

# THE NET GENERATION

## INTERNET SAFETY ISSUES FOR YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS

A REPORT FROM THE INTERNET SAFETY GROUP ON THE RESULTS  
OF A SURVEY BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

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Note: the full set of results tables are available by request. (Send the request to: [queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz))

# introduction

**The Net Generation: Internet Safety Issues for Young New Zealanders** was created in collaboration between members of the Department of Psychology at the University of Auckland, and members of the Internet Safety Group (ISG). This is the largest survey of young people and the Internet in New Zealand and one of the largest internationally.

The first research in New Zealand on Internet risk was released in March, 2001 by the Internet Safety Group, entitled 'Girls on the Net'. Using a sample of 347 adolescent girls, the results gave the first glimpse of how the Internet is interacting with young people in New Zealand. **The Net Generation: Internet Safety Issues for Young New Zealanders** now gives us a far more complete picture, looking at girls and boys from ages 7-19 who are part of a generation growing up with the Internet.

Members of the Department of Psychology at the University of Auckland designed the surveys, with input from the Internet Safety Group. The research had approval from the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee. All students and all parents of students under 16 years received an information sheet about the research prior to filling in a survey, and participation was voluntary.

The surveys were delivered by the schools involved and analysed by Michelle Duddy (supervised by Niki Harré) as part of a Master's thesis in Psychology at the University of Auckland. Claire Balfour of the ISG handled liaison with the schools and Liz Butterfield oversaw the release of the survey. Costs for conducting the survey were met by the Internet Safety Group.

A total of 2,582 students participated. This survey was conducted at three large Auckland Schools: one each of primary, intermediate and secondary levels. These schools are decile three (primary and intermediate) and four (secondary). The students come from a common geographic area that represents a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This means that comparisons between primary and secondary school children are valid as they draw from the same population base. All three schools have had major involvement with the ISG and have implemented procedures recommended in the New Zealand Internet Safety Kit.

There were 100 Maori participants in the survey. This number was considered too small to produce large enough numbers in each age category for the purposes of the statistical analyses conducted. The participants who identified as Maori were therefore combined with participants who identified as of Pacific descent. A set of tables showing the Maori results will be posted on [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz) .

This release now means that other organisations and government agencies can also have access to this important data, which can be used to inform policies and procedures related to Internet safety and education nation-wide.

**The Net Generation: Internet Safety Issues for Young New Zealanders** gives a fascinating picture of the social impact of communication technologies – with young people enthusiastically embracing a technology often foreign to their parents. It is hoped this survey will be a catalyst for more research in this area. Understanding the interactions of young people with the Internet, both positive and negative, is crucial to responding with clarity and wisdom and developing effective risk-prevention education.

# survey highlights

1. **63%** reported using the Internet at least two or three times a week. (See 3.1)
2. **84%** reported using the Internet at home, while **43%** use the Internet at someone else's home. (See 3.4)
3. Maori and Pacific Island students reported the highest levels of school use (**61%**) and were least likely to have the Internet at home (**51%**). (See 3.5)
4. Seven to ten year old students reported Mum or Dad were most likely to have taught them to use the Internet (**56%**), but **40%** also learned from a sibling and **16%** from a friend. (See 5.1)
5. **31%** of 7-10 year olds and **67%** of those 16 or older reported sending or receiving email from someone they met on the Internet. (See 6.1)
6. More than eighty students (**7%**, does not include Primary) reported feeling unsafe or threatened as a result of interactions with someone they met on the Internet. (See 7.1)
8. **23%** of 7-10 year olds and **37%** of those 16 or older reported having had a face to face meeting with someone they met on the Internet. (See 9)  
*About that meeting (not asked of Primary students):*
  - Most reported meeting that person because they were interested in friendship (**70 %**).
  - Over ten students (**3%**) were meeting people older than twenty-five.
  - Although many reported having safety strategies for the meeting, **16%** didn't think they needed any such strategies.
9. One in three students (**33%**) reported never having their use of the Internet monitored at home. (See 10.1)
10. More students (**59%**) reported hearing about Internet safety from a teacher than from parents or caregivers (**48%**). **11%** reported not having heard about Internet safety at all.
11. Only **20%** of those who felt unsafe or threatened on the Internet reported telling a parent. (See 14.1)
12. **46%** reported owning a mobile phone and **25%** reported using 'text-chat' as a way of talking to people they haven't met before. (See 15)
13. **18%** reported they had no safety rules when meeting someone they don't know well. (See 2.1 in the summary)

# survey summary

## **1. Who did we survey?** *(See Table 1, 2 & 3)*

- 1.1** The survey was conducted with three Auckland schools located in the same city suburb. A total of 2,582 students participated, almost evenly split between male (52%) and female (48%).
- 1.2** The age distribution was fairly even: 7-10 (15%), 11-12 (20%), 13-15 (36 %) and 16-19 (29%). There were four ethnic groupings of participants: European (22%), Asian (32% overall - with 58% of this ethnic group identified as Chinese), Pacific Island/Maori (22% overall - with 18% of this ethnic group identified as Maori, and 38% Samoan) and Indian (24%).
- 1.3** Some questions were only asked of primary students, and some of all but primary students (noted in Table comments).

## **2. What knowledge do these young people have of safety rules when meeting someone they don't know well?** *(All but primary students -see Table 4)*

- 2.1** The most common safety rules were: go with someone else (41%), tell their parents (37%), meet in a public place (31%). 18% reported they had no safety rules at all.
- 2.2** Female students reported higher rates of endorsement of all safety rules than males. Males were more likely than females to report having no safety rules.

## **3. Where, and with what frequency, is the Internet being used?** *(See Table 5 & 6)*

- 3.1** 32% reported using the Internet everyday (13% of 7-10 year olds), while 31% reported using the Internet two-three times a week. 8% never use the Internet.
- 3.2** Use of the Internet increased significantly between ages 7-10 and ages 11-12, with males reporting significantly higher use (although the difference in mean use is rather small).
- 3.3** Maori and Pacific Island students reported the lowest levels of use and the highest numbers of those who never use the Internet.
- 3.4** Overall, most students who reported using the Internet do so at home (84%), 45% use the Internet at school, 43% at someone else's home, and 13% at a public library.
- 3.5** Maori and Pacific Island students reported the highest rate of school use (61%) and were least likely to have home access (51%).

#### **4. What is the Internet being used for?** *(See Table 7)*

- 4.1** The most popular uses for the Internet were: educational reasons (73%), email (73%), and surfing for interesting things (61%).
- 4.2** A significant number used the Internet to seek relationships: 19% for making friends and 4% for a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- 4.3** Chat environments were very popular. 42% used instant messages and 36% used chatrooms, which were also more likely to be used by older students.

#### **5. Who is teaching primary-age students how to use the Internet?** *(Primary students only - see Table 7b & 7c)*

- 5.1** Mum or Dad (57%) was the most common response, followed by: sister or brother (40%), a friend (15%), and a teacher at school (12%).
- 5.2** European students were much more likely to be taught by Mum or Dad (75%), with Maori and Pacific Island students slightly more likely to be taught by a sibling (38%) than their parents (36%). A sizeable number of Maori and Pacific Island students reported that they were taught by a cousin.

#### **6. What sort of interactions are students having with people they meet on the Internet?** *(See Table 8)*

- 6.1** The activities with people met on the Internet reported were: sent or received email (54%), given personal information, such as name, address (17%), and spoke on the telephone (15%) and sent or received post mail (10%). However, 41% said they hadn't done any of these activities with someone met on the Internet.
- 6.2** There were no significant gender differences in revealing personal information, but as students get older, they are more likely to give personal details to those met on the Internet.

#### **7. Have students ever felt unsafe or threatened as a result of these interactions?** *(All but primary students – see Table 9 & 9a)*

- 7.1** Seven percent of students reported feeling unsafe or threatened as a result of doing any of these things (listed above in 6.1).
- 7.2** The causes for feeling unsafe or threatened (in order) were:
  - suspicion of those met online, with no negative outcome (26 responses). Example: "Yes, I had doubts that the person might be the opposite sex [I thought they might have] lied to me when I was trying to be friends with a girl."
  - fear or experience of computer viruses, hackers or 'spam' (22 responses). Example: "Sometimes people joke around and say they are going to hack my computer."

- offensive language (19 responses). Example: "Yes, someone sent me emails with swear words and bad things about my friends."
- personal details (15 responses). Example: "Yes, I regret that I actually gave them personal information even though that person was nice and nothing bad happened."
- verbal harassment, (14 responses). Example: "Yes, because I gave my telephone number to a guy and he began threatening me on the phone one night. Saying stuff like 'watch your back, b\*\*\*\*\*'"
- physical harassment, (3 responses). Example: " I had a 40 year old stalker (male)."

**8. Are these students having any personal, face-to-face meetings with someone they met on the Internet? (See Table 10)**

- 8.1** Of those students that use the Internet, 32% reported having a face-to-face meeting with someone met on the Internet, including 23% of 7-10 year olds and 37% of those in the 16+ age group.
- 8.2** There are no significant gender or ethnic differences in reporting meetings.

**9. What were the results of these face-to face meetings with someone they met on the Internet? (We asked a series of questions of all but primary students. See Tables 11,12,13,14,14a,15,16, & 17)**

- 9.1** Most students report their age at the time of the first face-to-face meeting as being the same as their current age group, with no significant difference between gender or ethnic groups.
- 9.2** Many reported using safety strategies at this meeting: 46% went with someone, 49% met in a public place, 24% told their parents and 24% talked about it with someone. However, 16% didn't think they needed to do any of these things. Females were more likely than males to go with someone else, talk about it with someone, or meet in a public place. As the age of the students increases, there was a decrease in reports of informing parents of this meeting, but also an increase in reports of talking about the meeting with someone else, and meeting in a public place.
- 9.3** Cross-gender meetings were the most common: 70% of females met males, while 66% of males met females.
- 9.4** The majority of students reported meeting someone around their own age, with a small percentage (3%) meeting someone considerably older than themselves (older than 25). Nearly half of males (48%) met someone who was the same age as them at the time of meeting, while, in contrast, the largest group of females (42%) met someone who was 1-2 years older.
- 9.5** The reasons for the meeting varied. Females were more likely to meet someone for friendship than males, while males were more likely to

meet someone for romantic reasons than females. Males were also more likely than females to meet someone because of shared hobbies and activities. All age groups were most likely to meet for friendship.

- 9.6** Overall, students were most likely to have met this person via ICQ (40%) or a chatroom (38%). Younger students were more likely to have met through a chatroom, and older students more likely through ICQ.
- 9.7** The most common ways the person met differed from students' expectations were: the personality differed from what was expected (35 responses), the person's appearance was generally different from what was expected (21 responses), and the person met was considered unattractive (19 responses).

**10. Is there monitoring of the students' use of the Internet at home? (See Table 18a)**

- 10.1** Levels of adult supervision reported at home were: never (33%), occasionally (30%) and sometimes (25%). The younger students reported higher levels of adult monitoring. Indian participants reported slightly higher levels of adult monitoring, and European students reported slightly lower levels of adult monitoring, with Asian and Maori and Pacific Island students reporting intermediate levels. However, as Indian participants also reported higher levels of adult monitoring at school these differences need to be interpreted with caution.

**11. Is there monitoring of the students' use of the Internet at school? (See Table 18b)**

- 11.1** Levels of adult supervision reported at school (in order) were: occasionally (20%), sometimes (19%) and often (16%), while 13% report never being monitored.
- 11.2** Very much higher rates of adult monitoring at school were reported by primary school participants than older participants.

**12. Have these students heard about Internet safety and from what sources? (See Table 19)**

- 12.1** The majority of students who use the Internet reported hearing about Internet safety from a teacher (59%), with parents also a common source of information (48%).
- 12.2** 11% report that they haven't heard about Internet safety at all. The youngest students (7-10 year olds) were the students most likely to have not heard about Internet safety (27%), compared with 13-15 year olds (7%).

**13. Have these students ever felt unsafe or threatened while using the Internet, and, if so, how?** *(All but primary - see Table 20, which also has more examples)*

**13.1** The most common causes for feeling unsafe or threatened were:

- fear or experience of computer viruses, hackers or 'spam' (69 responses). Example: "Unknown person spamming me."
- offensive language (28 responses). Example: "People asking weird and personal questions."
- personal harassment (24 responses). Example: "People say they want to kill you."
- personal details (15 responses). Example: "Someone knew my password/email."
- Suspicion (11 responses). Example: "Yes-they start to ask about personal things like address, numbers, etc...straight out of the blue."
- Pornographic/sexual content (10 responses). Example: "Sent pornography to my address."
- Odd website (10 responses). Example: "I went to the SS website organised by Nazis to threaten or neutralise people."

**14. Did those students who felt unsafe tell anyone?** *(All but primary - see Table 21)*

**14.1** 26% reported telling a friend.

**14.2** 20% reported telling a parent. This rose to 34% for Maori and Pacific Island students.

**15. Do these students own a mobile phone?** *(All but primary - see Table 22)*

**15.1** 46% of respondents students reported owning a mobile phone.

**15.2** The older the student, the more likely they were to own a mobile phone; 25% of 11-12 year olds, 43% of 13-15 year olds, and 65% of those aged 16 or older, reported owning a mobile phone.

**16. Are students using 'text-chat' as a way of talking to people they haven't met before?** *(All but primary - see Table 22)*

**16.1** 25% of students reported using text-chat as a way of talking to people they haven't met before.

# methodology

In this report document, proportions are expressed as percentages which have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The Tables show the main findings from the survey. The title of each table is the question as given in the survey. All figures are given to one decimal place and have been rounded to the nearest .5, therefore percentages will not always sum to 100.

The total sample size is 2,582:

- Gender: males (1340), females (1242)
  - Age Group: 7-10 (383), 11-12 (526), 13-15 (927) and 16+ (746)
  - Ethnic Group: European (562), Asian (830), PI/Maori (560), and Indian (630).
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- 8 surveys removed from analysis because answers indicated the participants were not filling it in appropriately
  - 18 surveys deleted due to missing essential demographic data
  - 10 due to age missing
  - 8 due to gender missing
  - 2 surveys were deleted (1 x 6 year old, and 1 x 21 year old). These were deleted as their ages fell outside the 'normal' range of our survey group.
  - The number corresponding to each question is given on tables in which the response categories are mutually exclusive. For some items response options were not mutually exclusive and therefore non-responses cannot be distinguished from negative responses. For example, not ticking any response from a range of options for a certain question may mean that none were applicable or that the person chose not to answer that question. The numbers (N) reported for these items include only those participants who made at least one response to the question. These results must therefore be viewed conservatively. For Table 6 (Question 6: In the past 6 months, where have you used the Internet?), there are different N's for options a and c, as some respondents selected responses to these options that conflicted with their responses to Question 18, and consequently, their responses were removed from analyses for these questions. For Table 7 (Question 7: What do you use the Internet for?) there is a different N for option i (To find a boyfriend or girlfriend), as this option was not included in the Primary version of the questionnaire.
  - When coding surveys, ethnic groups were identified as: N Z European, Asian, Pacific Island/Maori, Indian, or Other. Data for 'Other' ethnic groups were left out of analyses, as it was deemed an uninformative category. These categories were chosen to reflect the ethnic make-up of the sample, and to ensure that each category was large enough for statistically powerful analyses to be carried out. (For example, while there were

initially three categories: Pacific Island, Samoan and Maori. These were combined as the numbers in each were insufficient in some age groups.)

- Checks were made for some items to ensure that the respondent was answering accurately and consistently. Where inconsistencies were found, the participant's responses to the item/s concerned were deleted. So:
  - Question 6C; deleted 26 responses that conflicted with 18B (therefore removed 26 responses from 18B as well)
  - Question 6A; deleted 3 responses that conflicted with 18A (therefore removed 3 responses from 18A as well)
  - Question 11; deleted 70 responses as age when meeting person greater than current age
  - Question 21; deleted 24 responses as no response to Q20
- The options for many questions were not mutually exclusive of each other, so participants could select as many options as they wished for these questions. On other questions, items were mutually exclusive, thus participants were prompted to select only one item. Information regarding this can be found with each table.