

**Research of  
Internet Downside Issues  
August 2001**

**Submitted to the  
Internet Advisory Board  
by  
Amárach Consulting**

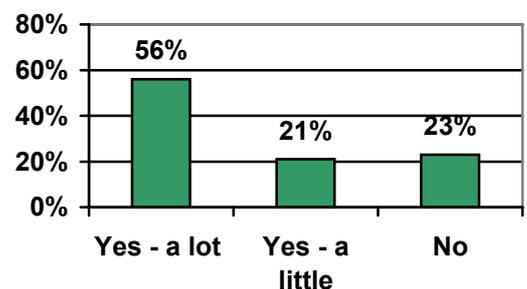
## Executive Summary

An estimated 30% of Ireland's 10-14 year olds are regular Internet users. This is equivalent to 132,000 young people online. Over the last number of years some concern has been expressed regarding the potential harmful aspects or "downsides" of Internet use, particularly among young Internet users. The Internet Advisory Board commissioned Amárach Consulting to conduct innovative and original research to explore Internet Downside issues among 10-14 year old Internet users and their parents. This is the first report of its kind in Ireland. This summary paper presents a brief overview of some of the key findings.

### The Knowledge Gap

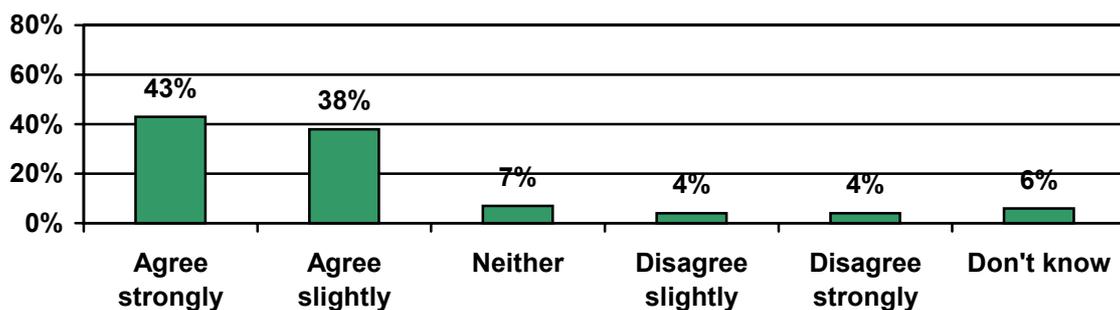
One of the most striking findings from the research is the lack of knowledge many parents have about the Internet when compared to their children. Only 23% of parents say they know more about the Internet than their child does. The research found that the parents who knew the most about the Internet were also the parents who were most capable of, and interested in, monitoring their child's Internet use.

Does your child know more about using the Internet than you do?



Parents are well aware of the challenge this knowledge gap poses. Eighty-one percent agree strongly or slightly with the following statement – "many parents are unable to control and monitor the Internet use of their children as they do not know enough about it".

Agreement with statement - "Many parents are unable to control and monitor Internet use of their children as they do not know enough about it"



### Rules Governing Children's Internet Use

Despite the knowledge gap, almost eight in ten (78%) parents do have rules for their children when they access the Internet at home. Of those who do impose rules, just over four-fifths restrict the websites visited by their children to those only authorized by a parent or another adult. About half allow their children to use the Internet only when an adult is present. However, when children were asked about the rules imposed on them, some inconsistencies were evident. Eighty-two percent of parents say their children can only visit websites they authorize, while only 56% of children seem to be aware of this rule.

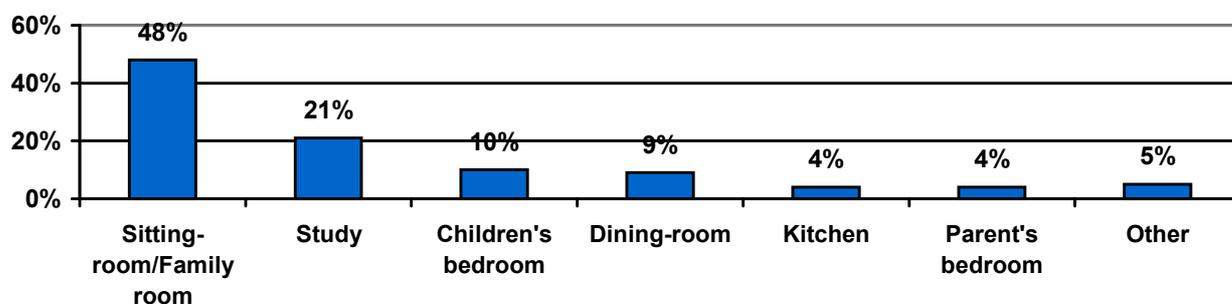
Just over half of the children surveyed who use the Internet say they can go online when an adult is not present. This was more prevalent among children who say they know a lot more about the Internet than their parents do and among children who visit chat rooms. Forty percent of children who use the Internet at home usually access it when alone.

### Location of Home PCs

Where a home PC is located has clear implications for the ability of parents to monitor what their children are doing online. If a PC is located in a communal area of the home, for example in a family room, the opportunities for parents to communicate and discuss with their children what they are doing online are far greater than if the PC is in the child's bedroom or in other isolated areas of the home.

A slight majority of home PCs are kept in "communal" areas, such as a family-room, kitchen or sitting room. About one in five are used in a study and one in 10 are in children's bedrooms.

**Location of PC in the home**

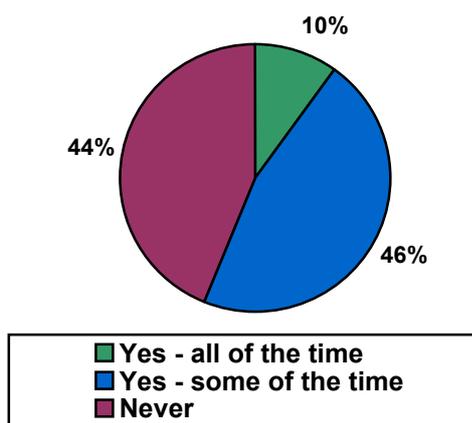


### Accessing the Internet at Friends' Homes

Children are more likely to be adventurous and thrill seeking when they are online with friends than when they are on their own. With this in mind, one of the areas of possible vulnerability was found to be when children access the Internet at friends' homes.

Nearly half of the children surveyed say that they are never supervised when they access the Internet at a friend's house. This is particularly evident among children who have not been spoken to by their parents about the potential dangers of Internet use. Those not supervised at friends' houses are also more likely not to be supervised in their own homes.

**When you use the Internet at a friends' house does an adult supervise you?**



### What Are Parents Concerned About?

What do parents consider to be negative about young people accessing the Internet? All parents were asked what they considered to be the main negative impact of Internet use among children aged 14 or under. Children having access to pornography was the most frequently cited downside. This was followed by access to material or information that was considered unsuitable. Just over one

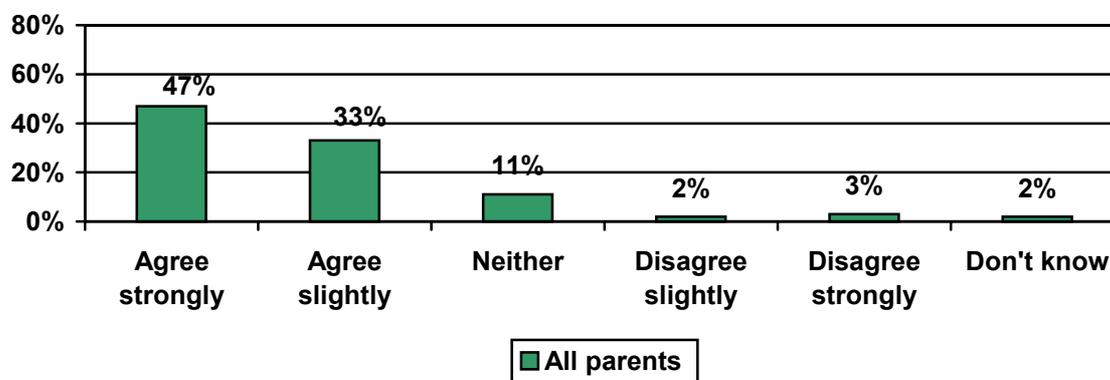
in ten (12%) expressed concern about children coming in contact with unsuitable people, such as paedophiles.

Main Negative Aspect of Internet Use	%
Access to pornography	44%
Access to unsuitable material/information	18%
Can be exposed to unsuitable people e.g. paedophiles	12%
Anti-social/insular activity	6%
Could spend the time more usefully	6%
Access to violent/hate material	5%
Makes them lazy about doing homework/ school projects	3%
Spend too much time playing games	1%
Too exposed to advertising	1%
Nothing	2%

*Base: All parents (n=312)*

The level of concern parents have is high. Eight in ten parents agree strongly or slightly with the following statement: "I am concerned that my child/children might access harmful material such as sexually explicit or violent material on the Internet". Only about 5% of parents seem to be unconcerned.

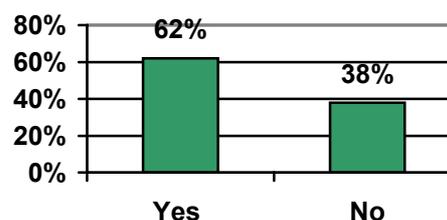
**Agreement with statement - "I am concerned that my child/children might access harmful material such as sexually explicit or violent material on the Internet"**



**Communication between Parents and Children**

With such high levels of concern, it is unsurprising to note that over six in ten (62%) parents say they have discussed with their child the potential dangers of Internet use. Parents who use the Internet and who consider themselves knowledgeable of the Internet are more likely to have discussed the potential dangers of Internet use with their child. This once again emphasises the impact of the knowledge gap.

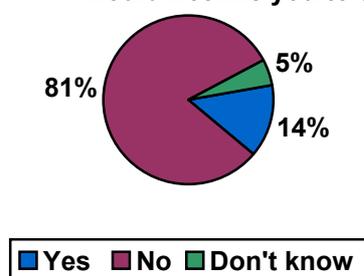
**Have you ever discussed with your child the potential dangers of Internet use?**



### Cause for Concern?

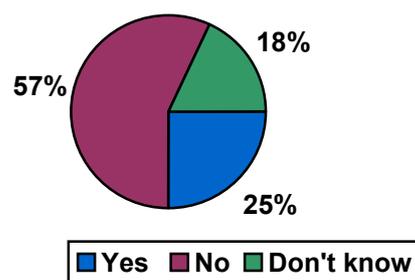
Amárach asked all children surveyed whether they had ever seen things on the Internet that their parents would not like them to see. Fourteen percent said they had. It is interesting to note that acknowledgement of seeing unsuitable material online was significantly higher among children who were responding to the survey without a parent present in the room – 21% of children who used the Internet at home and were surveyed without a parent present said yes. This suggests that the frequency of children coming across inappropriate material could in fact be quite a bit higher.

**Have you ever seen things on the Internet that you think your parents would not like you to see?**



One in four children say they know of friends or people in their class who have come across information or pictures on the Internet that their parents would not like them to see. Once again positive responses were significantly higher in interviews where no parent was present. It is likely that a much higher percentage of children are hearing about unsuitable online material from their friends and classmates.

**Do you know of any friends or people in your class who have come across information or pictures on the Internet that your parents would not like you to see?**



### Who's Responsible for Protecting Children?

Despite many parents not having a good understanding of the Internet, most consider that parents have the primary responsibility for protecting children when they use the Internet. Schools and teachers are also considered to have a major role to play. Nearly one in four said government and a similar number mentioned ISPs.

Who is responsible for protecting children online	Primary responsibility	Other persons responsible	Persons responsible – any mention
Parents	86%	11%	97%
Schools/teachers	5%	68%	73%
Older brothers/sisters	-	24%	24%
Government	2%	23%	24%
ISPs	4%	18%	22%
Website owners	2%	18%	20%
Neighbours/Friends parents	1%	19%	19%
Other	-	5%	5%
Don't know	-	5%	-

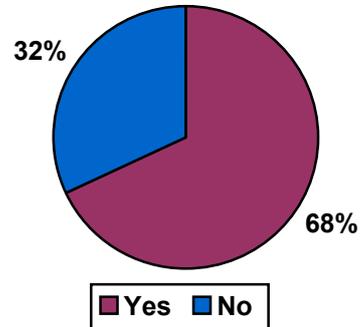
*Base: All parents (n=312)  
Note: Multiple responses allowed*

**Information Need**

When asked directly if they would like more information about how to protect their children online – seven in ten said they would.

Parents were also asked who they thought should provide information. Schools and government were the most frequently cited information providers.

**Would you like more information about how to protect your children online?**



Who should provide information?	%
Schools	49%
Government	37%
ISPs	34%
PC retail outlets/shops	31%
Media	19%
Website owners	16%
Other	6%
Don't know	6%

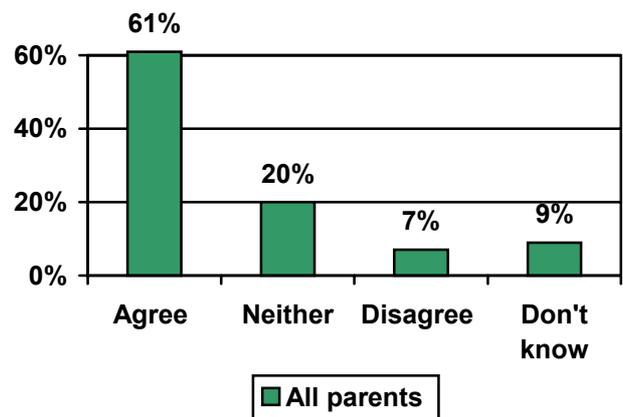
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**Internet Upsides**

The focus of the research study was Internet downside issues. However, the Internet has many beneficial uses. Despite the high levels of concern parents have, six in ten agree that the positive aspects of Internet use among children outweigh the negatives. Only 7% disagree.

Similarly 70% of children agreed that the Internet is very important for their schoolwork.

**Agreement with statement - "The positive aspects of Internet use among children outweigh the negatives"**



### **SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

- Seventy-seven percent of parents surveyed feel their child knows more about using the Internet than they do.
- Forty percent of children who use the Internet at home usually access it alone.
- Mothers play a significantly larger role than fathers in supervising Internet use.
- Twenty-five percent of home PCs use software that restricts access to adult sites.
- The level of supervision and rules imposed when children access the Internet at school is very high.
- The level of supervision when children use the Internet at friends' homes is very low.
- Forty-four percent of parents cite access to pornography as the main negative aspect of Internet use among young children.
- Sixty-two percent of parents say they have discussed the potential dangers of Internet use with their child.
- Only a small minority (14%) of children say they have accessed unsuitable material online.
- The vast majority (86%) of parents feel they have primary responsibility for protecting their children online.
- Schools are also considered to have a major role to play in teaching children to behave sensibly online.
- Almost seven in ten parents surveyed would like more information on how to protect their children online.
- Schools and government are regarded as the key information providers.
- Sixty-one percent of parents agree that the positive aspects of Internet use outweigh the negatives.