

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Internet Predators, Privacy and Porn Concern Parents

The Internet is increasingly a part of children's education and a way for them to be connected to their peers and friends through social networking sites. But along with the Internet's many benefits come parents' worries about online predators, privacy, and pornographic material.

The CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents about concerns with their children's use of the Internet, and what actions parents take to help safeguard their children.

Parent Concerns with Internet Safety

81% of parents report that their children age 9-17 use the Internet and access websites on their own. For children using the Internet, 66% of teens (13-17) and 19% of preteens (9-12) have their own social networking profiles. Among parents with kids on the Internet, nearly 1 in 3 are "very concerned" about online sexual predators, and 1 in 5 are "very concerned" about the loss of privacy and with their children viewing pornographic material (Table 1). Parents with children in online social networks are even more concerned about online sexual predators and loss of privacy.

Table 1. Parents' Level of Concern with Children's Use of Internet

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not concerned
Online sexual predators	32%	32%	36%
Loss of privacy	22%	45%	33%
Viewing pornographic material	21%	32%	47%
Playing online games	8%	27%	65%
Online bullying	9%	22%	69%
Online gambling	8%	9%	83%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Internet Safety Concerns for Girls vs. Boys

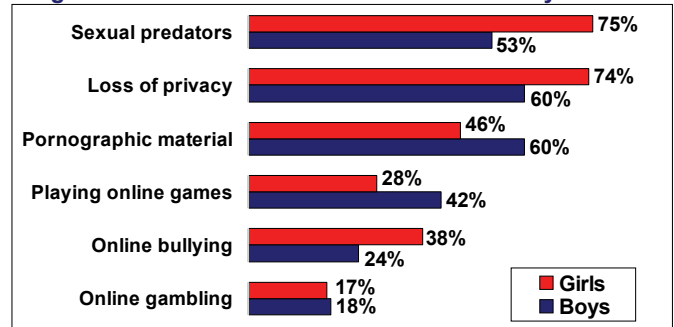
Parents who responded regarding their daughters report greater concern with online sexual predators, loss of privacy

Report Highlights

- For girls, parents' leading Internet concerns are online sexual predators and loss of privacy.
- For boys, parents' leading Internet concerns are viewing pornographic material and loss of privacy.
- Black parents are generally more concerned than white or Hispanic parents with Internet safety issues for children.

and online bullying than did parents who responded about their sons (Figure 1). For girls, 3 in 4 parents report being "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about online sexual predators and with loss of privacy. For boys, 3 in 5 parents report being concerned about their sons viewing pornographic material and loss of privacy. Playing online games was also more of a concern for parents of boys than for parents of girls.

Figure 1. Parents' Concern with Internet Safety Issues



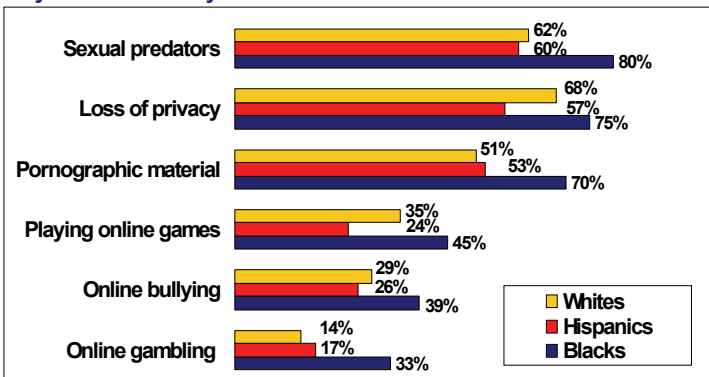
Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Internet Safety Concerns by Race/Ethnicity

Black parents report greater concern for all areas of Internet safety than do white or Hispanic parents (Figure 2). 8 in 10 black parents are concerned with online sexual predators compared with 6 in 10 white and Hispanic parents. 7 in 10 black parents are concerned with their children viewing pornographic material, compared with 5 in 10 white and Hispanic parents.

In addition, black parents have about twice as high levels of concern with online gambling as do white parents or Hispanic parents (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Parents' Concern with Internet Safety Issues, by Race/ Ethnicity



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Parents' Efforts to Safeguard Their Children on the Internet

Parents were asked if they take specific actions to protect or monitor their children's use of the Internet. Overall, parents report the following actions:

- 65% disable pop-ups
- 62% monitor social networking sites
- 61% check history of websites
- 49% block websites they don't want kids to use
- 32% use child-safe software

68% of parents report taking 1 to 4 of the above actions, while 19% take all 5 of the actions listed. However, 13% of parents whose children access the Internet report not taking any of these actions to protect or monitor that use.

Implications

As the Internet has grown rapidly, so too has children's access to all the Internet has to offer — good and bad. Internet safety ranked as the 5th biggest health problem for children in the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health annual list of the top 10 biggest health problems for children ([August 2009](#)), with 31% of adults rating Internet safety as a big problem.

This level of public concern is reflected in recent federal laws, which are designed to limit kids' access to pornography on the Internet and strengthen surveillance and stiffen penalties for online sexual predators who target children. New federal legislation introduced in Congress this year also addresses the issue of cyber-bullying and its effects on children.

But do these laws comfort parents? Their levels of concern about Internet safety for kids remain high for pornography, sexual predators, and loss of privacy, particularly so among black parents. The majority of parents whose children have their own social networking profiles are concerned about the same issues. Although most parents are taking some actions to protect their kids online, some are taking no action and many others may not be certain how effective different strategies are. Find out more about Internet safety at: www.wiredsafety.org or www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguideec.htm

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older with children age 9-17 (n=1,066) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 56% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is plus or minus 2 to 6 percentage points for the main analysis. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

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