

A world map in a light purple color with the outline of India highlighted in a dark green color. The map is centered on the Indian subcontinent.

# **The Impact of the Popular Media on Awareness: *Aap Ki Antara***

IMFAR, 21 May 2010, Philadelphia

**Nidhi Singhal, PhD**  
**Tamara Daley, PhD**  
**Merry Barua**

Action For Autism  
National Centre for Advocacy, Research, Rehabilitation and Training  
New Delhi, India

# Autism in India

- Considered rare; 'an illness of modern civilization'
- Delays and misdiagnosis
- High use of pharmacological and alternate therapies:  
Pranic healing, Reflexology, Astrology, Acupressure, Yoga, Ayurveda, Homeopathy
- Lack of appropriate and adequate intervention centers
- Schools not geared to meet special needs
- Significant economically disadvantaged population
- Low awareness levels and high stigmatization



# Media Penetration

|                   | 1998       | 2004        | 2005        |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Television sets   | 70 million | 105 million | 119 million |
| Cable connections | 25 million | 52 million  | 62 million  |

Total television viewership: 415 million; amongst world's highest

(CII-KPMG, 2007)



June 2009:

An Indian television network with a reach of about 120 countries and access to over 500 million viewers globally

launched a nightly soap opera called

*Aap Ki Antara*

(Yours truly, Antara)



# Each episode concluded with

- Three minute 'testimonial' from a family member of a person with autism
- Number of a seven-hour telephone helpline (Mon–Fri, 1pm–8pm)
- Address for website of national Indian autism organization: Action for Autism



- Selected a five-week sample period (Sep-Oct 09) after the initial launch
- Documented calls
- Coded content and background data about caller/child
- Used website analytics to compare sample period and pre-launch period



## Documentation of basic information

- a. Location of the caller
- b. Age of the person of concern
- c. Sex of the person of concern
- d. Relationship of caller to person of concern

## Additional information

- a. Purpose of the call
- b. Knowledge of autism prior to the serial
- c. Nature of services person of concern currently receives



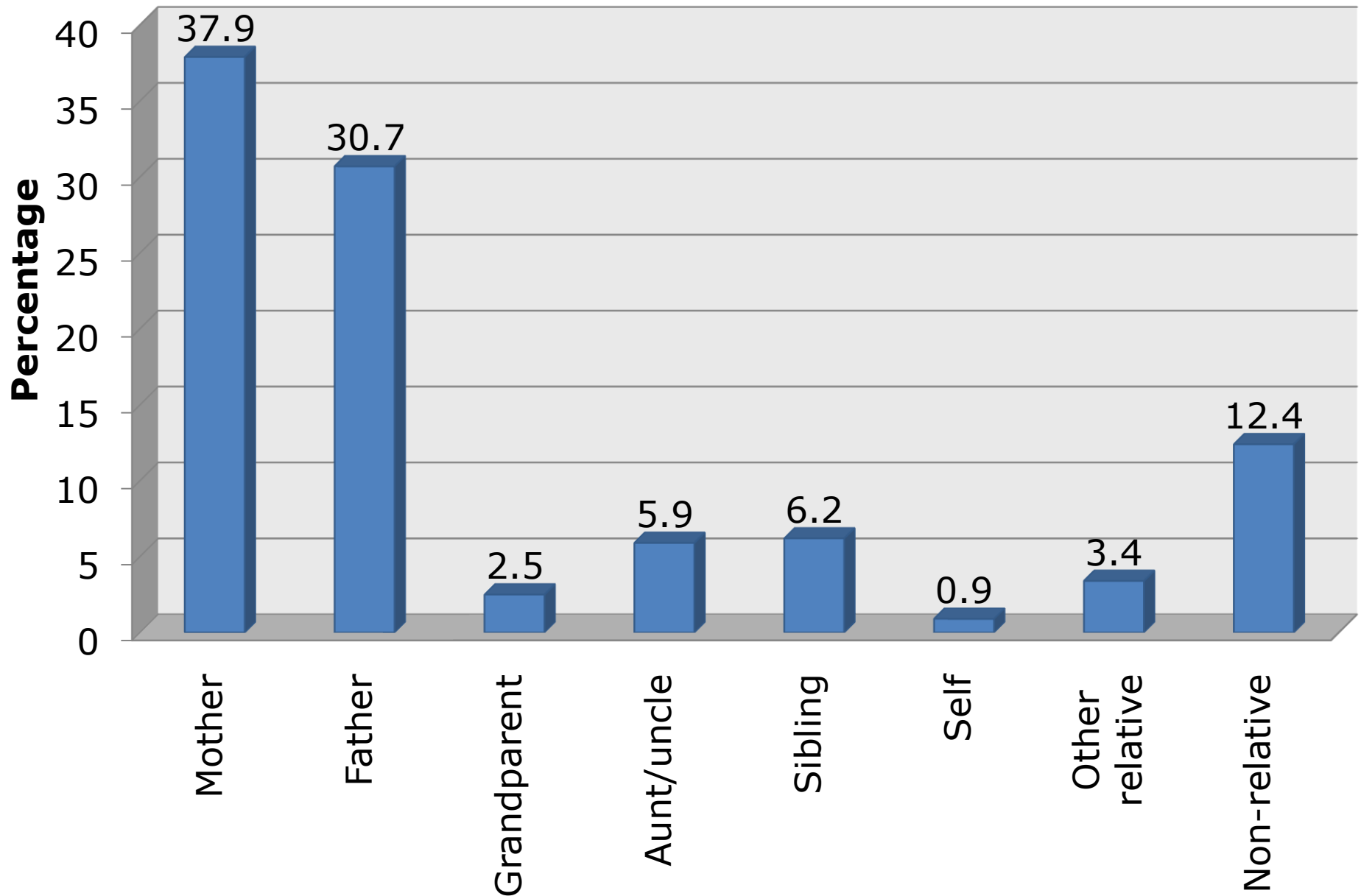
# Results: Call Summary

- During initial months:  
(Jun–Aug 09) > 50 calls / day
- During the five week sample period:  
(Sep–Oct 09) = 336 calls total
- Average of approx 15 calls / day

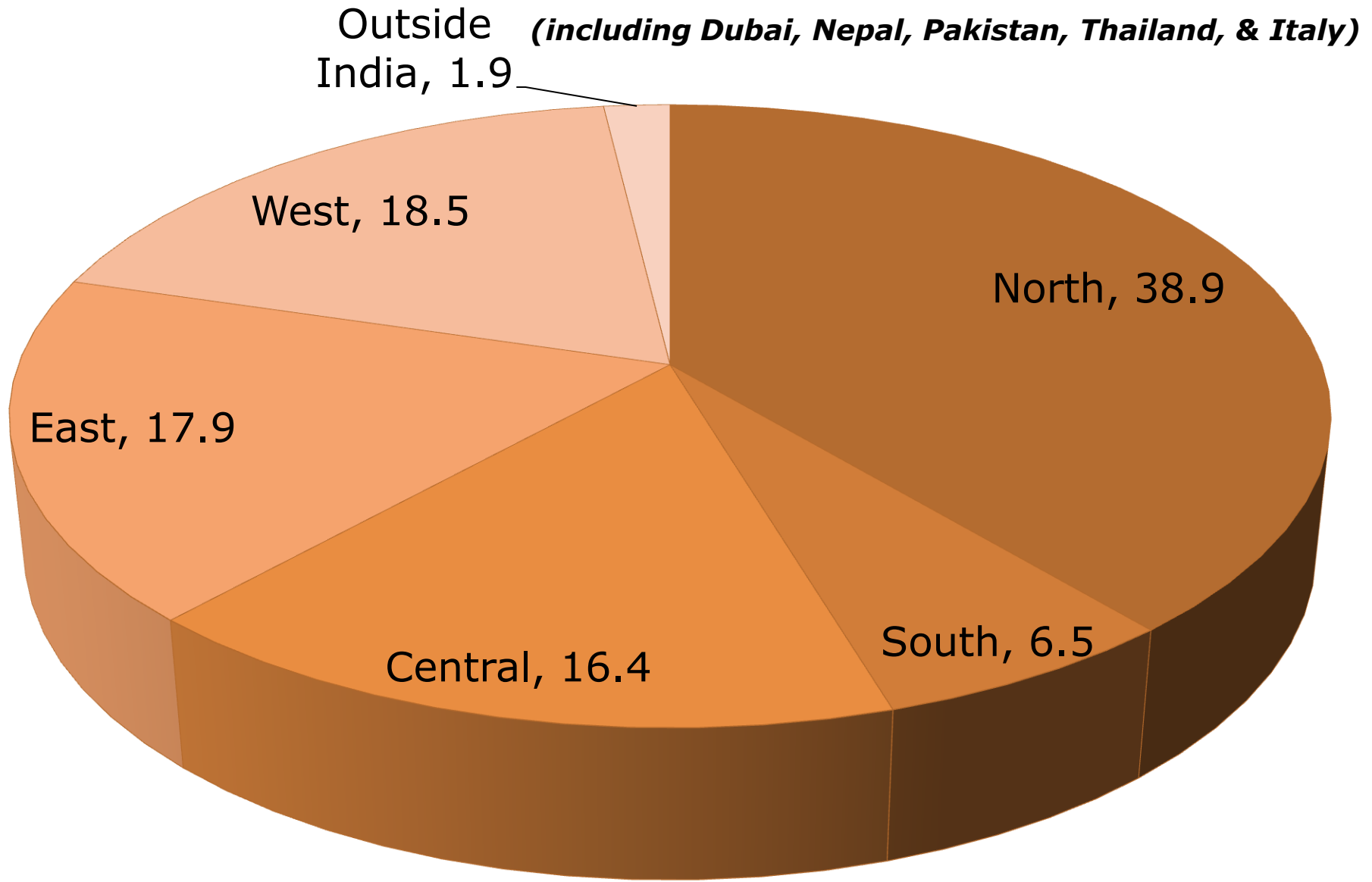




# Who is Calling

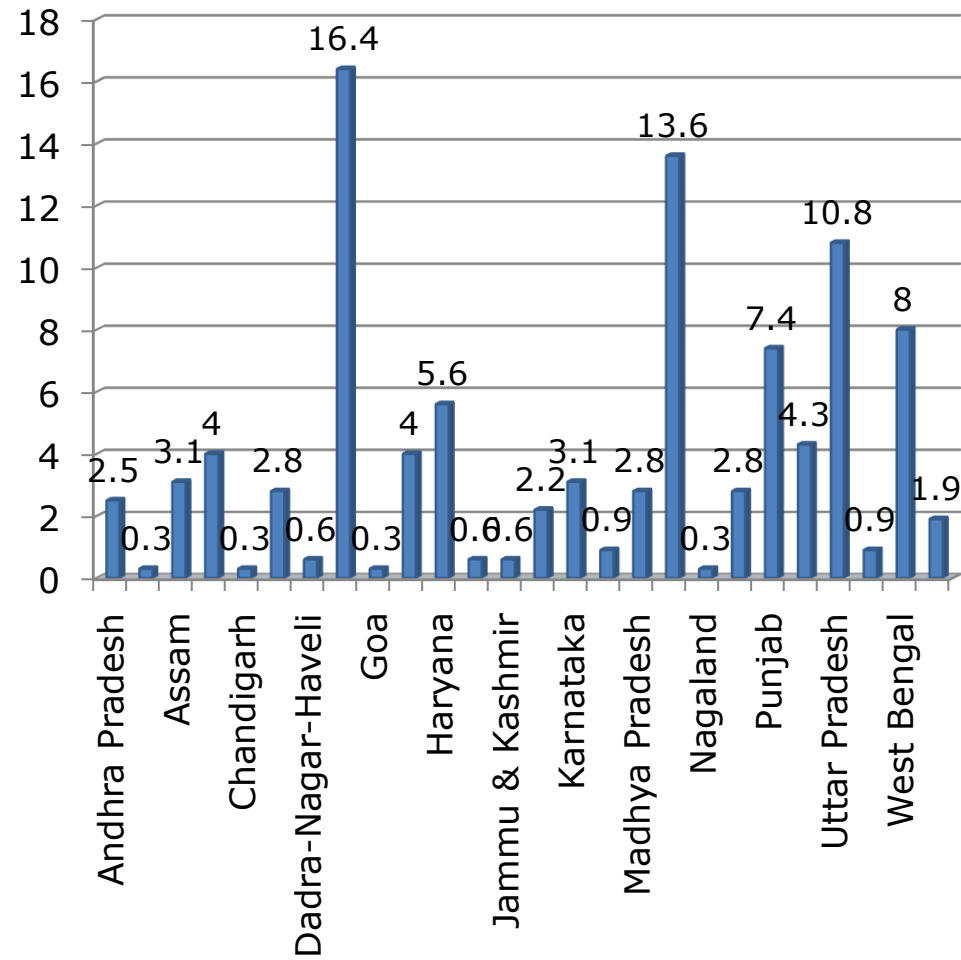
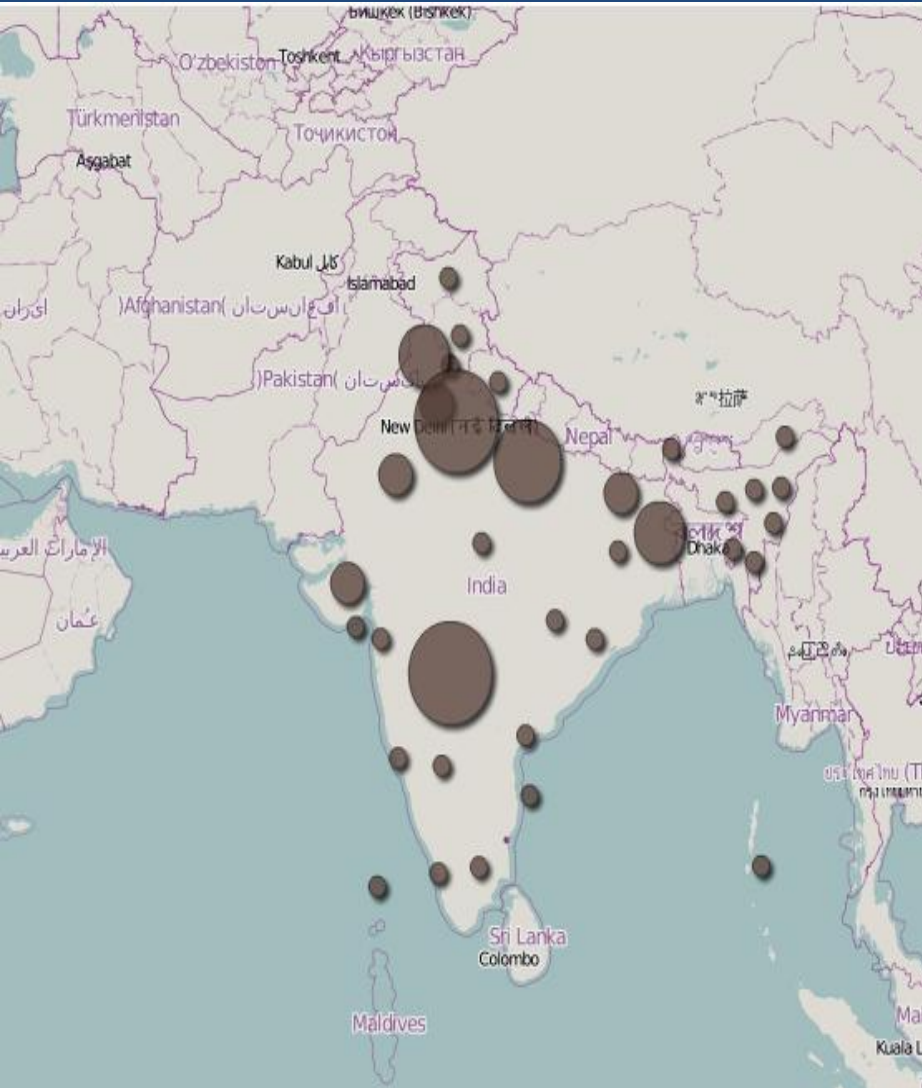


# Location of Caller

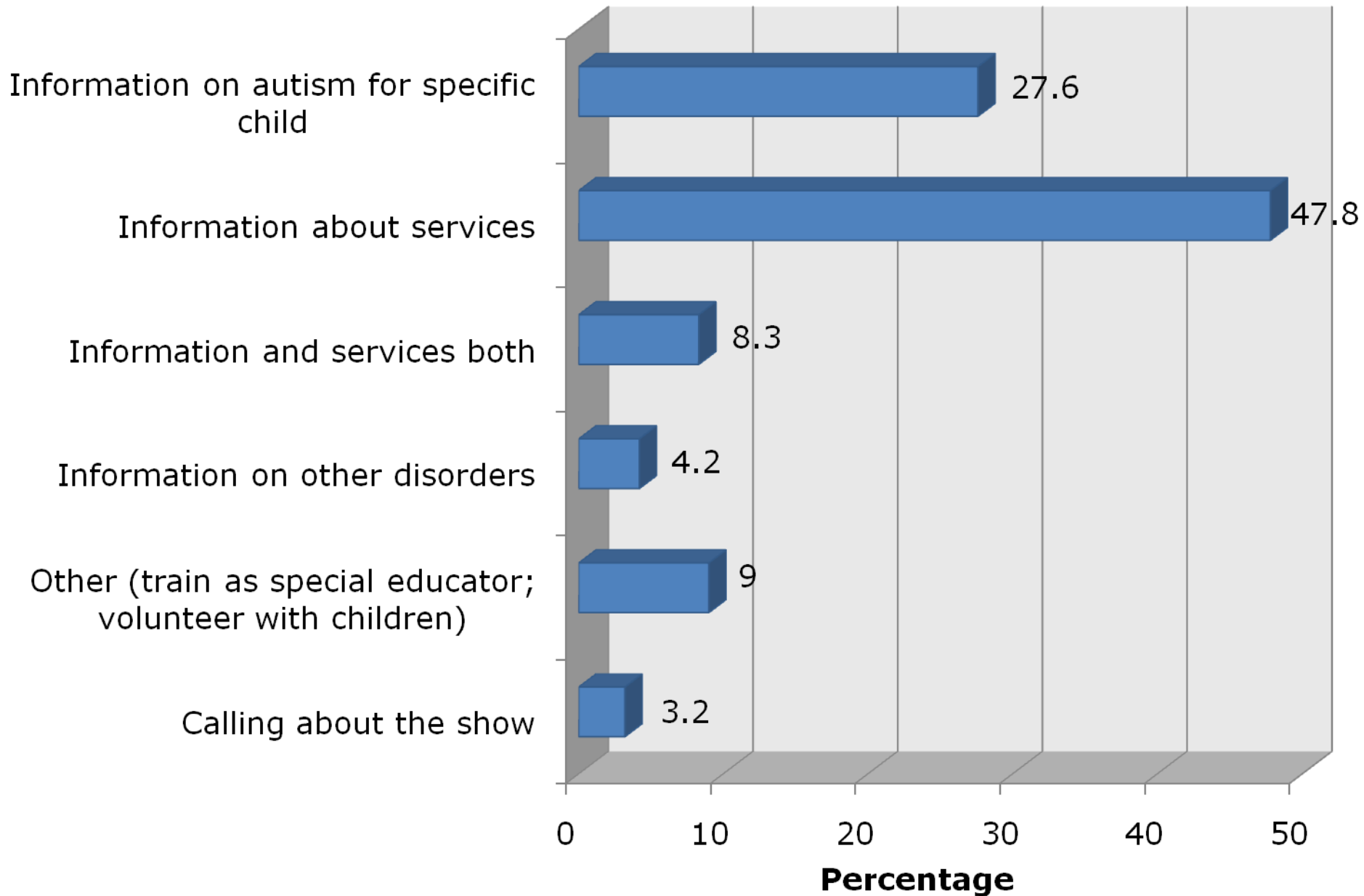


**All figures are in percentage**

# Location of Caller



# Reason for Call

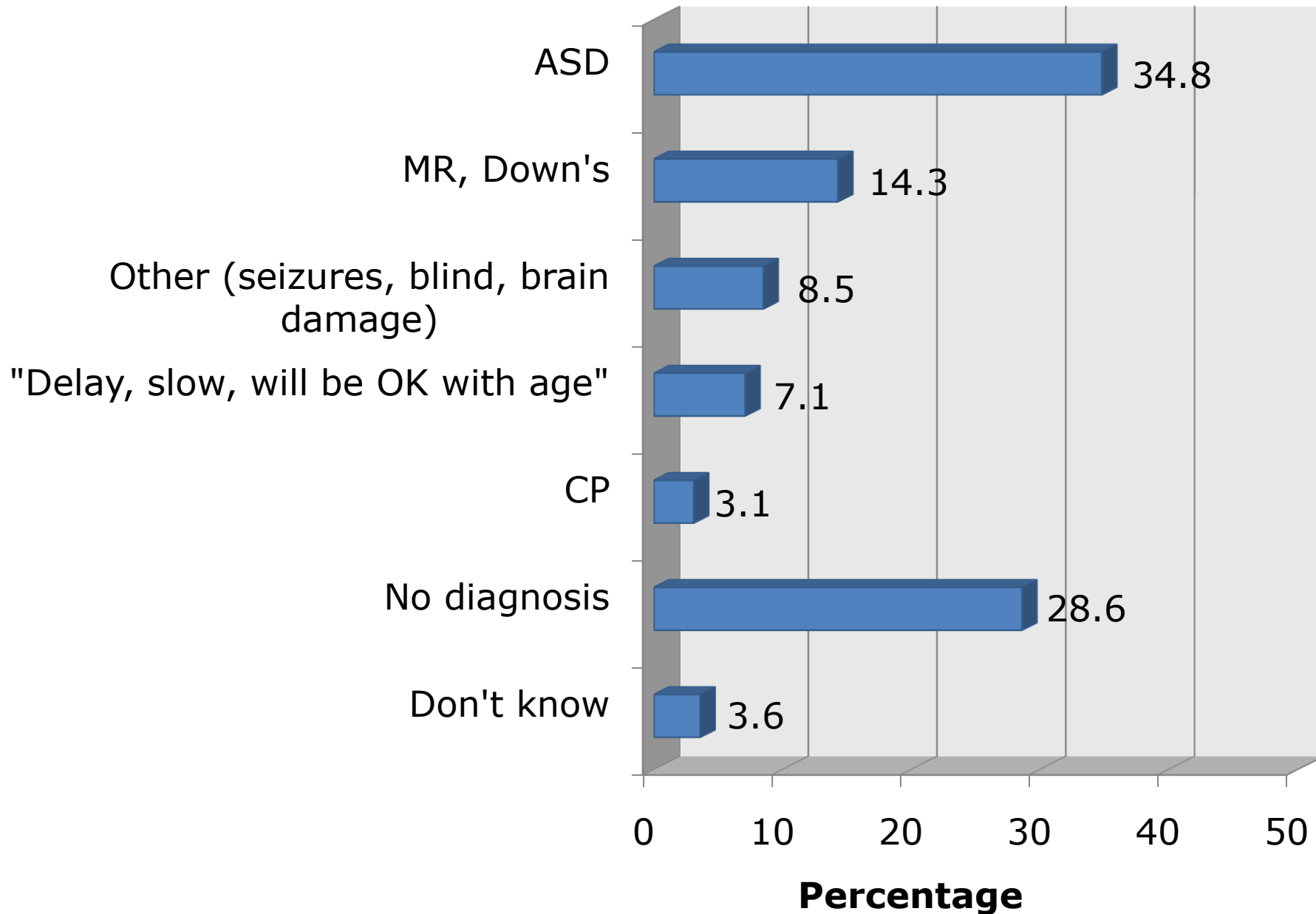


# Characteristics of Person of Concern

- 72% calls were about children who are male
- Wide age range
  - 2 months to 35 years
  - Mean = 9.5 years (SD=6.7)



# Diagnosis



## Of the callers with a child diagnosed with autism

- 48% of children did not attend any school
- 36% attended a special school
- 16% attended a regular school

65% of all callers reported that they were not aware of autism prior to watching *Aap Ki Antara*





During sample period (Sep – Oct 09) site received 7,781 visits from:

- 129 countries and territories
- 79% of these were new visitors
- 42% of the visits were from India (79 cities)
- 27% were from the U.S. (51 states)



- Compared to a five week period before show was launched (Apr – May 09):
  - An increase of 35% total number of visitors
  - An increase of 30% of first time visitors
- 97% increase in people accessing the site through direct entry of website address



- Television as a medium can be a powerful source for raising awareness
  - Includes penetration in rural areas where access to services is limited
- Popularity of show independent of accuracy of portrayal
  - Can serve as a reference point
  - Validation of personal experience



# Next Steps...

- Documenting awareness of AAK through intake information sheets
- Small awareness study on *My Name is Khan*
- Applied for funding for an IVR+phone counseling helpline
- Developing 30 second spots for TV and theaters



# Thank You!

Nidhi Singhal  
[dr.nidhisinghal@gmail.com](mailto:dr.nidhisinghal@gmail.com)

Tamara Daley  
[TamaraDaley@westat.com](mailto:TamaraDaley@westat.com)

Action For Autism  
[actionforautism@gmail.com](mailto:actionforautism@gmail.com)

