

Toronto's Deepening Digital Divide: Impact on Families and Children

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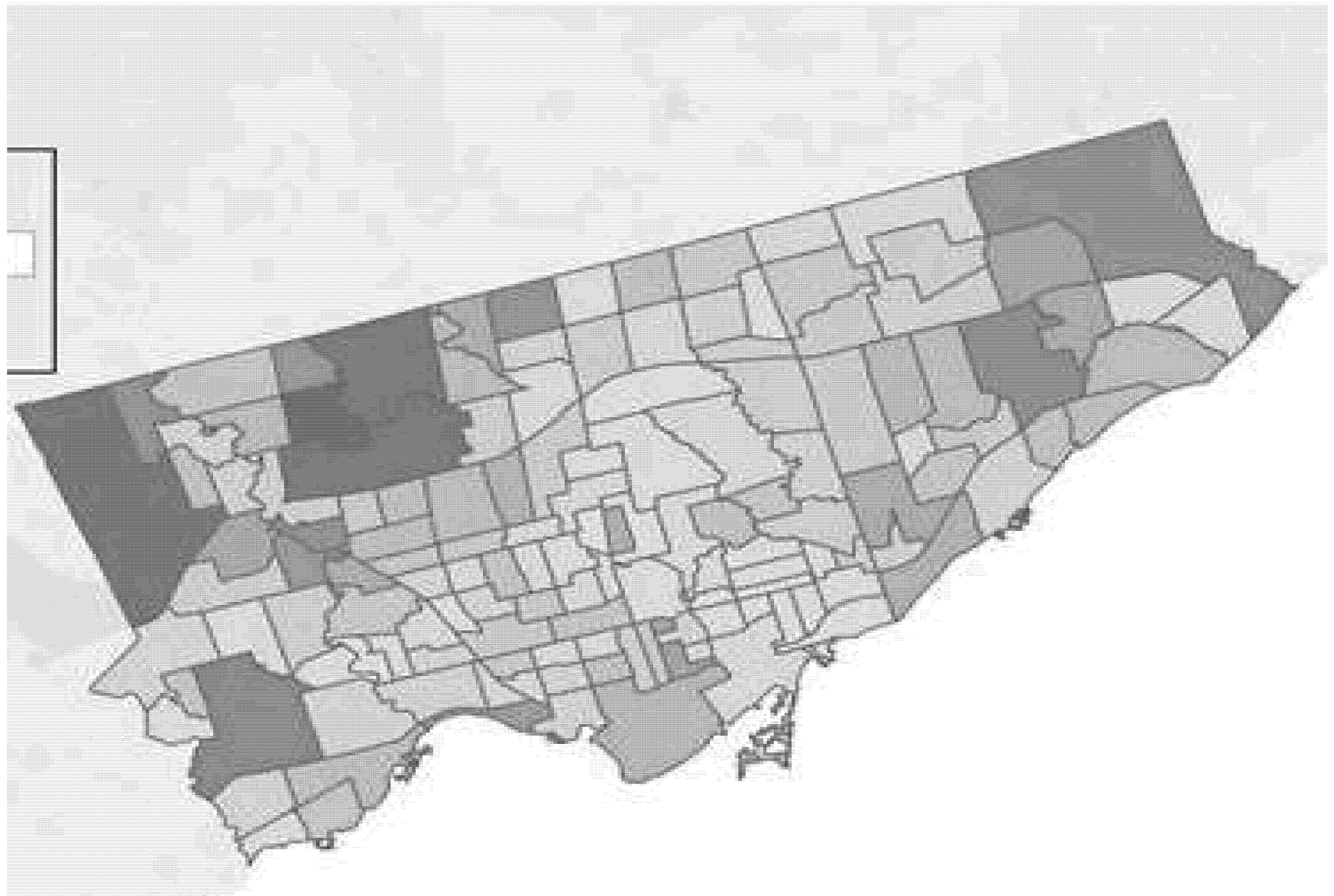
Context

- COVID has increased our dependence on the internet for access to work, to services and to school
- COVID has also deepened the digital divide between those who are able to access affordable high speed internet and those who cannot
- Access is a function of network infrastructure but also affordability, devices and skills
- Colour of poverty, colour of COVID, colour of lack of access to high speed internet intersect
- Education is the strongest predictor of social mobility -
- vulnerable children and youth and their families need supports

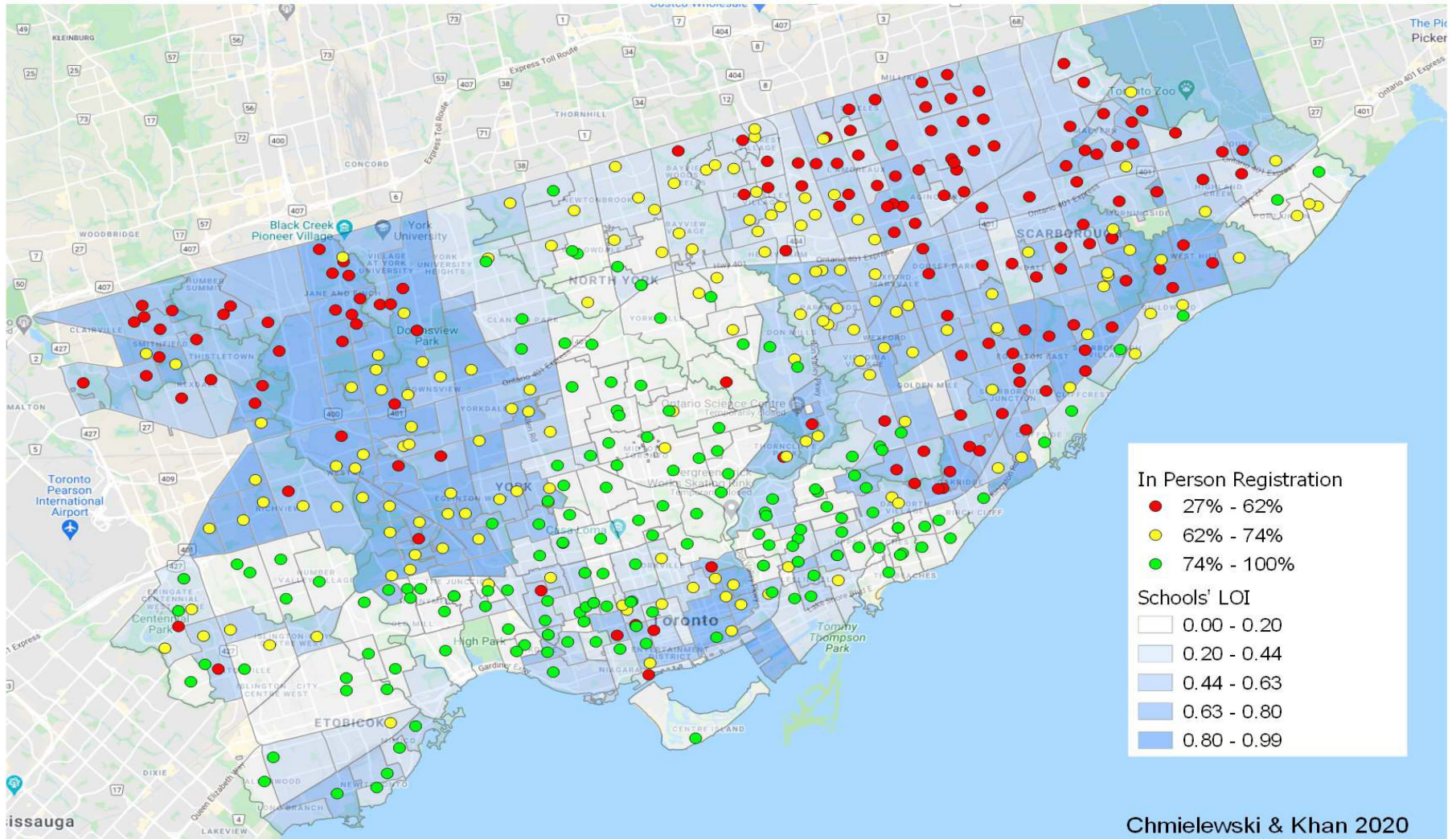
Reminder

- From 2006–2011, the Toronto District School Board documented that 69 % of Black students graduated compared to 84 % of white students.
- Only 25 % of Black students were confirmed in Ontario universities compared to 60 % for other racialized students and 47 per cent for white students.
- These outcomes have been improved (particularly with the elimination of streaming) but we run the risk that COVID + the digital divide will turn back the clock

Map of Cumulative Cases by Neighbourhood



Percent Opting for In Person School by LOI, TDSB Elementary Schools

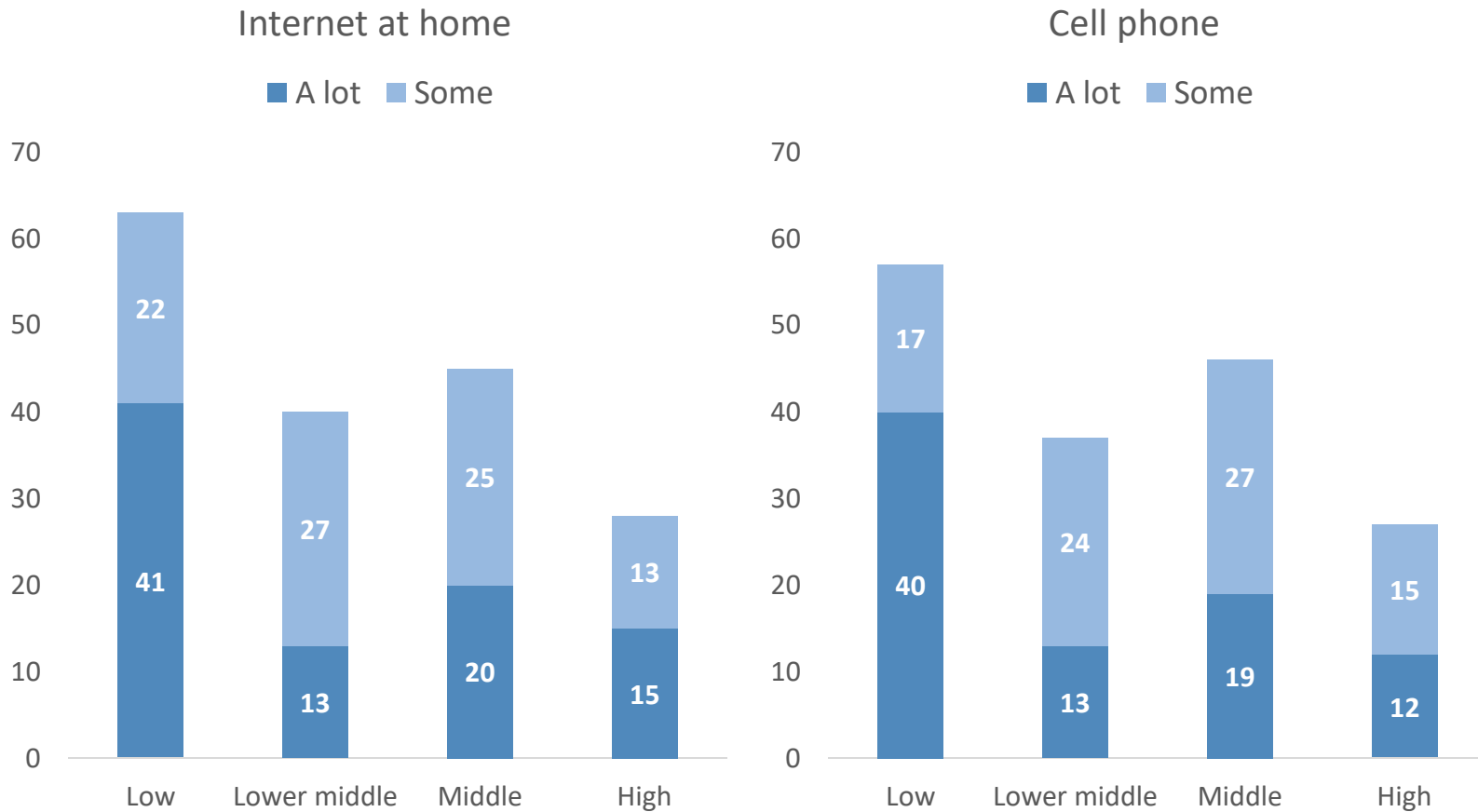


Survey on Employment and Skills Wave 2 (December 2020) by



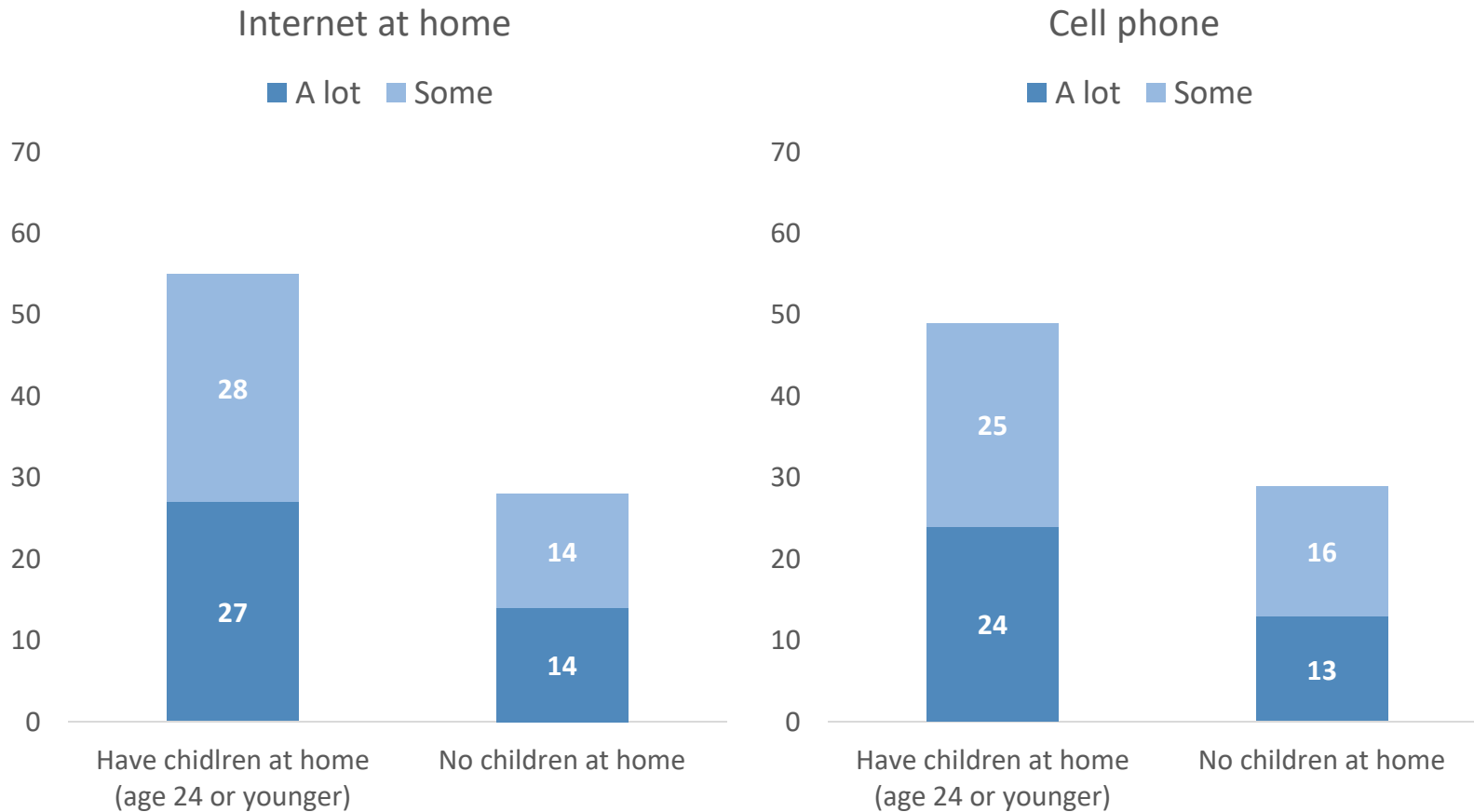
- Residents of Northwest Toronto are twice as likely as the Canadian average to say they have been greatly affected by the pandemic. Canada (n= 5,351)
- Income-losses due to the pandemic are more pronounced among lower-income than higher income households in the GTA Ontario (n= 1,052)
- In general, GTA residents are more likely than the Canadian average to be working from home during the pandemic, **but this does not apply to residents of northwest Toronto** GTA (n= 701)
- GTA residents are more likely than the Canadian average to have children who have difficulty completing their online schoolwork due to limited access to computer & Internet – **and this difference is even more pronounced for racialized GTA residents** Toronto (n= 487)
- Within the GTA, **low-income residents, racialized residents, and parents with children at home are all much more likely to be worried about paying for their home internet and cell phones** Northwest Toronto (n= 292)

Worry about paying for Internet and cell phone, GTA only, by household income



Q.42H How much, if at all, do you worry about being able to pay for each of the following over the next few months? A) High-speed internet connection at home; B) Your cell phone bill

Worry about paying for Internet and cell phone, GTA only, parents and others



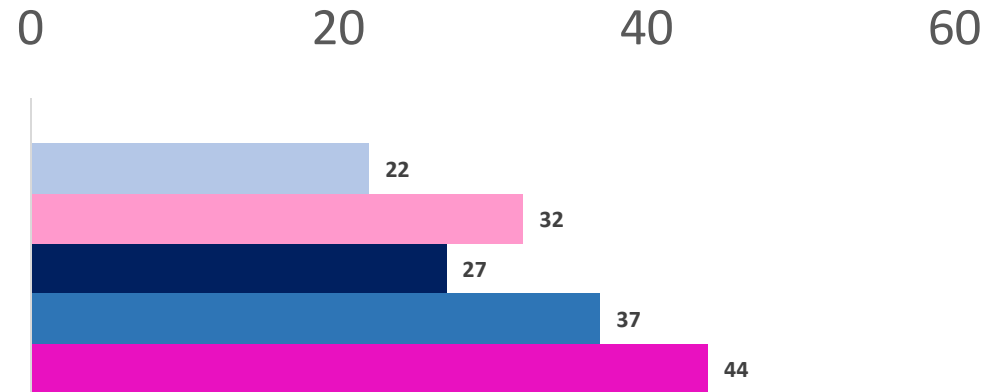
Q.42H How much, if at all, do you worry about being able to pay for each of the following over the next few months? A) High-speed internet connection at home; B) Your cell phone bill

Very or somewhat likely that, as your children do their schoolwork at home due to the coronavirus outbreak...

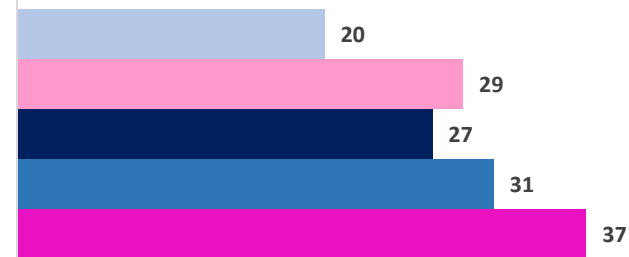
Subsample: parents with children learning online

- U.S.
- Ontario
- GTA - racialized
- Canada
- GTA

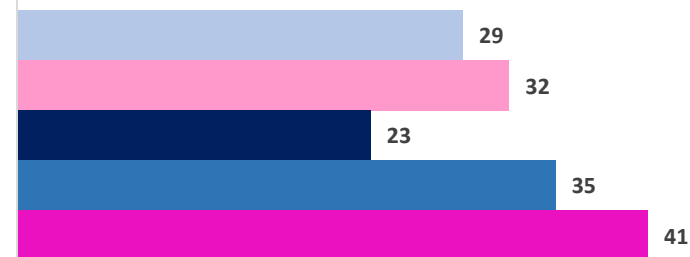
Have to use public Wi-Fi to finish their schoolwork because there is not a reliable internet connection at home



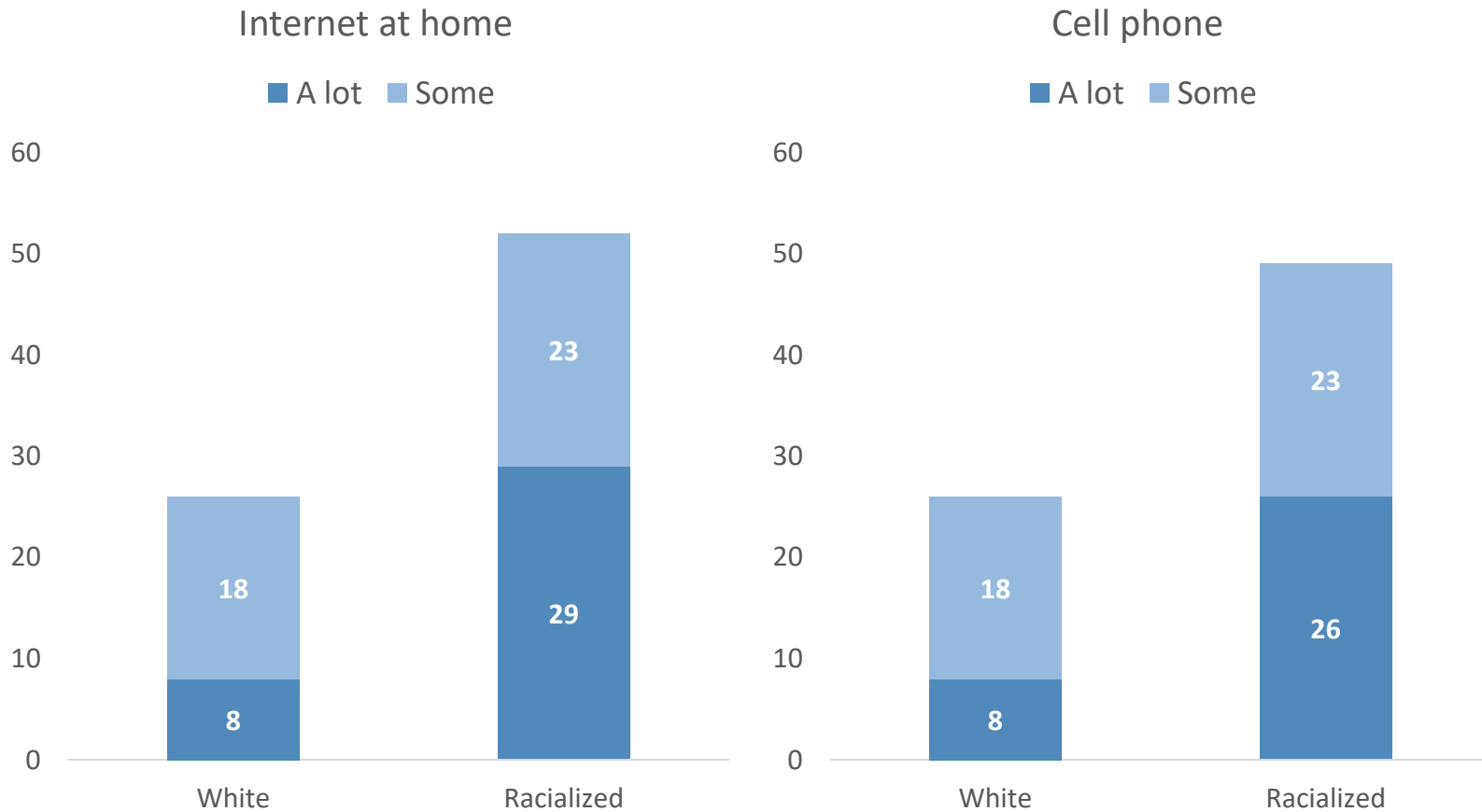
Not be able to complete their schoolwork because they do not have access to a computer at home



Have to do their schoolwork on a cellphone



Worry about paying for Internet and cell phone, GTA only, by racial identity

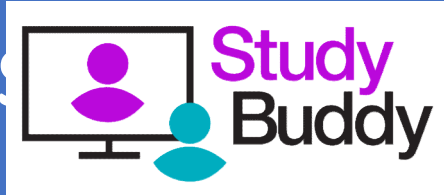


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Multiplier effects – mental health

Children's Mental Health Ontario found one in three Ontario parents reported their child's mental health had deteriorated from being home from school, and more than half of the parents noticed behavioural changes in their child including drastic changes in mood, behaviour and personality, to difficulty sleeping and more. Those with pre-existing mental health issues have been hit particularly hard.

American Psychological Association (APA) and WHO have highlighted impact of lockdown on family discord and family violence, including intimate partner violence and child/youth maltreatment. **Risk factors that may contribute to the increased risk of child/youth maltreatment in this context include the heightened rates of parental/caregiver unemployment, family financial stress, lack of social supports and parental mental illness, including increased substance use.**



- Launched in May 2020
- Free online tutoring for Black and marginalized students
- Work Integrated Learning for student teachers

- **143 families**
- **293 students**
- **74 active tutors**
- **2750 sessions**
- **2317 hours of tutoring**

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Recommendations

- Recognize complex nature of digital divide including experience of racialized people
- Enhance affordable access to infrastructure and devices
- Enhance access to support services (including mental health)
- Focus on skills development
- Explore alternative platforms
- Augment online learning