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# *Passing on Ancestral Languages*

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\* On behalf of Martin Turcotte, Statistics Canada, author of the study.



## *Background*

- Many immigrants hope that their mother tongue will be retained by their Canadian-born children.
- Beyond the subjective cultural value, it can be an asset to know another language in addition to English or French.
- Maintaining and transmitting the ancestral language depends on a number of factors (socio-demographic, cultural, socio-psychological, etc.)



## *Research Questions*

- To what extent have the respondents – persons born in Canada of allophone immigrant parents – acquired their parents' mother tongue?
- What proportion of respondents *know* the ancestral language? What proportion use it?
- What factors are associated with a fairly strong probability of passing on the ancestral language?
- Who are most likely to know and use their parents' ancestral language at home?



## *Data and Methodology*

- Ethnic Diversity Survey of 2002
  - 40,000 respondents aged 15 and over
  - Selection of the respondents to this survey was based on responses to the 2001 Census questions on ethnic origin and place of birth of individuals and their parents.
- Target population of the study
  - Persons aged 15 and over **born in Canada** whose parents were allophone immigrants (i.e., both parents were immigrants with a mother tongue other than English or French).
  - 4,500 respondents, representing roughly 1.25 million Canadians.



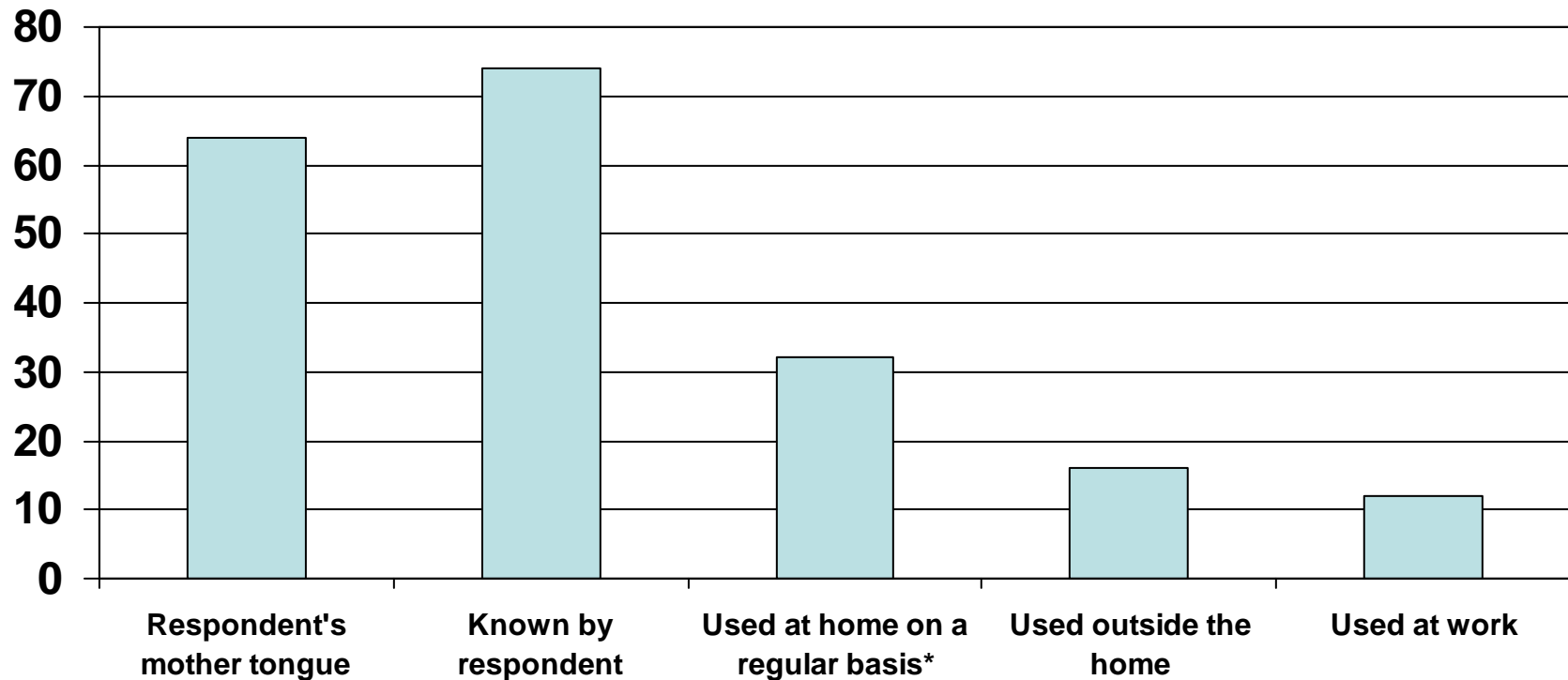
## *Methodology (continued)*

- Results presented here are in percentage form.
- Logistic regression analyses were conducted, holding the different factors constant.



*The majority know the ancestral language but seldom use it in daily life*

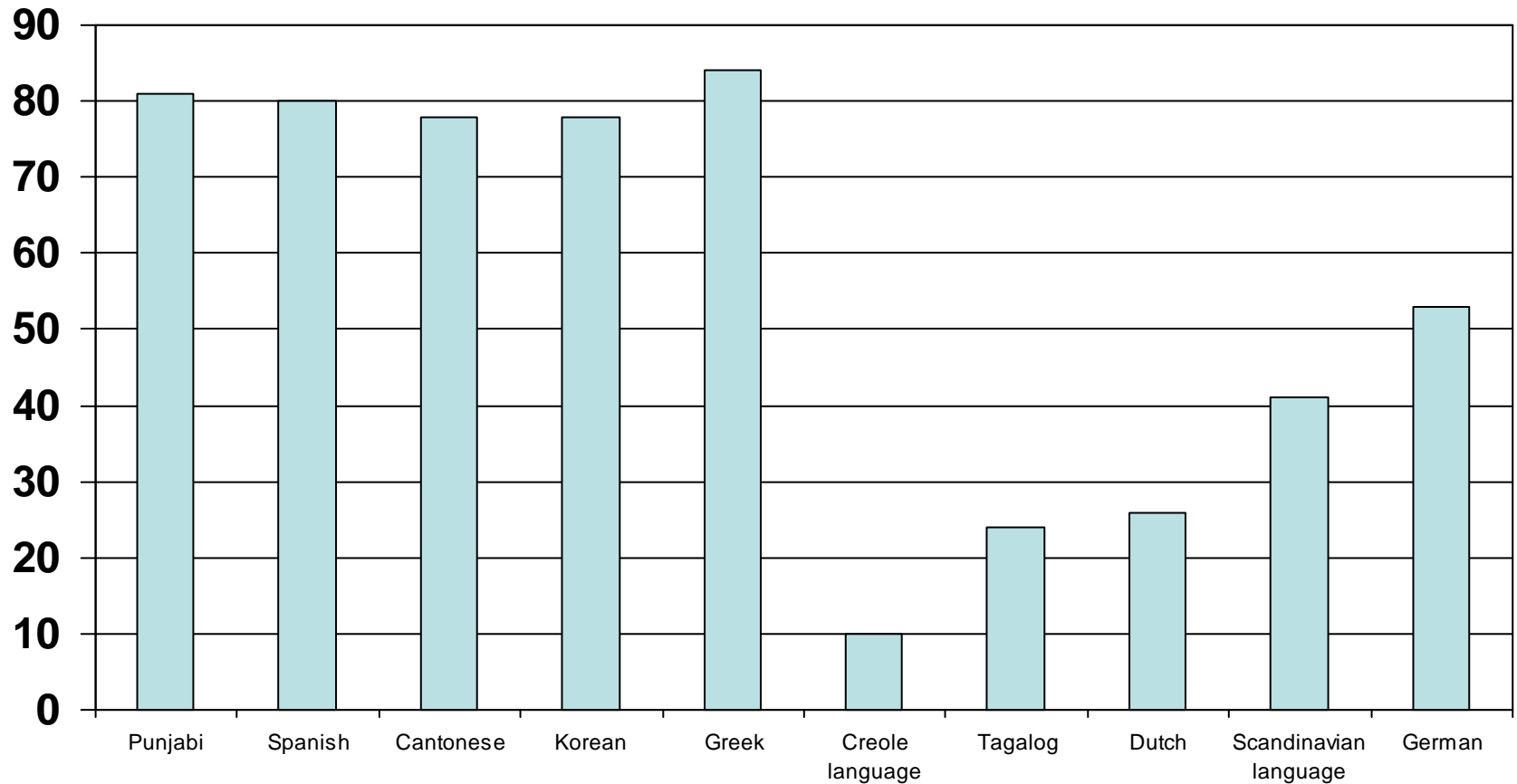
### The ancestral language is...



\* Predominantly or otherwise

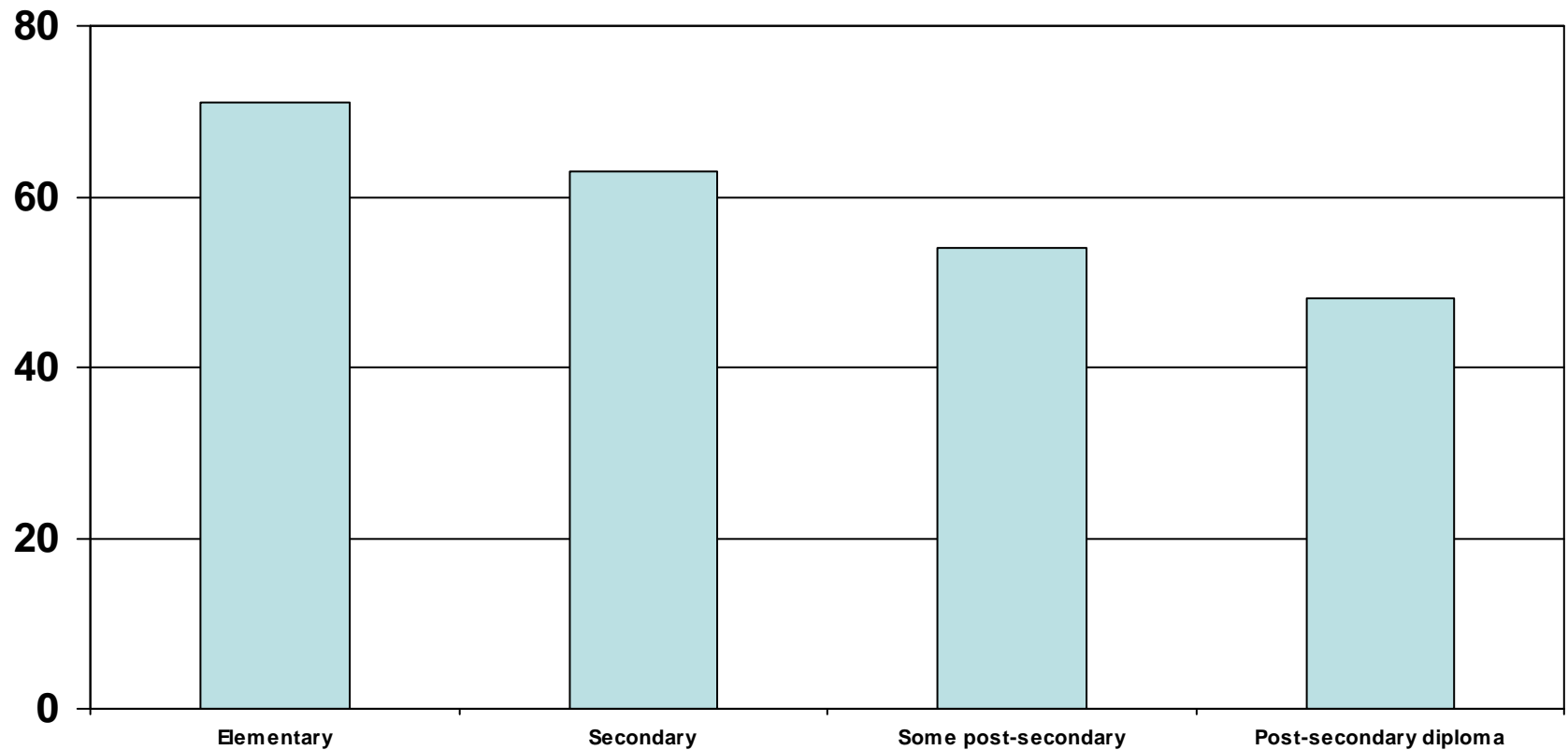


## *Ancestral languages most and least likely to be passed on to children as their mother tongue*





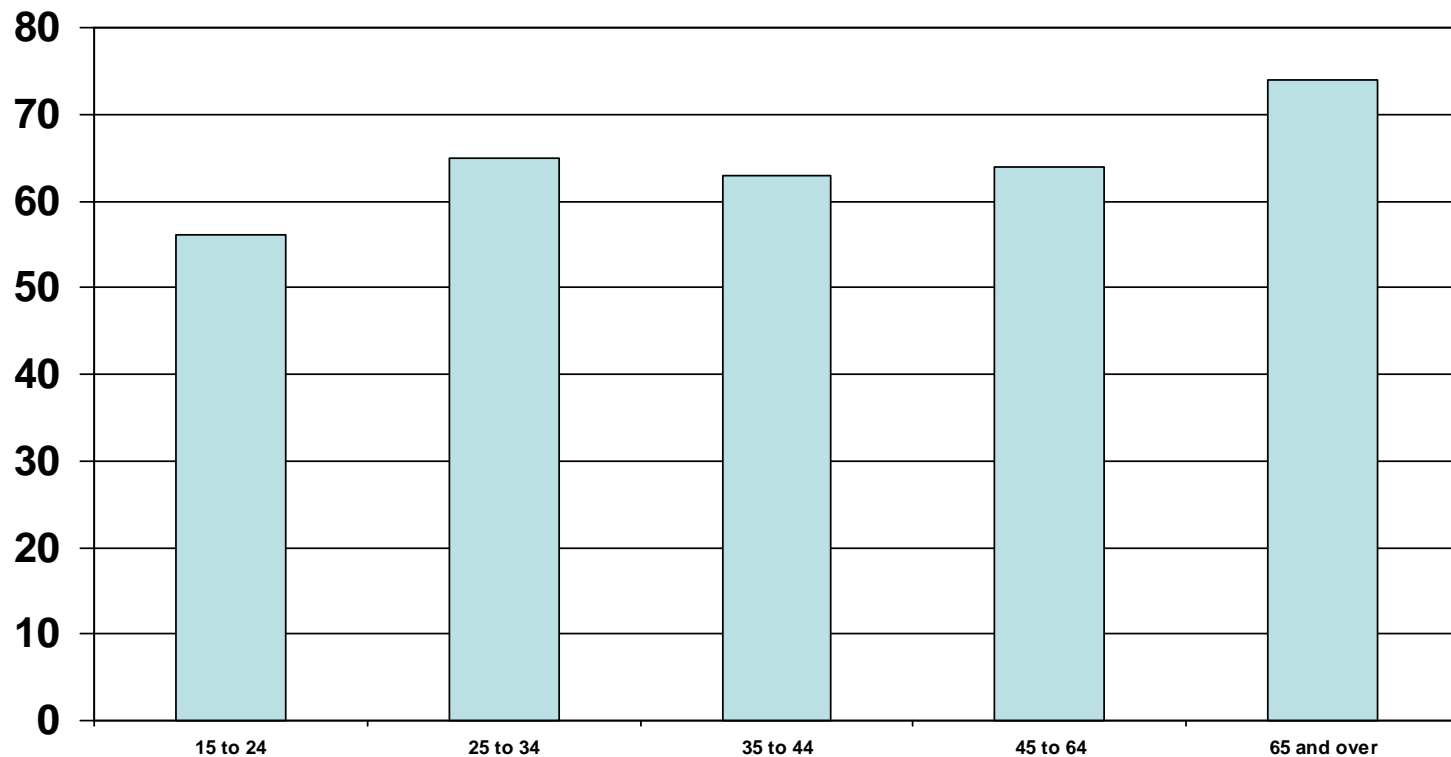
*When the mother is more educated, transmission of the ancestral language is less frequent*





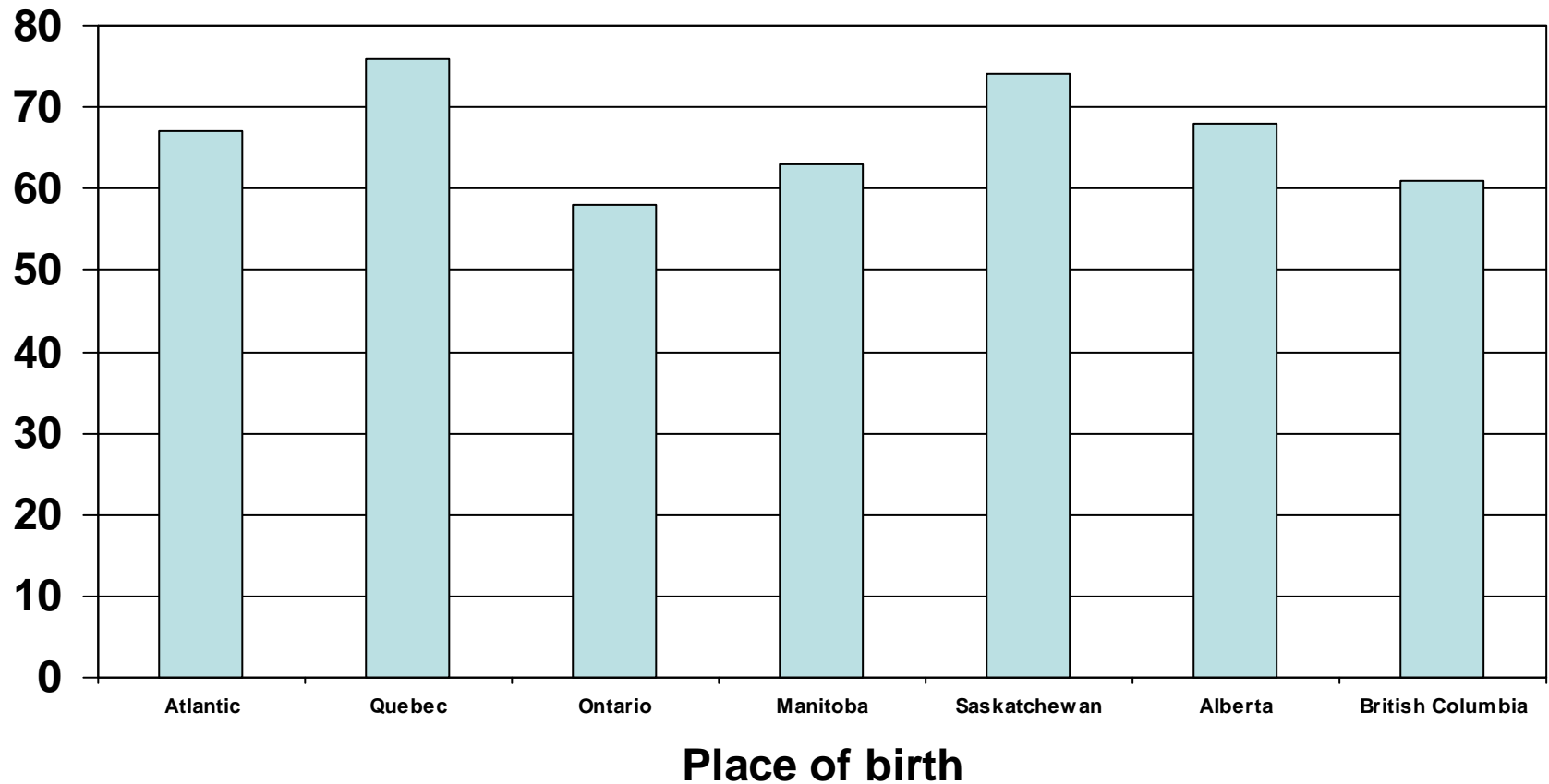


# *Acquisition of the ancestral language is less widespread in the younger cohorts*





*The probability of acquiring the ancestral language as a mother tongue is highest in Quebec*



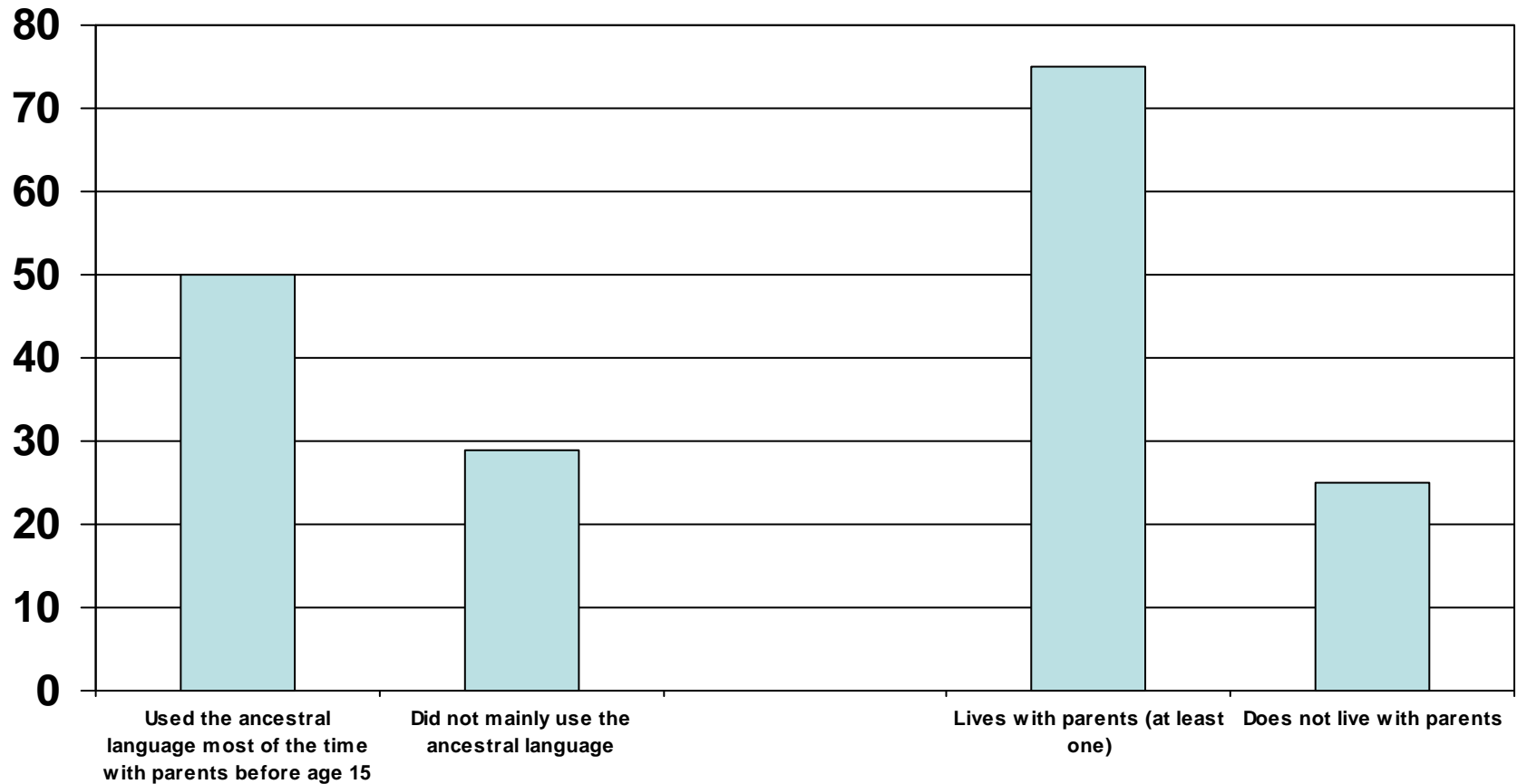


## *Use of the language*

- Having acquired the ancestral language as a mother tongue does not mean that it will then be used frequently.
- The probability of using the ancestral language, either predominantly or at least on a regular basis at home, varies according to language group but also and above all according to family situation (presence of immigrant parents in the household, spouse who knows the ancestral language, presence of children, etc.).
- Results that follow: only for those with a knowledge of the ancestral language.

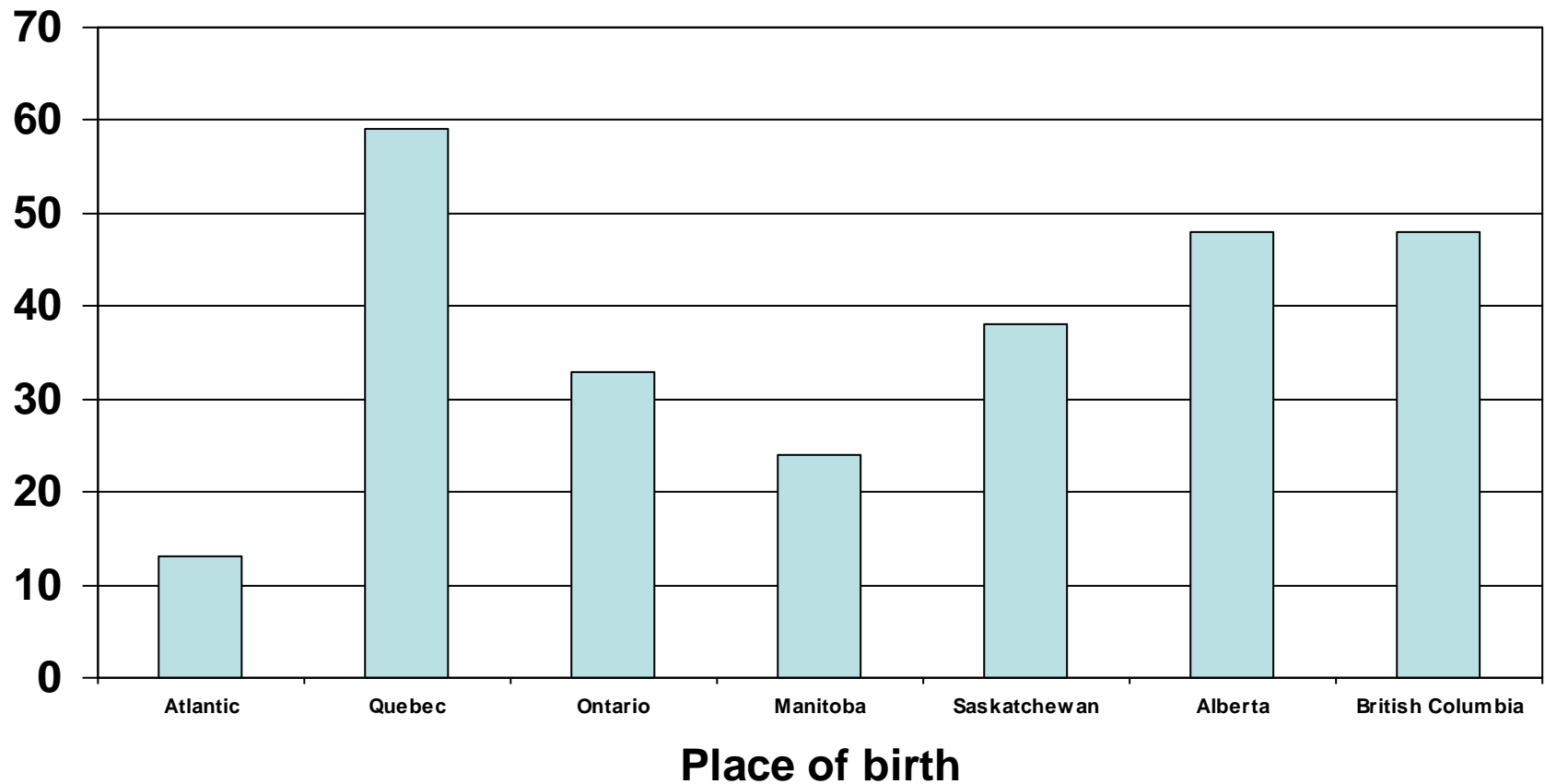


*Having used the ancestral language with one's parents in childhood favours its use later in life, as does living with the parents*





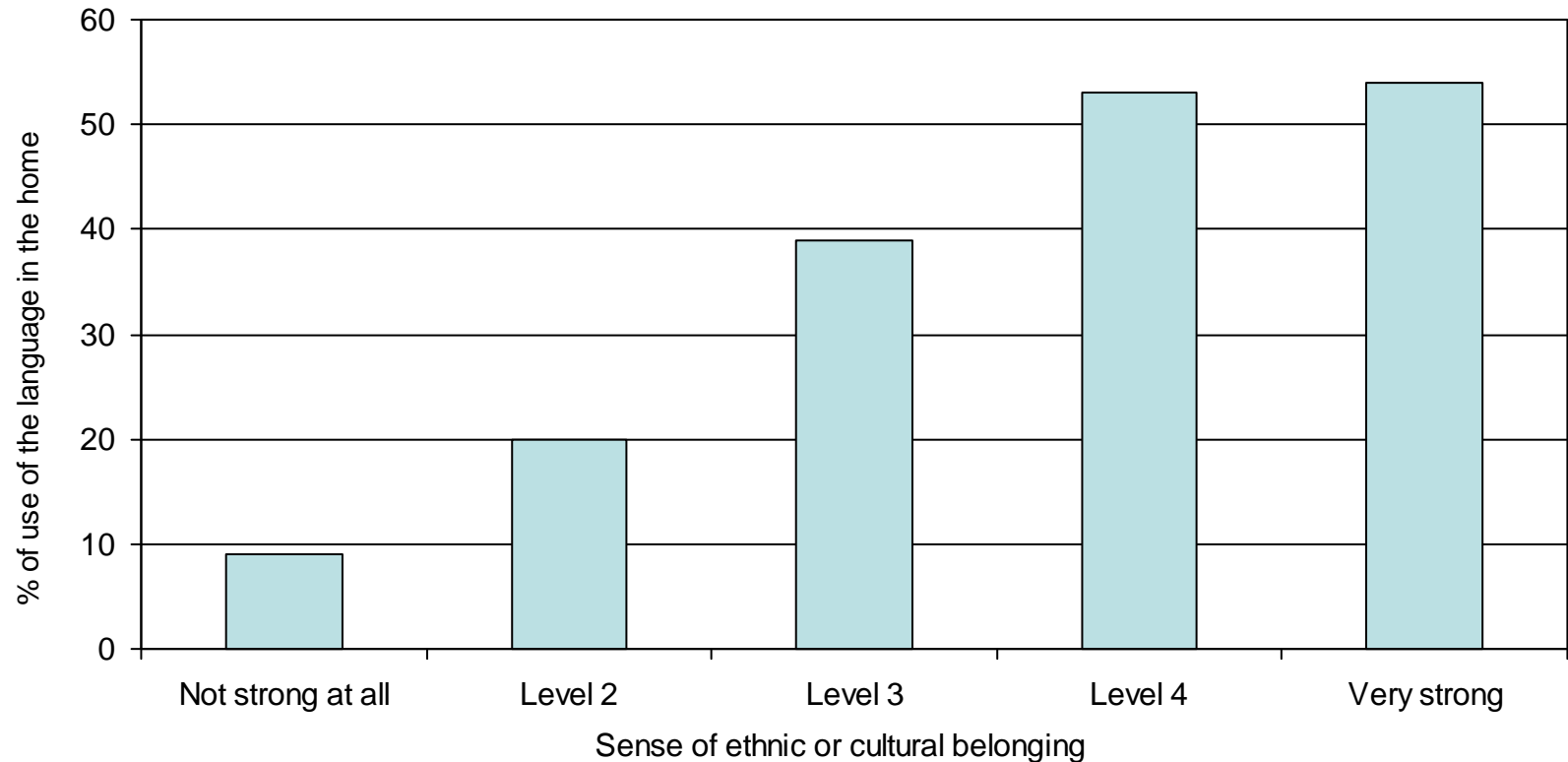
*Persons born in Quebec are more likely to use the ancestral language at home*





## *The strength of the sense of ethnic or cultural belonging makes a big difference in the use of the ancestral language at home*

Use of the ancestral language at home by reported level of sense of ethnic or cultural belonging on a scale of one to five





## *Conclusion*

- Approximately three respondents in four were able to carry on a conversation in their parents' mother tongue.
- However, only one-third of all respondents used this language on a regular basis (either predominantly or otherwise) at home.
- The propensity to know and use the ancestral language varied from one linguistic group to another.
- A higher level of education for the mother was generally associated with less transmission of the ancestral language.
- The use of languages at home is affected by the family situation: language of spouse, presence of parents in the household, experiences during childhood.
- Persons born in Quebec are the most likely to use the ancestral language at home.