CHILDREN'S INTERNET USE AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S ONLINE EXPERIENCE

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A study commissioned by the MCA

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TWO KEY FINDINGS

The internet in general, and social networks in particular, are very present in the lives of Maltese children between the ages of 8 and 15.

Parents' perceptions of their children's internet use is often very different from what their internet use actually is.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

AIMS

- The aims of this research were:
    - To investigate children's access, use and perceptions of the Internet
    - To investigate the parents' perceptions of their children's Internet use
    - To compare parents' perceptions with patterns reported by children
    - To analyse children's and parents' awareness of Besmartonline!

METHODOLOGY

- Survey
  - Stratified Random Sample
  - Included all 6 demographic regions of Malta and Gozo
  - 4 schools selected randomly from each region
  - 2000 questionnaires with children between 8 and 15 years
  - 2000 questionnaires with their respective parent/guardian

METHODOLOGY

- Children and parent responses were paired to enable a direct comparison.

- The survey was based on the studies held by MCA (2010, 2012) and on the pan-European research project, EU Kids Online II.
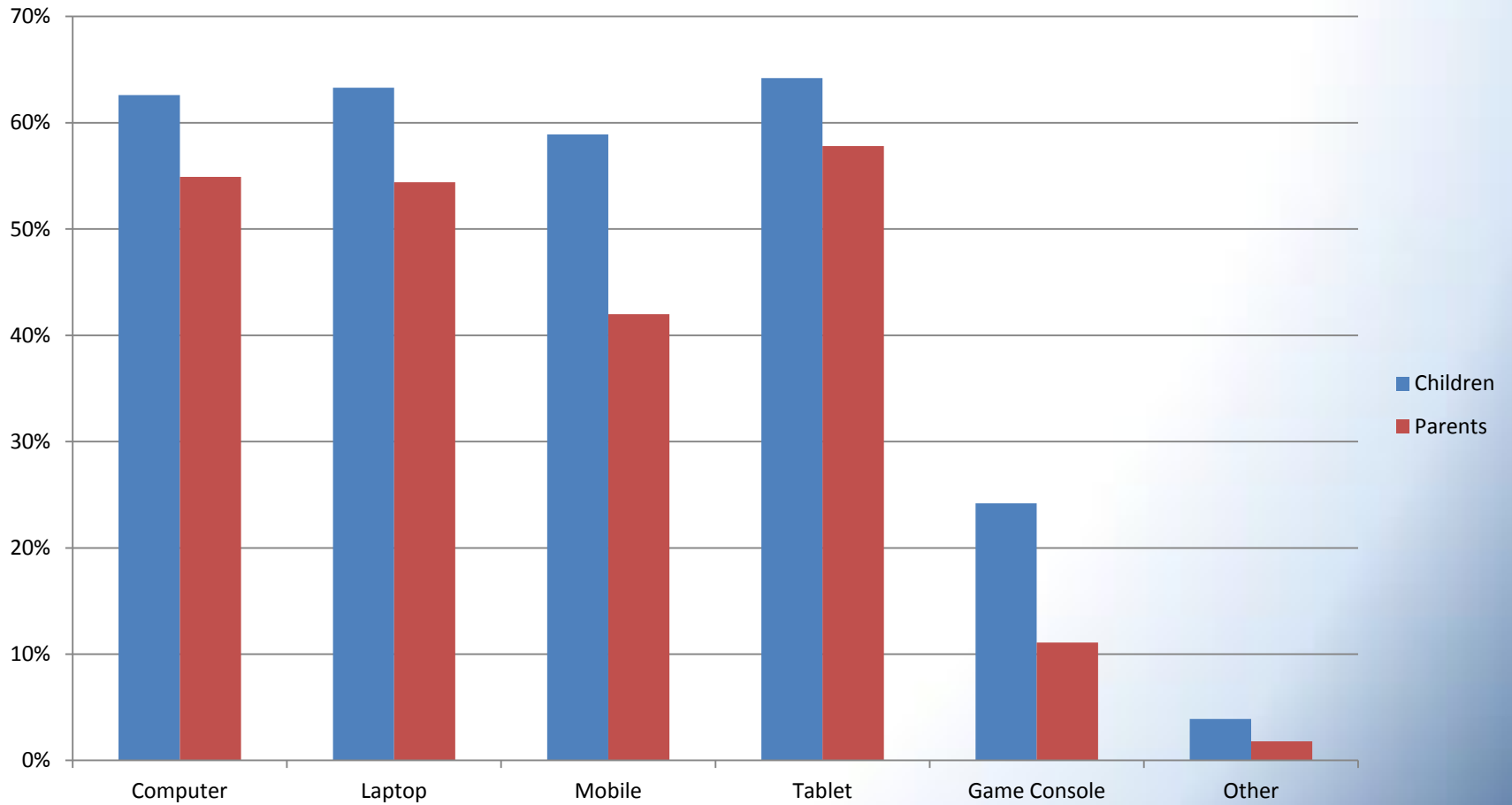
METHODOLOGY

- Fieldwork was carried out in November and December 2014

- Response rate of 78% i.e. over 3000 questionnaires returned

FINDINGS

97.5% of Children

- The vast majority of Maltese households (97.5%) participating in the survey who have children between 8 and 15 have internet access.

Devices Used to Access the Internet

Frequency of Internet Use

- 59% of children (8 – 15 years) say that they use the internet daily.

- This percentage increases to 85% in Form 4.

Internet Use – Week Days

- 43.5% of children (8-15 years) use the internet between 30 minutes to 2 hours daily during week days.

- Almost 10% of the sample state that they are "always online".

- 18.3% of those in Form 3 and 16.8% of those in Form 4 say they are "always online".

Internet Use - Weekends

- Children claim that during the weekend, they use the internet for more hours when compared to weekdays.

- The number of children who use the internet for 3 to 5 hours increases from 23% during week days to 33% during the weekend.

Child-Parent Discrepancies Internet Access

	Children	Parents
Own Room	49.9%	29.2%
Friend's House	24.1%	9.1%
Relative's House	41.2%	24.0%
Shops	26.2%	14.6%

Activities Online

	Children	Parents
School Work	69.9%	87.8%
Social Networking	43.2%	38.2%
Chatting	45.9%	28.2%
Email	29.4%	22.3%
Video Calling	41.0%	26.2%
Downloading Music or Films	36.4%	25.6%
Watching Videos Online	71.2%	59.9%
Blogging	11.1%	3.5%
Online Shopping	18.3%	4.5%

Information Available Online

- Children put more information online than their parents are aware of:
  - Real date of birth
  - Mobile number
  - Home address
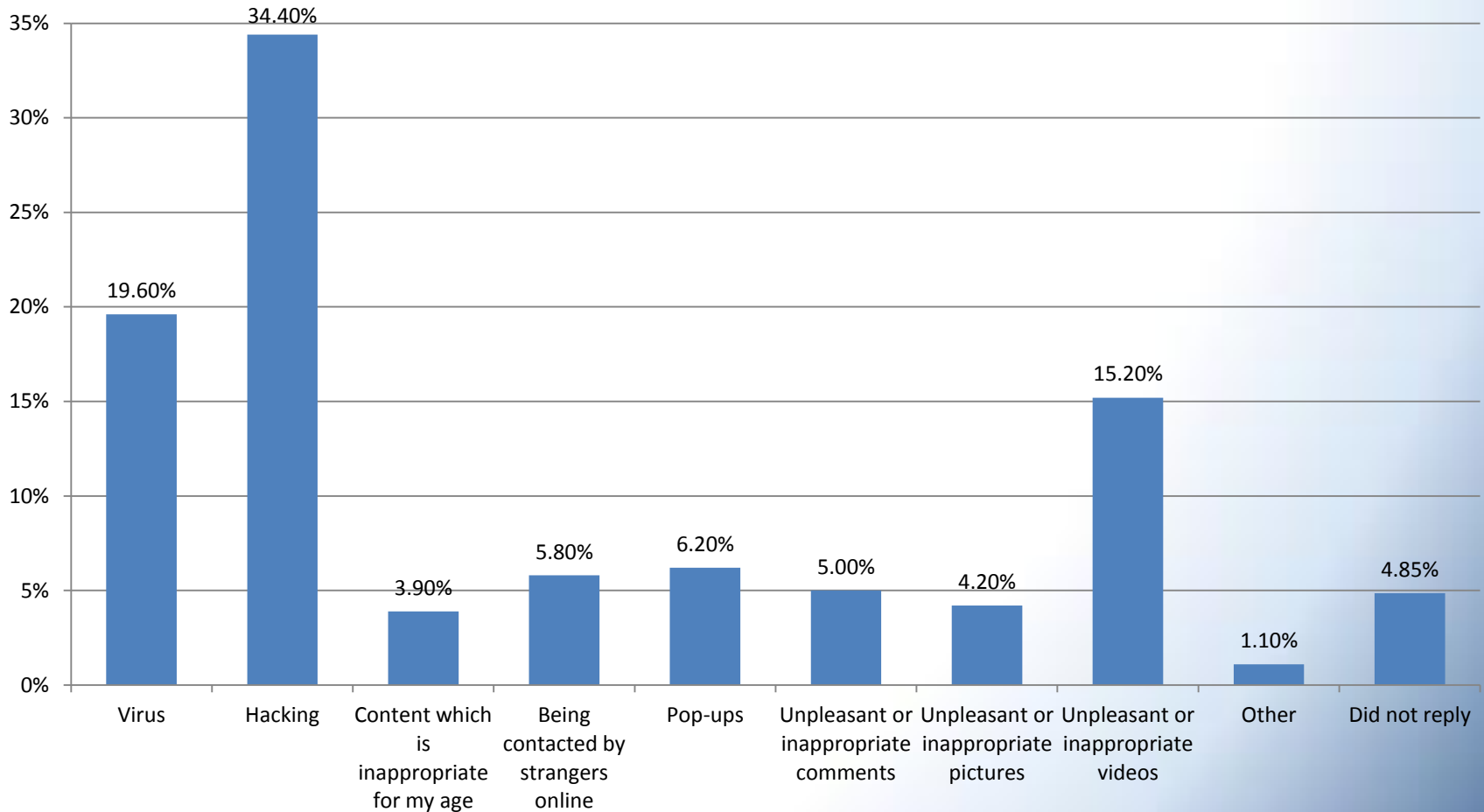- 38.6% have a false date of birth

Accounts

	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
Facebook	27.3%	26.5%	45.6%	61.2%	74.3%	92.2%	97.1%
Skype	40.2%	37.0%	43.0%	52.9%	43.6%	70.0%	77.4%
Google	62.1%	58.7%	57.5%	61.5%	68.3%	82.2%	84.7%

Risk Perceptions

	Children	Parents
Internet is safe	26%	8%
Public Posting on SNS is fine	11%	6%
Meeting new people on the internet is safe	15.7%	3%

- Both parents (80.6%) and children (79.8%) strongly agree about the importance of using privacy settings on Social Networking Sites.

Perceptions of the Most Dangerous Things Online

Actual Risk Experiences

Category	Percentage
Virus	44.60%
Hacking	14.30%
Content which is inappropriate for my age	12.00%
Being contacted by strangers	19.60%
Pop Ups	45.40%
Unpleasant or Inappropriate Comments	14.70%
Unpleasant or Inappropriate Pictures	18.40%
Unpleasant or Inappropriate Videos	17.30%
None	22.10%
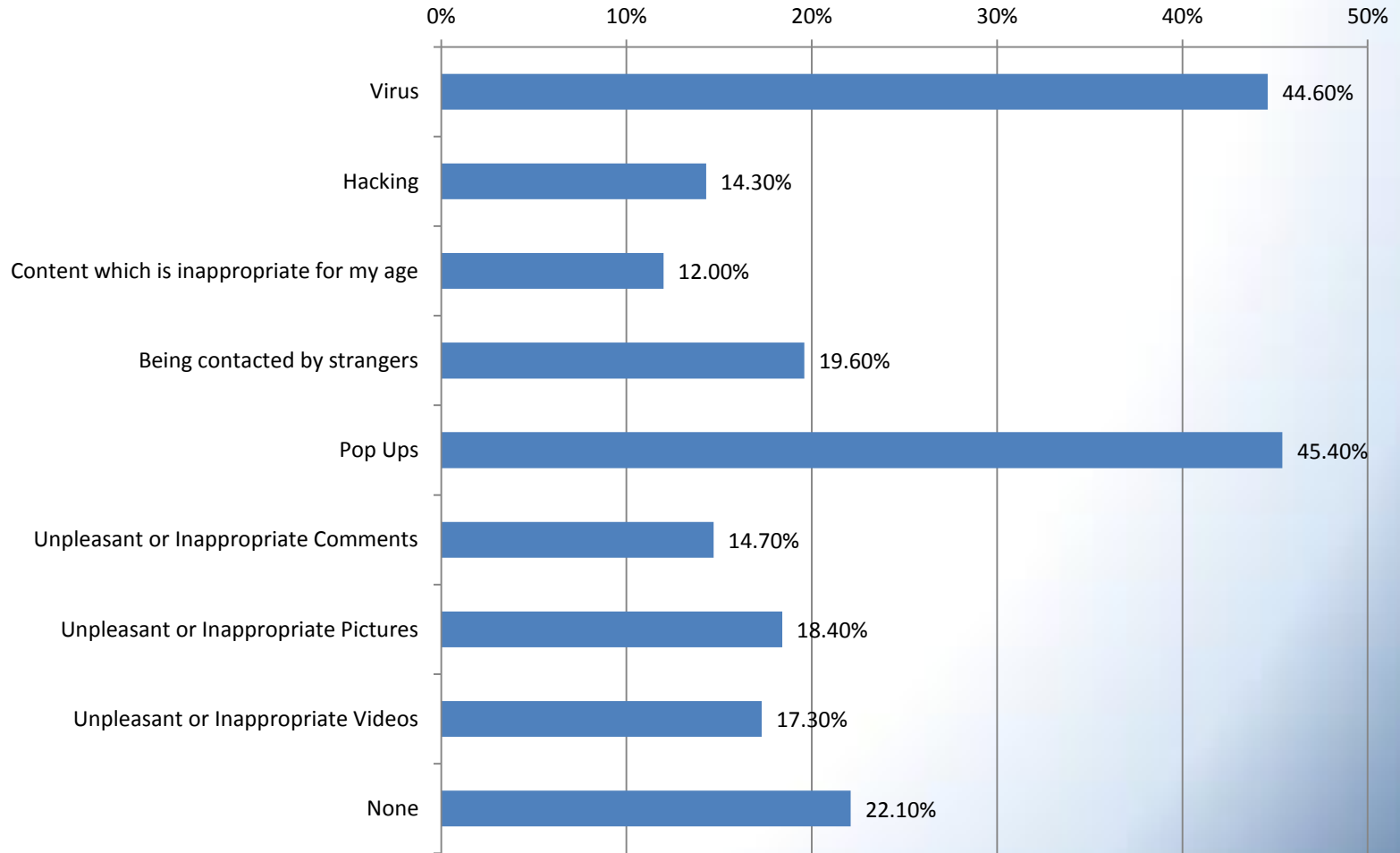
Coping with Risk Experiences

- Contact by Strangers:
  - Over half of the children say that they did not feel upset about it.
  - 31.8% did nothing about it
- Pop Ups
  - 31.5% spoke to someone about it
  - 34.7% tried to solve it on their own
  - 24.9% did nothing about it.
  - 61% were not upset by pop ups

Preferred Sources of Safety Information - Children

- Children prefer to get information on online safety mainly from two sources.
  - Parents: 77.9%
  - School: 66.9%
- 18.4% prefer to get this information from friends

Sources of Safety Information - Parents

- Family and friends: 50.5%

- Media: 49%
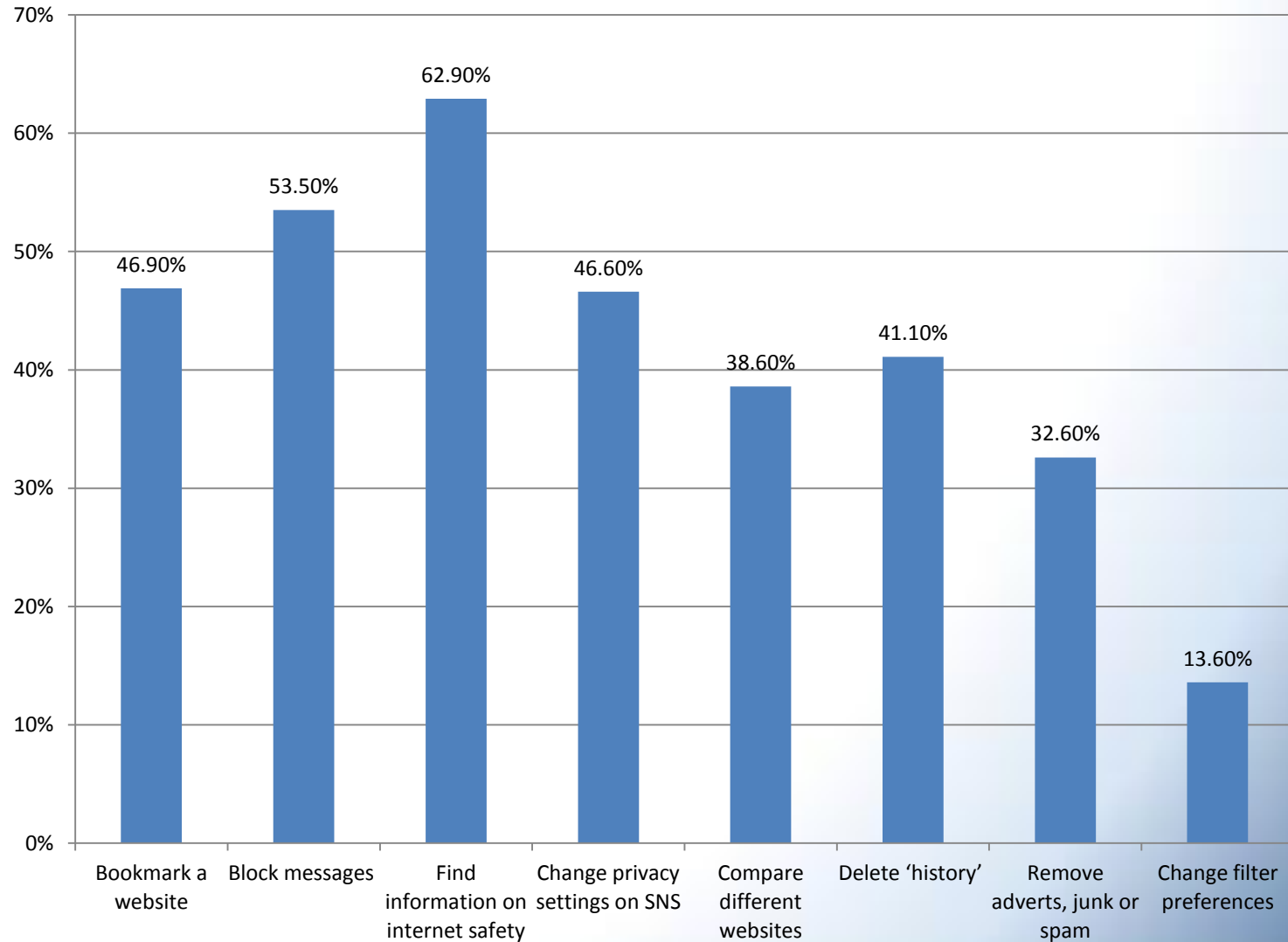
- Child's school: 46%

- Safety websites: 30.4%

Coping with Risk - Parents

- 53.6% think that their children are able to deal with what bothers them online.
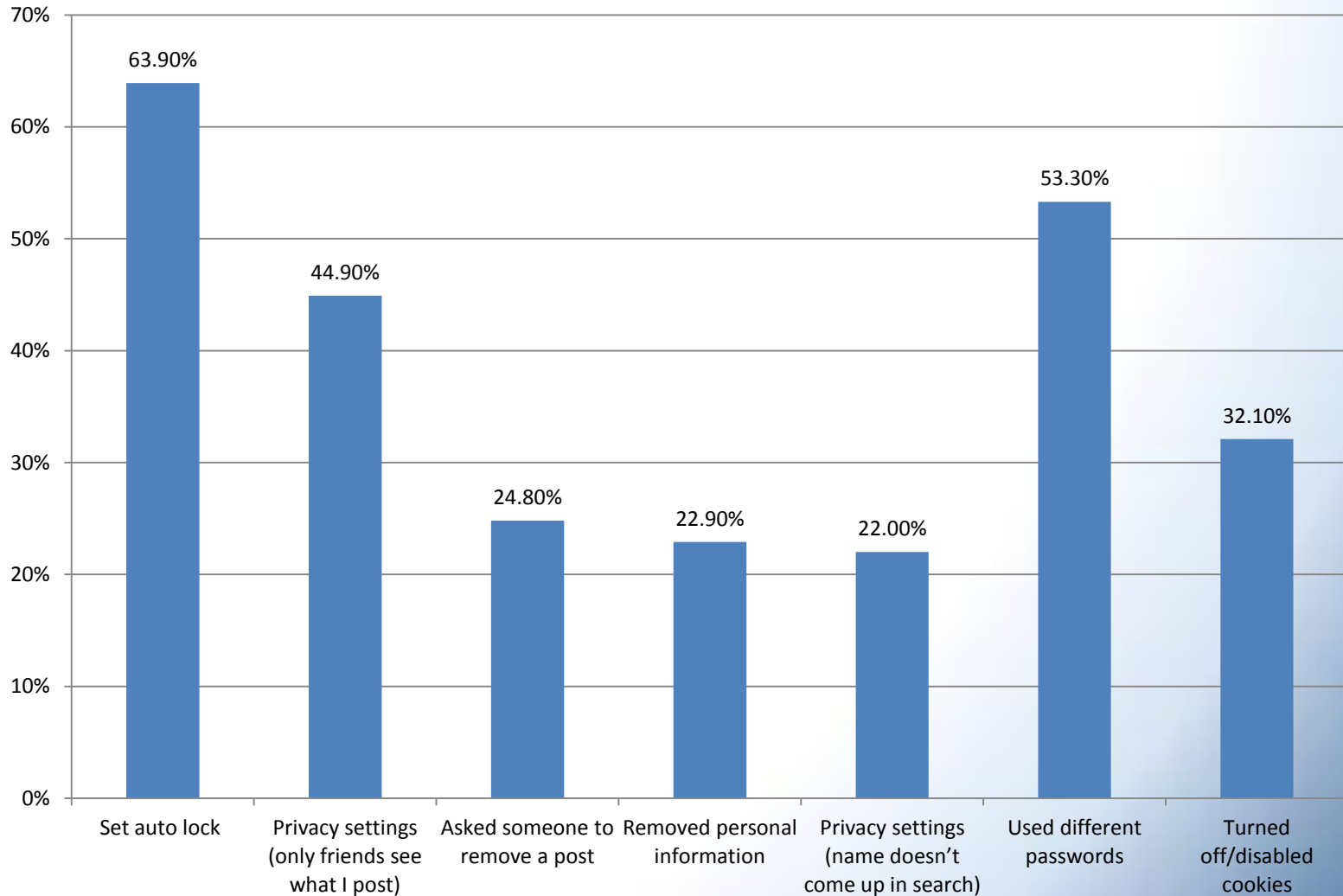
- 22.6% were not aware of their children's abilities.

Parents' Abilities to help their Children
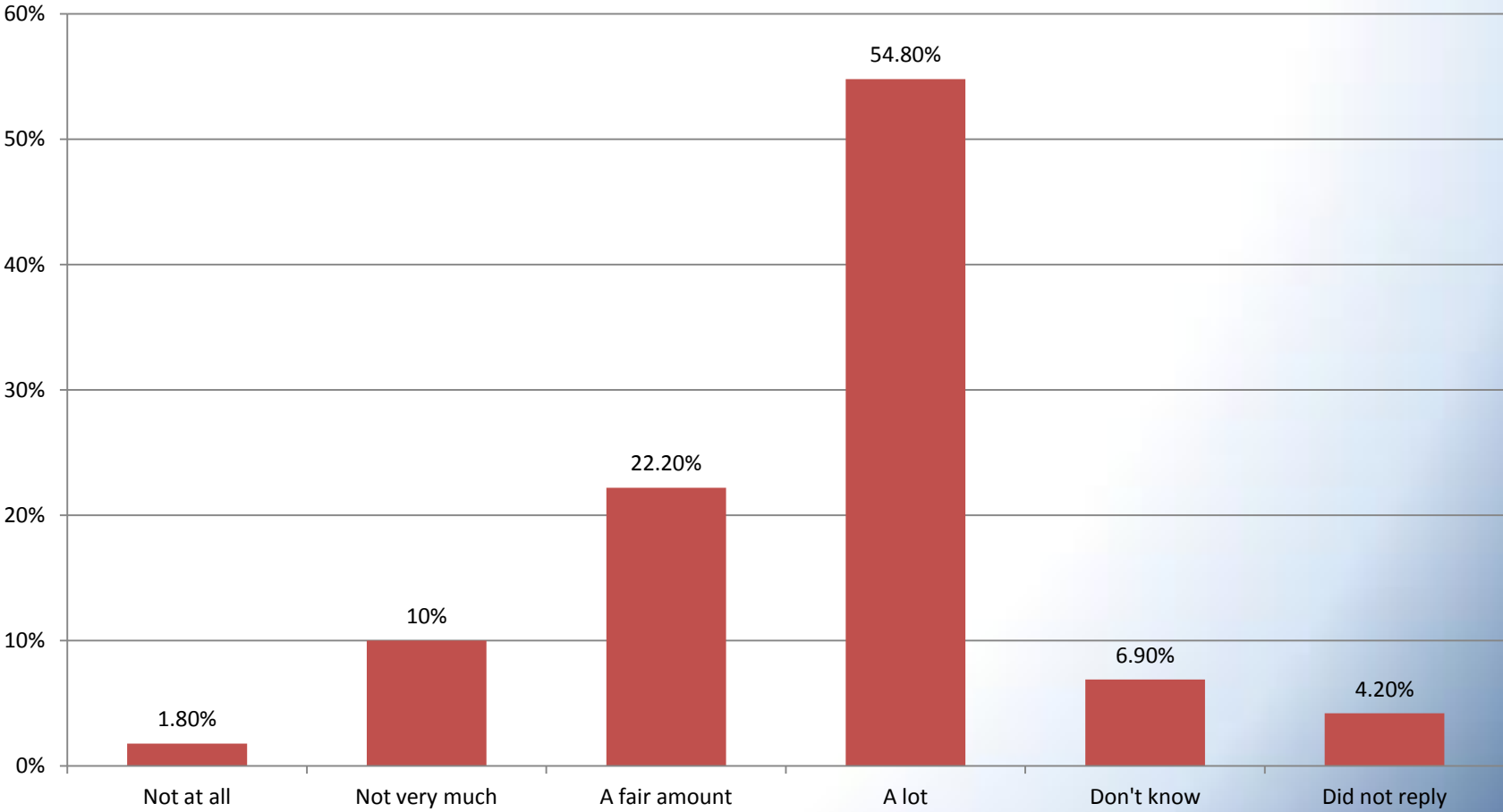
Digital Literacy Skills

Parental Strategies

- 67% spoke to their child about online dangers
- 66% kept track of websites visited by their child
- 58% spoke to their child about what they do online
- 29% use blocking or filtering software
- 39% check child's contacts and friends
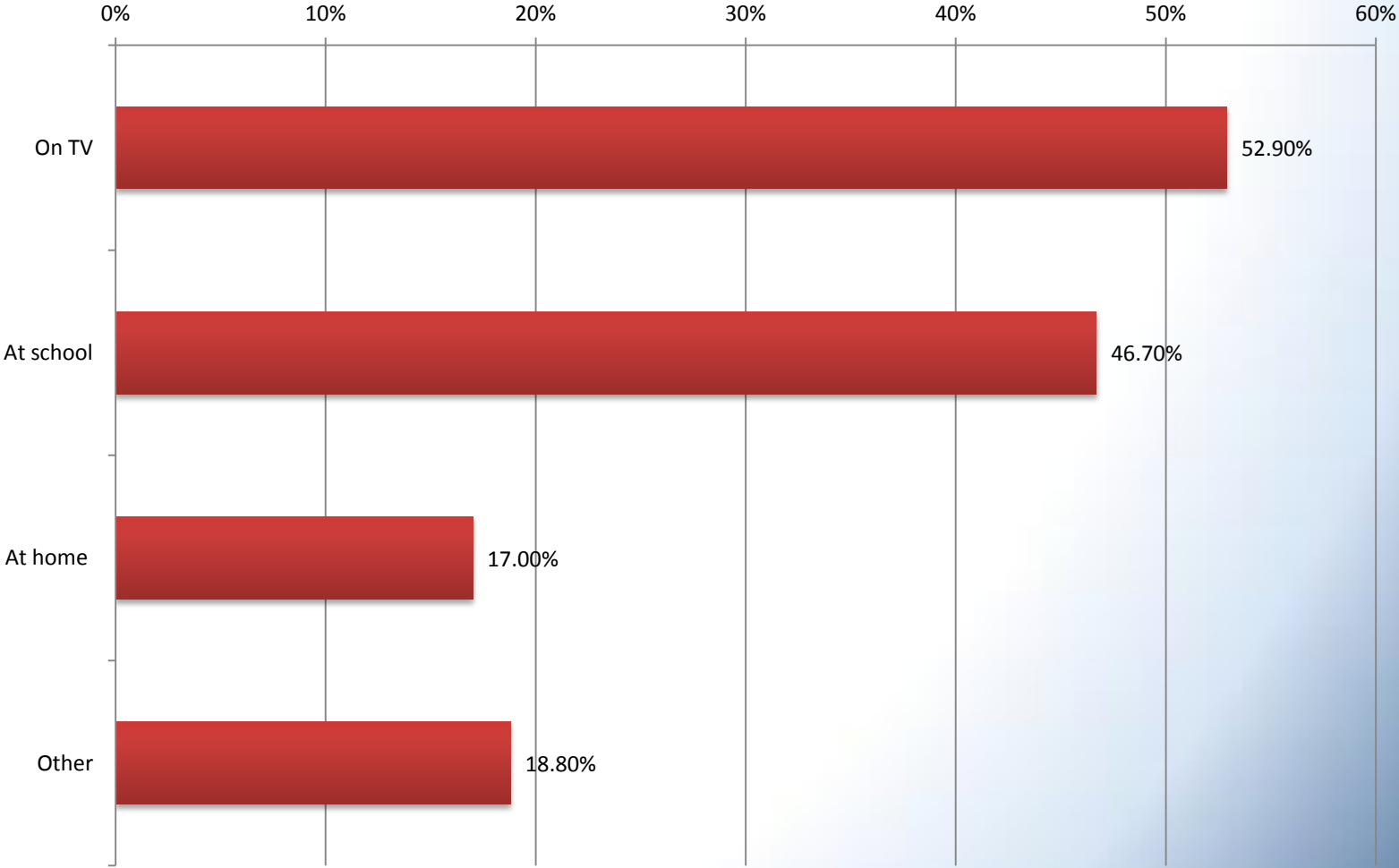- 1.6% don't let their child use the internet

be SMART ONLINE!

- Those who had seen the logo:
  - Children – 53.8%
  - Parents – 39.9%

Where Children had seen the Logo
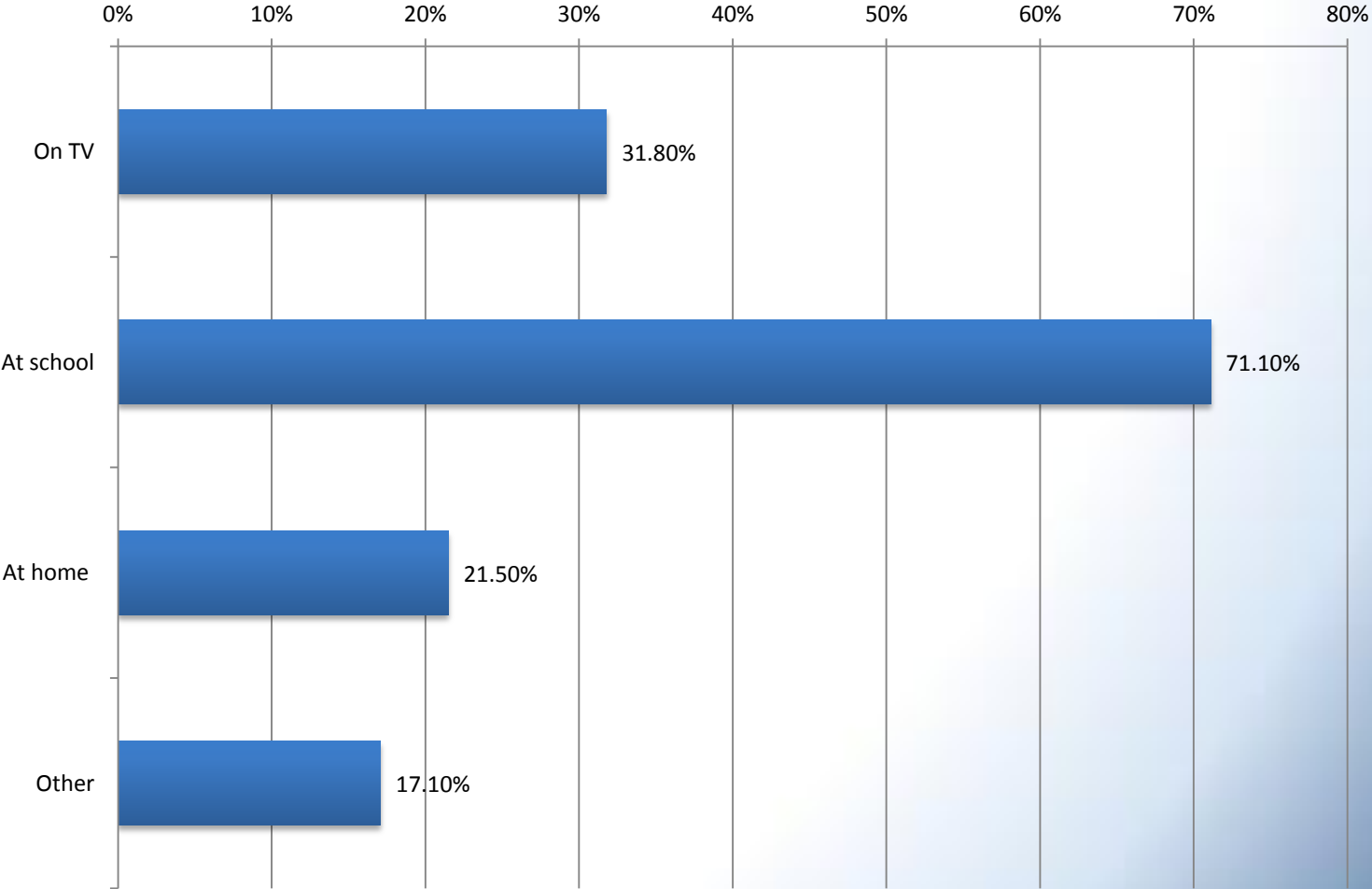
Where Parents had seen the Logo

Concluding Observations

- Parents should be more aware of where their children access the internet from.

- Adopt appropriate strategies to deal with the increased use of social networking and the children's increased access to internet in mobile devices.

Concluding Observations

- Parents are to ensure that safety measures are applied on all devices.

- Organising training sessions for children and parents together

- While it is important that children are well versed in digital literacy, it is also essential that this should be accompanied by programmes of media education.

Thank You