



# Children's diet and lifestyle patterns

## Influence of parental concerns & attitudes

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National Research  
**FLAGSHIPS**



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## Influence of parental concerns & attitudes

- **Background**
  - Healthy Weight and Wellbeing for Children Project
  - Child obesity prevention: supporting parents as part of the solution
- **Consumer research: engaging and supporting parents**
  - Objectives and methods
  - Parental concerns
    - Prompted and unprompted
  - Parental attitudes
    - Difficulties in achieving healthy diet in children
    - Difficulties in achieving child physical activity recommendations
  - Implications for engaging and supporting parents

# Healthy Weight and Wellbeing for Children

Determinants of eating, activity patterns and behaviour change



Program development and evaluation

Engagement with stakeholders

Parents & Families



Intervention research



Aiming to encourage and support parents to prioritise healthy eating and physical activity for their children



# Obesity prevention: A multi-factorial approach required

- Primary and secondary prevention
- Adults and children
- Nutrition & activity patterns plus behaviour modification
- **Range of intervention approaches**
  - Legislative/ regulatory
  - Modifying food supply and physical environment
  - Media
  - Health education/ behavioural theory – individuals, communities, professionals
- **Across a number of intervention settings**
  - Populations, communities, neighbourhoods
  - Schools & child care settings, worksites
  - Health settings
  - Families and individuals – the home environment; parent-led change; cultural & consumer resistance
- **Consider system, environment and organizational issues as well as individual & group behaviour change (Summerbell et al 2007)**

# Obesity prevention: promoting healthy eating & activity in children

- Children spend the majority of their time at school or at home
  - Obesity prevention in schools to date has had limited impact
  - Even school setting requires the support and engagement of parents
  - Limited research to date to guide intervention via parents or at home
- Unique challenges in engaging and supporting parents
  - Perception of children's diets and activity patterns
  - Absence of visible health impairment
  - Perception of child's weight status
  - Mix of environmental and internal drivers
  - Potential for harm (body image, disordered eating)
- Parent-led behaviour change
  - Addressing parents own behaviour
  - Facilitating behaviour change in others (their children)

# Consumer research: Engaging and supporting parents

Study objective was to understand parents' concerns and attitudes toward:

- children's dietary intake
- participation in physical activity
- influences on diet and lifestyle
- their children's weight



# Methodology

- Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
  - Questionnaire developed by CSIRO
  - Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute conducted interviews
    - Early December 2007
    - 41 trained interviewers
- Recruitment via online research panel
  - Representative of the Internet population
  - Sample drawn from 5246 panelists
  - Selection based on location, age and gender of child
  - Participant had the primary knowledge about child food habits, meal preparation and daily routine

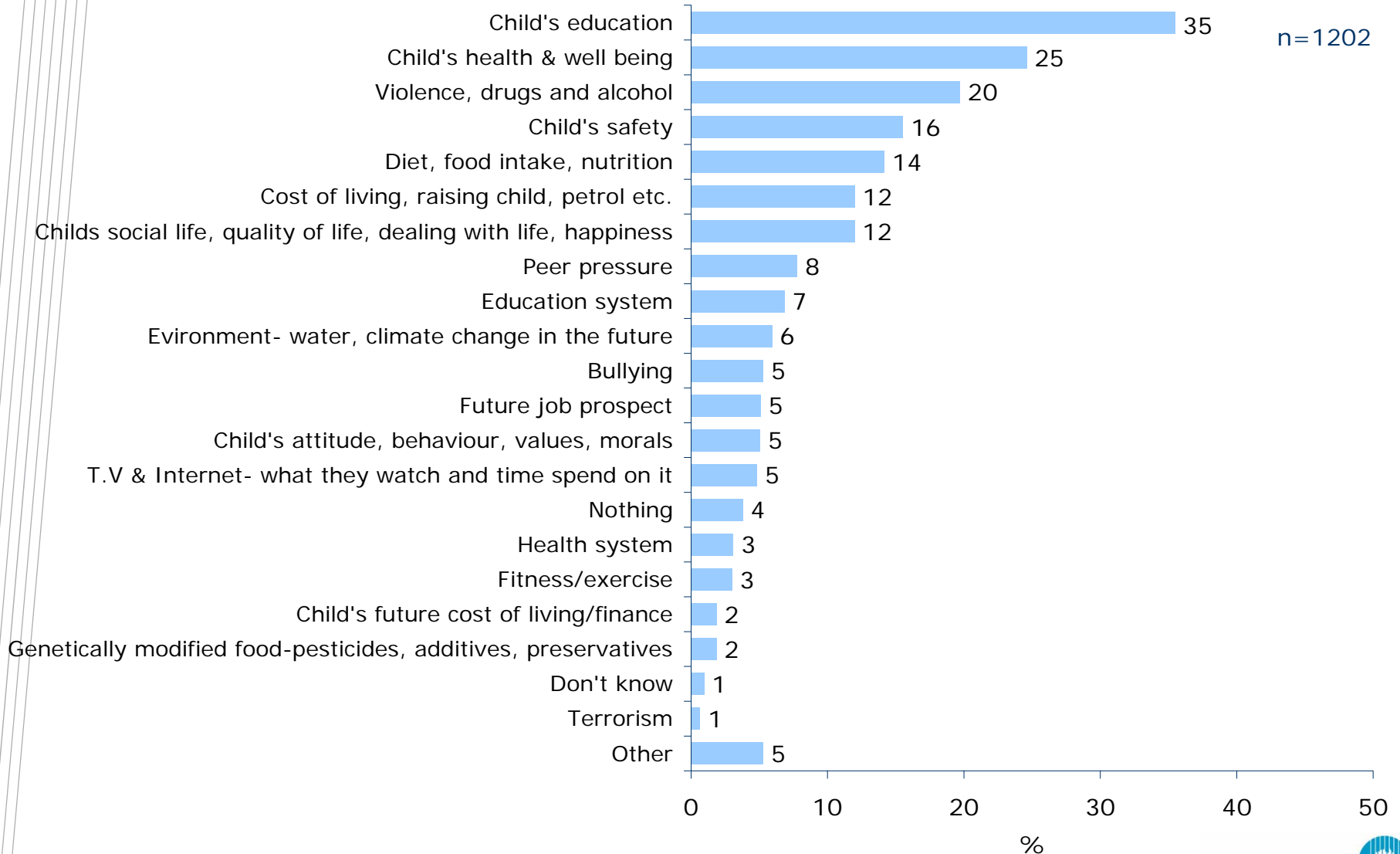
# Methodology

- Data weighted to adjust for parental education status
- Analyses undertaken
  - Descriptive statistics
  - Comparison by child age and gender
  - Categorical data - Chi-square test (Fischer's exact test; proportions given)
  - Ordinal data – Kendal's tau-b test (linear patterns; association direction)
- Power
  - 95% confidence interval of  $\pm 2.8\%$
- Significance was set at  $p < 0.05$

# Sample demographics

- 1202 Australian parents of children aged 2 to 16 years
  - Geographical spread representative of Australian population
  - 78% 1 or 2 child households
  - 75% female
  - 72% in their thirties to forties
  - 64% working parents
  - 75% \$25000 to \$105 000 per year
  - 55% post-secondary school
- Child characteristics
  - Even distribution child gender and age bands
  - 18% preschool
  - 50% primary school
  - 28% secondary school

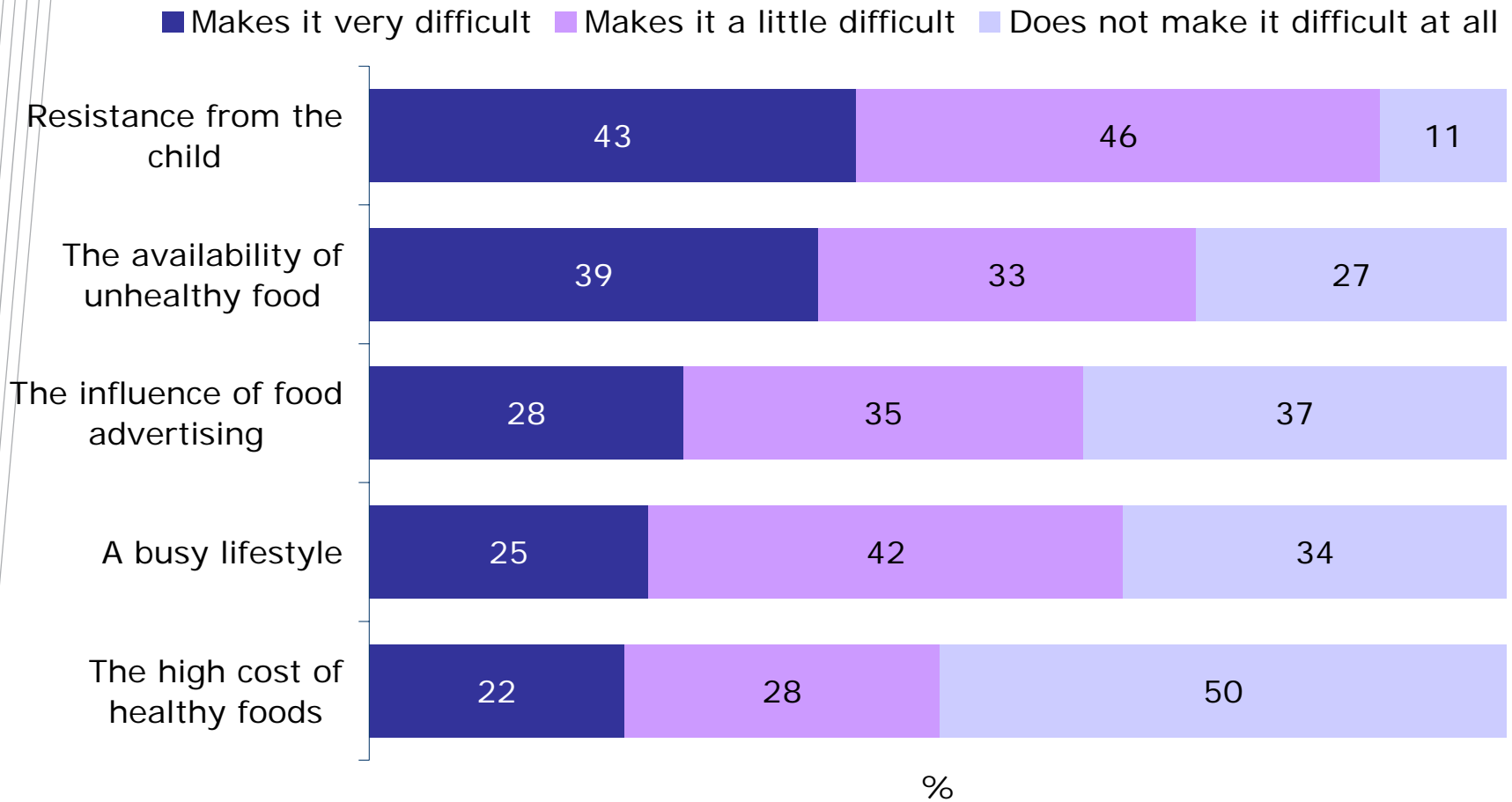
# Parents unprompted concerns about their child



# Parent prompted concerns about child's diet

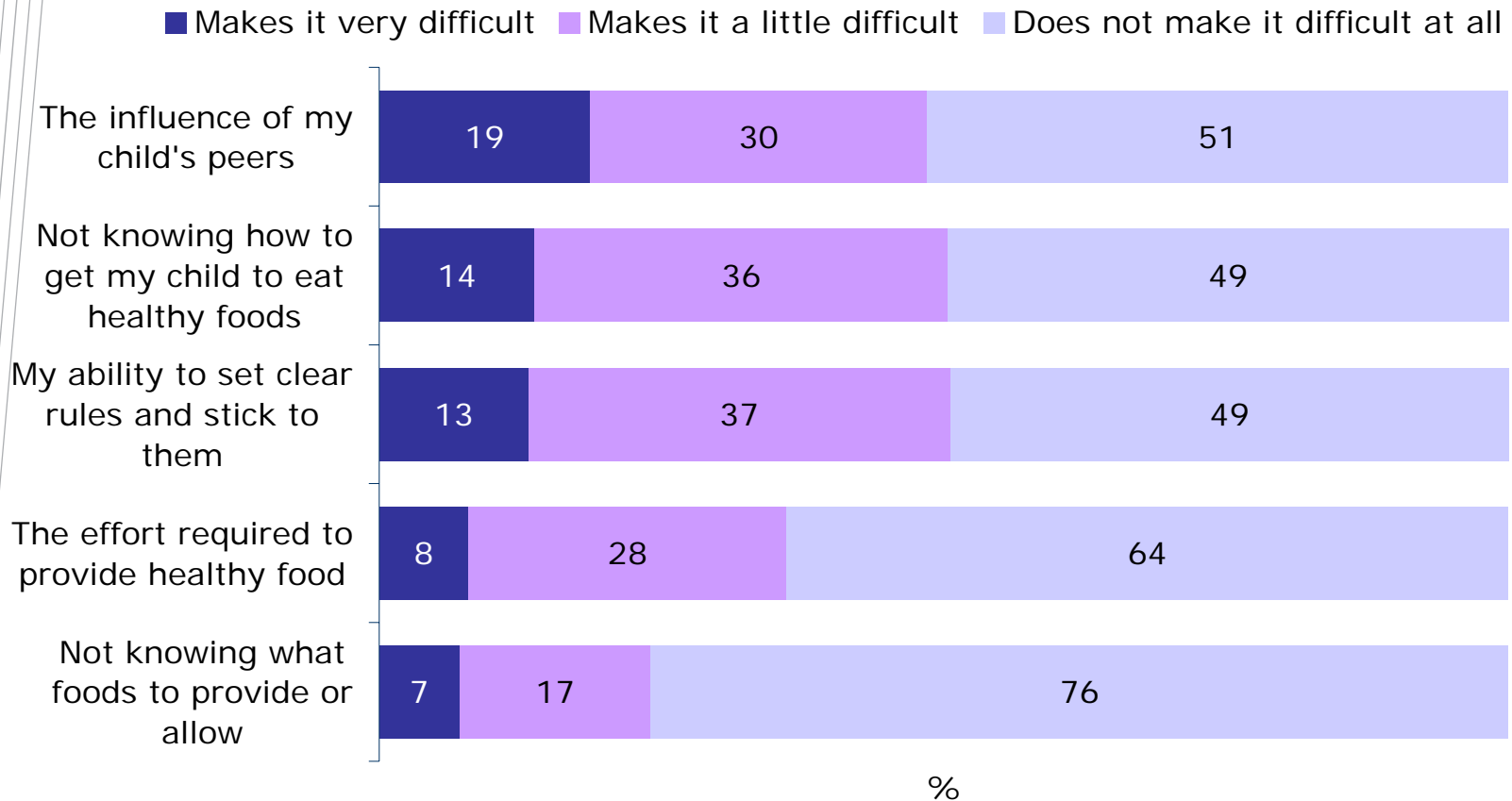
- 53% of parents indicated they had some concern
  - Eats too much junk
  - Too few vegetables
  - Concern about additives
  - Intake sugary drinks
  - Limited variety
- 47% of parents had no concern about their child's diet
  - Child has a balanced diet
  - Parent has control over child's diet
  - Child watches what they eat
  - Child is not fussy

# Parental difficulties: children eating a healthy diet



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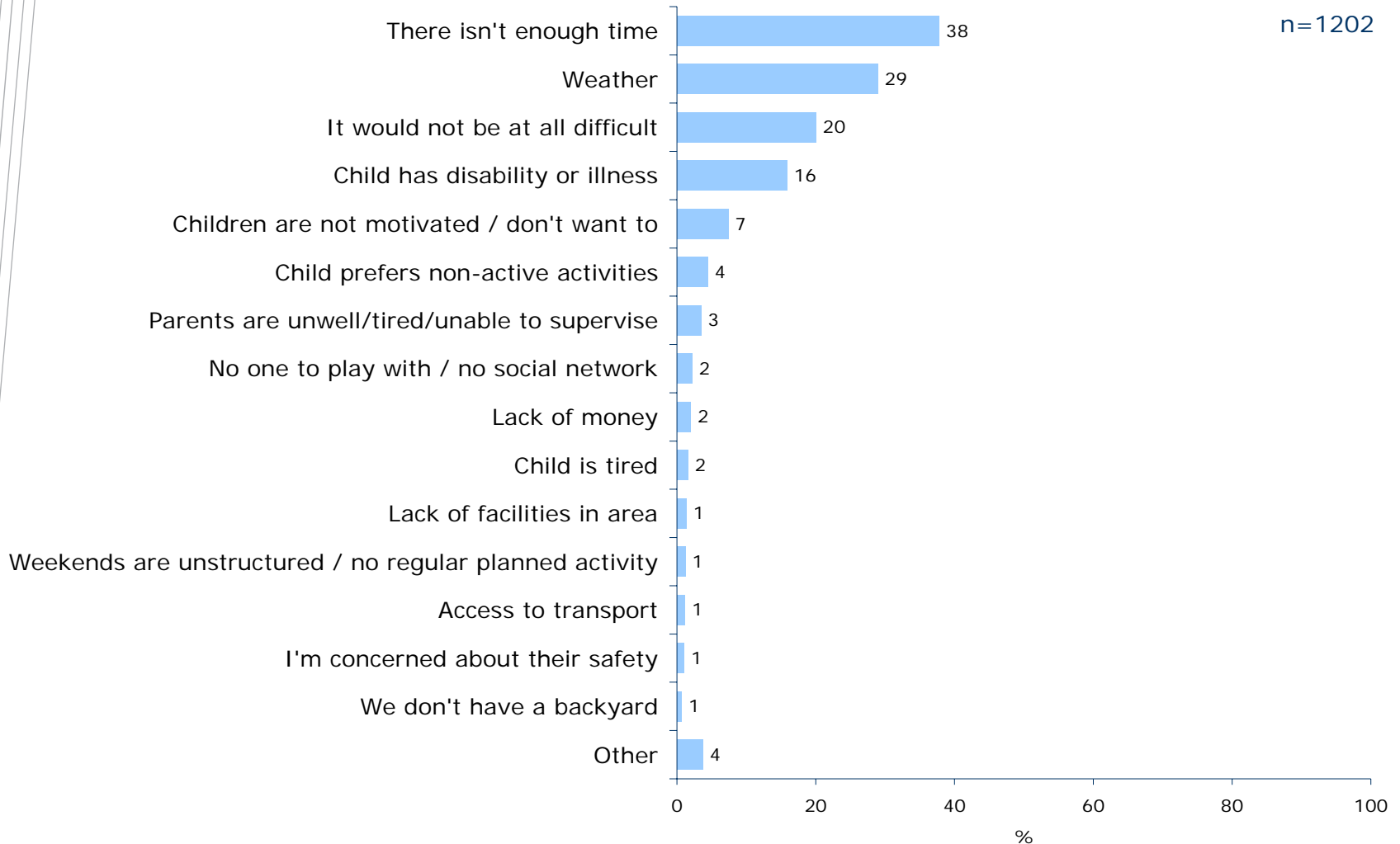


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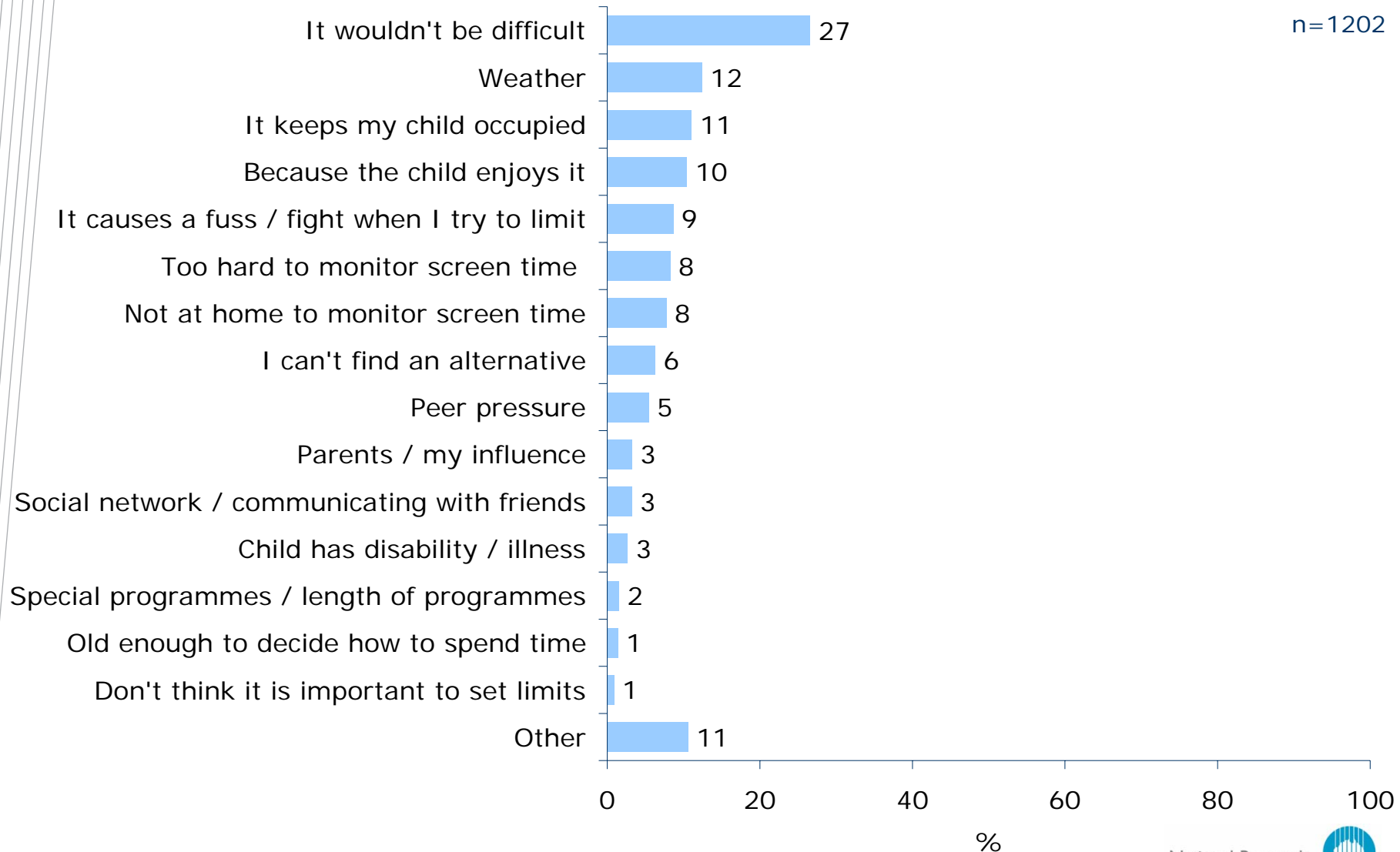
# Parent prompted concerns about child's activity

- Only 28% of parents indicated they had some concern about child activity levels
  - Primary concern was child not active enough
  - Influence of screen activities
  - Main reason for no concern (72% parents) was perception that child was active enough
- 46% of parents indicated they had some concern about child screen time
  - Primary concern was screen time duration
  - 11% screen time content/ safety
  - 6% lost opportunity for being active/ outdoors
  - 1% advertising content
  - Main reasons for no concern were child not wanting to engage screen time much (44%), having screen time rules (36%)

# Perceived difficulties for child achieving at least 1 hour activity a day



# Perceived difficulties for limiting screen time to a maximum of 2 hours a day



# Implications: Engaging & supporting parents

- Linking in with parental concerns
  - Engaging parents
  - Relevant to parents
- Framing intervention or public health messages
  - Use parents experience
  - May need an indirect approach
- Understanding parent perceptions
  - Need to be inspiring and relevant
  - Role for raising awareness
  - Working with their perceived barriers

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# Thank you

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