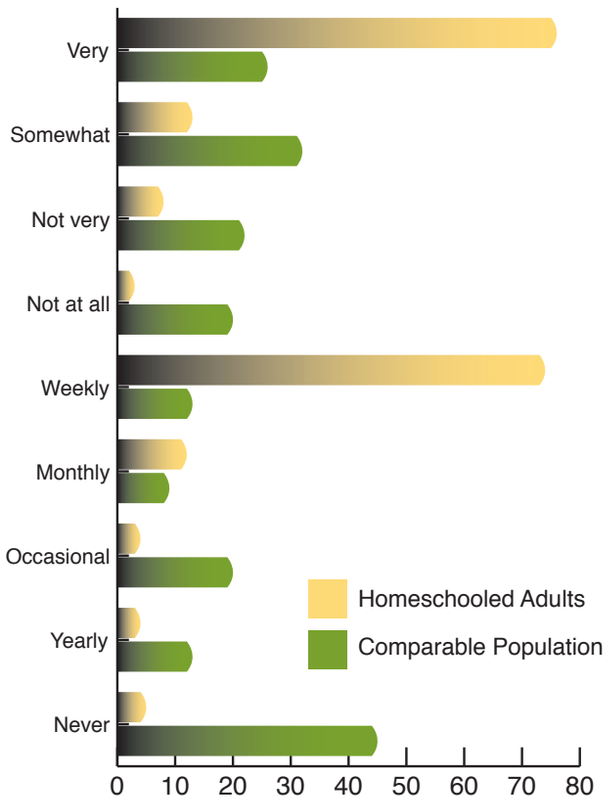
Participation

The majority of our respondents (69%) participated in organized activities at least once a week, compared with 48% of the comparable population. Home education graduates were most frequently (82%) involved in religiously-related groups, compared with only 13% of young Canadian adults in general. They were also more active in sports-related groups (48% compared with 36%). They were more active in cultural groups, educational groups, and political parties, but somewhat less active in unions or professional associations. Taken together, home-educated adults were more socially engaged than other young Canadians, engaging in more types of group activities and doing so more often. They were also twice as likely to have voted in a federal election, and much more likely to have voted in a provincial election.

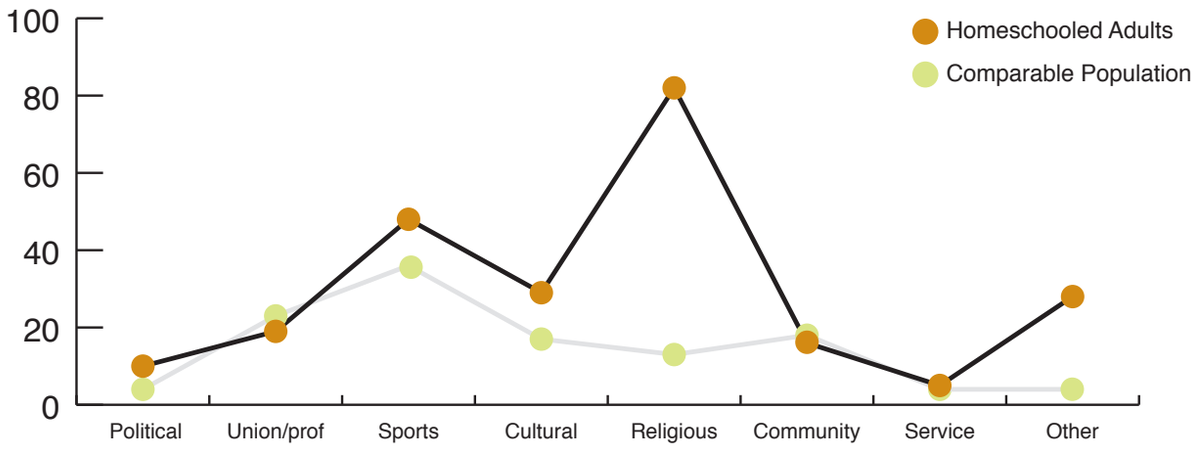
IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ATTENDANCE AT SERVICES:

homeschooled adults and comparable population



CIVIC PARTICIPATION:

homeschooled adults and comparable population



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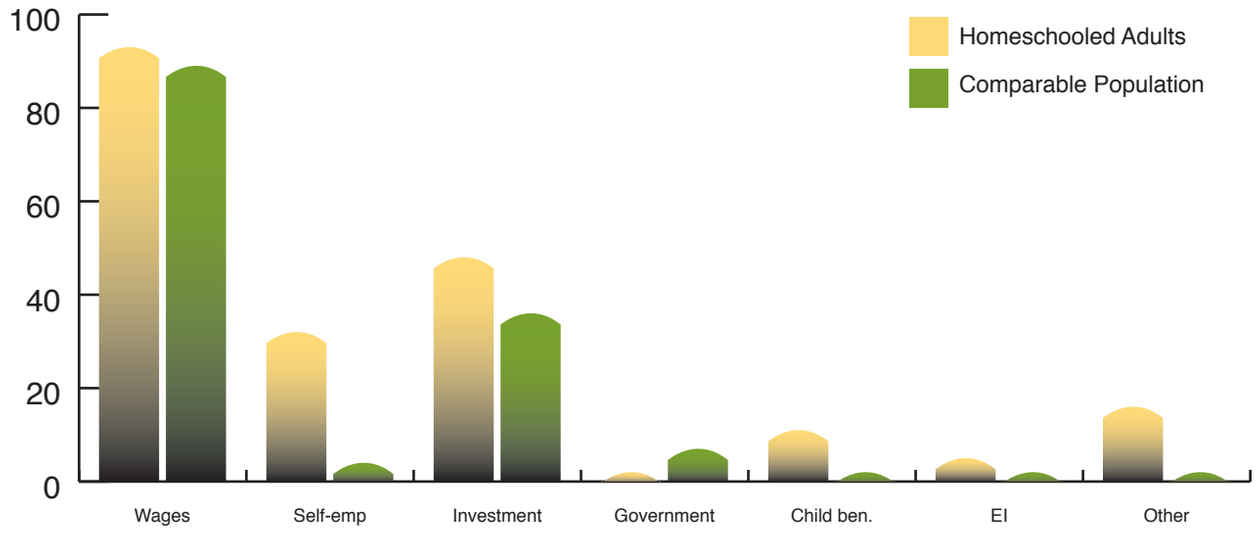
SOURCES OF INCOME:

homeschooled adults and comparable population



Income

Home-educated adults appeared to be somewhat more self-reliant than the comparable population: they were somewhat more likely to earn wages, and much more likely to have income from self-employment and investments. None of our respondents were primarily supported by government payments, whereas 11% of the comparable population did receive such payments. Income for the past year ranged from nothing to $160,000, with a median of $20,000 and a mean of $27,534. In comparison, 15- to 34-year-olds in the general population reported a median income of $18,335 and a mean of $22,117.

Life satisfaction

Overall, the homeschooled adults were slightly more likely to be satisfied with their current work: 52% were ‘very satisfied’ and 44% were ‘moderately satisfied’, for a total of 96% in comparison with 88% in the population at large. They were also happier with their lives in general: all but one was either ‘very happy’ (67.3%) or ‘fairly happy’ (32.3%), compared with national data for the 15–34 age group, in which 43.8%

...most of them are happier and more satisfied with their work and life than similarly aged Canadians,

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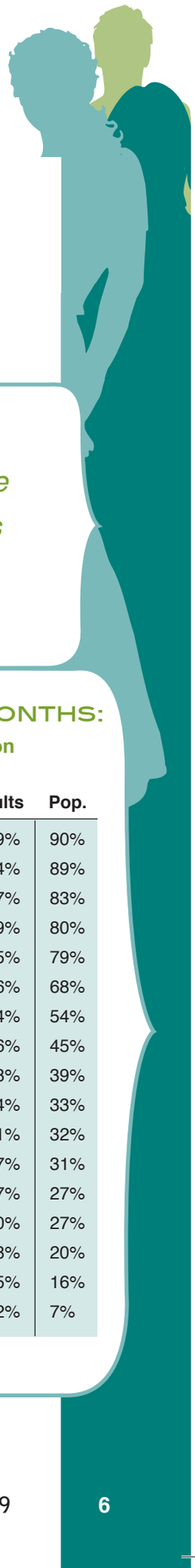

were 'very happy', and 52.5% 'somewhat happy.' Likewise, they were more satisfied with their present financial situation: about 88% of the home-educated adults were on the positive side, compared with about 80% of the general population.

In response to the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), our respondents mostly agreed or strongly agreed with all of the positive statements. Taking these responses as a summary satisfaction scale, their mean satisfaction rating was 28.5 out of a possible 35, notably higher than the normative satisfaction levels for other populations (see Pavot & Diener, 1993, p.166 and Pavot & Diener, 2008, p.143), but consistent with the high levels of life satisfaction among home-educated adults reported in earlier work (Van Pelt, 2003, p.82).

Overall, very few home education graduates would have preferred a different education, and most of them are happier and more satisfied with their work and life than similarly aged Canadians, and, indeed, young citizens of other countries.

Recreational pursuits

For the most part, our respondents were physically very active: they engaged in both solitary activities like walking, and team activities like ice hockey, more often than the comparable population. The home educated were also notably more engaged than the comparable population in other types of recreational pursuit. They were much more likely than the comparable population to have read books and attended concerts of classical music or theatrical performances. They were also more likely to have read magazines, listened to recorded music and attended movies, to have visited conservation areas or parks, historic sites, zoos, aquariums, or observatories and museums, but spent less time watching television.

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LEISURE ACTIVITIES, LAST 12 MONTHS:
homeschooled adults and comparable population

Activity	HS Adults	Pop.
Watched a video, rented or purchased	99%	90%
Listened to music on CD/s, tapes, etc.	94%	89%
Read a newspaper	87%	83%
Read a magazine	89%	80%
Gone to a movie or drive-in	85%	79%
Read a book	96%	68%
Listened to downloaded music	84%	54%
Attended a concert by professional artists	66%	45%
Visited a zoo, aquarium, botanical gardens, etc.	48%	39%
Visited a historic site	54%	33%
Visited a conservation area or nature park	71%	32%
Attended a popular musical performance	37%	31%
Attended a cultural or artistic festival	27%	27%
Attended a public art gallery or museum	40%	27%
Attended a theatrical performance	48%	20%
Attended a performance of cultural/heritage music	15%	16%
Attended a symphonic or classical music performance	32%	7%

General Social Survey, 2005.

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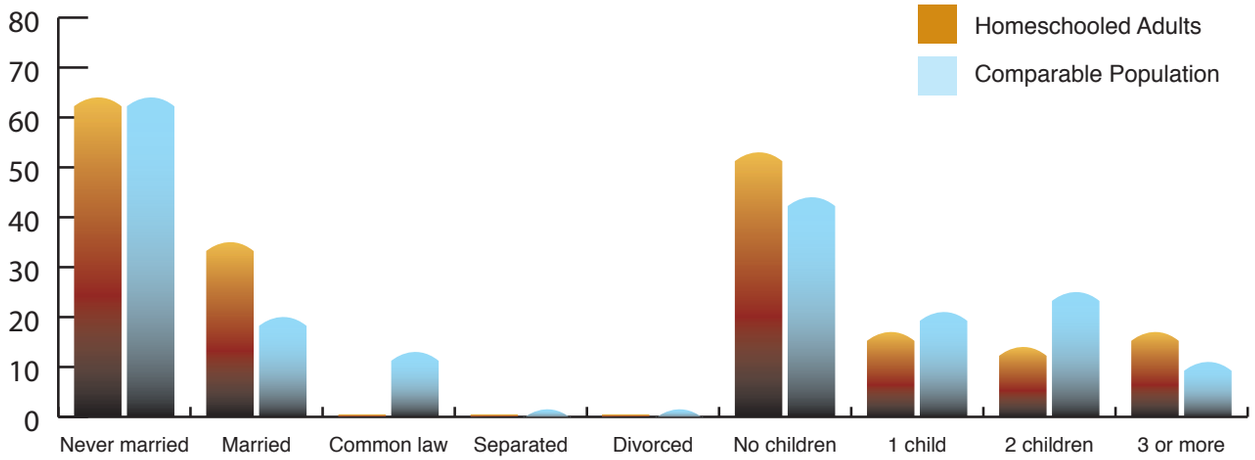
Marital status, family size:
homeschooled adults and comparable population



Marital and family status

The home-educated adults were more likely to be married than was the comparable population of the same age, but this difference disappeared completely when common-law arrangements were taken into consideration, since 13% of the comparable population lived in common-law relationships, whereas this was not so for any of the home-educated adults. However, whereas the homeschool graduates were more likely to be married and to marry earlier, they were less likely to have children early, but tended to have larger than average families when they did have children.

Family Background & Home Education Experience

Home environment

Home-educated adults typically came from larger-than-average families, the median being four children, usually home educated together. Families were overwhelmingly white, Christian, English-speaking and Canadian by birth. Parents held an enormous variety of different occupations, but, not

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surprisingly, the greater majority of the mothers were homemakers (and home educators), and this included mothers with all levels of education, from secondary schooling to PhD and MD. Both mothers and fathers of homeschooled adults were likely to have a higher academic education than average: the proportion of homeschooling parents holding university degrees was almost twice that of the general population. About 17% of the mothers held teaching certificates and most had taught in the public system. Parental occupations included professional work, skilled trades, and unskilled labour. Insofar as it is possible to compare with the general population, fathers of home-educated adults were more likely to be occupied in social support types of employment such as education and religion, and less likely to be occupied in sales and service, or manufacturing employment.

In most cases, the home curriculum was designed by parents, occasionally with some resources from an independent school or a satellite school curriculum.

The most typical pattern of home education covered the entire period from the ages of 5 to 18, and 42% of our respondents had never attended either a private or a public school at all. Other than this, all sorts of patterns of home education combined with private and/or public school attendance were reported, but very few had changed more than once or twice, the most common pattern being a switch to home education after a year or two of public school, and a return to public school for senior secondary grades.

In most cases, the home curriculum was designed by parents, occasionally with some resources from an independent school or a satellite school curriculum. Collaborative learning with children outside the family was plentiful, as were social interactions. The homeschooling experience was usually an extremely busy one, with a wide range of sports, musical, group, and individual activities outside of the home.

Just over a quarter (29%) of our respondents went to university immediately after completing secondary school, and about one-third (34%) went to community colleges, Bible colleges, or private colleges.

Most respondents gave many reasons for the decision to home educate, but the desire for a better education than that offered in schools was by far the most frequently mentioned and the most important. Religious and moral reasons were frequently mentioned, especially with respect to the development of character and moral values, and the teaching of a particular worldview. Less common reasons were family specific or child specific, or based on concerns about the social structure of schools.

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Reflections

Most of our respondents were glad that they had been home educated, and most of them believed that it had proved to be an advantage in their adult life. Very few felt that their home education had limited either their subsequent educational opportunities, or their subsequent employment opportunities. Most felt that, on the contrary, home education had prepared them very well for further education and for life in general.

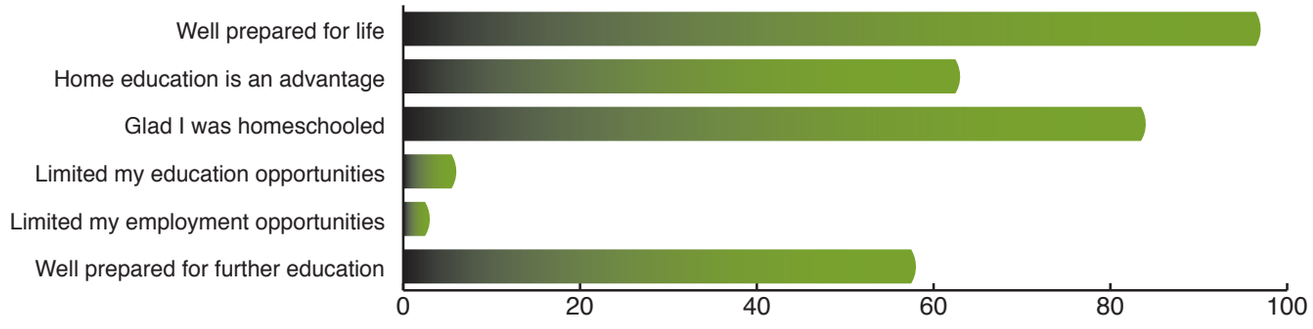
The best part about being home educated, according to our respondents, was the breadth of opportunities for curricular enrichment, flexibility, individualization, independence, and superior academics.

The worst part about being home educated was most commonly an aspect of the social challenges. Some respondents felt that their curriculum was somewhat limited, and some found the social prejudices against their form of education difficult. Adjusting to a classroom setting after home education was sometimes not easy, and a slow Internet connection could be really trying.

The common criticism of home education that it limits socialization with other children was not a reality in the experience of most of our respondents: they mostly had more than enough opportunities for socializing. For the most part, parents made considerable efforts to ensure a high level of social interaction. The few who reported relatively little social interaction mostly did not feel that this was a problem, especially since they were more likely to have had much more interaction with adults than do most children.

Most felt that, on the contrary, home education had prepared them very well for further education and for life in general.

Reflections on the value of being home schooled:



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Discussion

In comparison with the same age groups in the general population, home-educated adults,

- had parents who had a higher academic education and were more religiously committed;
- attained higher levels of academic education;
- were more likely to be occupied in health and social services;
- were just as likely to be involved in business, finance, and administration;
- were much more likely to be civically and politically engaged;
- were typically very religiously committed;
- earned slightly more;
- were more satisfied with their lives;
- were physically more active and culturally more involved;
- were more likely to marry and unlikely to live common-law.

They were also very happy that they had been home educated, and for the most part felt that it had given them an advantage in life and in future education. Drawbacks included stigmatization and social prejudice, curriculum limitations and, for some, fewer opportunities to participate in group activities such as sports. The benefits included rich relationships, opportunity for extensive curricular enrichment, flexibility, individualized pace and program, development of independence and confidence, and superior academic education.

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Fifteen Years Later:

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About the Authors

Deani A. Neven Van Pelt, B.Comm. (McMaster), B.Ed. (Toronto), M.Ed. (UWO), Ph.D. (UWO) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Redeemer University College, Hamilton, Ontario. Her international research collaborations, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and others, centre on private schooling, religious schooling, home schooling and Charlotte Mason's educational philosophy. A former teacher in the math and business departments of public and private secondary schools, she and her husband home educated their three children for more than a decade.

Patricia A. Allison, B.Ed. (Alberta), M.Ed. (UWO) recently retired from the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario, where she worked for over thirty years as a teacher, administrator, and researcher. Prior to joining the Faculty, she taught elementary school, secondary school and pre-school. In the Faculty's teacher education program, she taught the social, legal, and policy foundations of professional practice, and also developed and taught an elective on private and independent schools. She has over thirty years' experience as an educational researcher.

Derek J. Allison, B.Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D. (Alberta) has taught in the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario for over thirty years, specializing in educational administration, organization, and law. He has taught the social and legal foundations of education to thousands of teacher education candidates, and guided hundreds of graduate students through advanced research and study. Prior to beginning his academic career, he was a teacher and principal, in England and northern Alberta. He has an extensive publication and research record.

Funding

Canadian Centre for Home Education (CCHE) was formed in order to fill the void on a national scale for the need to do quality research in the area of home education and to train volunteer homeschool leaders from across the country. CCHE is a charitable organization.

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For more information about CCHE visit: **www.hslda.ca/cche**

Canadian Centre for Home Education
32B-980 Adelaide Street South
London, Ontario N6E 1R3

Phone: 519-913-0318
Fax: 519-913-0321
Email: info@hslda.ca

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