

Survey on the level of information among students on risks associated with Internet use

In 2010 the Romanian Police, together with the Norwegian Police, initiated the project „*Strengthening the capacity of the Romanian law enforcement agencies to prevent and investigate internet child pornography cases*”. One of the objectives was to increase the target groups’ (children, parents, teachers) level of information on the risks associated with the use of the Internet and on the means to prevent child pornography online. The Crime Research and Prevention Institute carried out a survey in February 2010 on a sample of 903 secondary school students (aged 11-15) that were familiar with the Internet. Its objectives were to investigate secondary school pupils’ habits concerning Internet use, the level of information about the risks associated with Internet use, the frequency of risky behaviors and the level of familiarizations with ways to counter risky situations.

The tool for data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire with items regarding type of internet services used by the children, type of sites accessed and other questions aimed at providing an image on positive aspects but also on dangers they faced or they could face on the Internet.

The survey revealed that secondary school students show a high interest/concern for the internet. Thus, for about 87% of them, the internet plays an important or even very important role in their lives. It answers, first of all, to the students’ communication needs. Thus, 80% of the questioned students access the internet with the desire to communicate with different other people. At the same time, the internet is a space for playing – about 64% access the Internet to play network or online games.

At a declarative level, the survey found a quite cautious attitude among secondary school students in the way they relate to the Internet. Thus, 70% of them state that they would be afraid to meet a person known through the Internet and about 87% wouldn’t give real personal information if they asked by someone from the online chatters. It also found a low level of trust of what they meet on the internet (95% reject the statement that all you find on the Internet is true and about 94% allege that they do not trust in what every person says online). With age, the students become more tempted to adopt risky attitudes and boys seem to have this type of risky attitudes to a greater extent than girls. Although at attitudinal level there is a display of prudence regarding internet use, some risky behaviors and potentially risky situations could be noticed among secondary school students tied with internet.

The results showed that:

- **86%** of students use social/dating web sites (*instant messenger, chat, forum, hi5, Facebook, Twitter, My Space etc.*),
- Approximately **70%** have encountered indecent (pornographic) images and messages while surfing the net
- Over three quarters chatted at least once with persons (children or adults) they didn’t know in real life
- 38% declared they have posted or sent pictures of themselves to persons (children or adults) they didn’t know
- 25% respondents said they have divulged information about themselves or their families online (name, age, phone number, address, school they go to, etc.)
- One quarter of the students admitted they have met live a person they chatted with online
- 14% have posted or sent other children’s pictures.

Even if three quarters of the questioned students state that their parents know almost entirely what they do on the internet, less than half of the respondents have established rules of internet use together with their parents.

In the circumstances when the majority of students estimate that they could take care of themselves on the internet, it has been noticed that there was a quite low level of information among students regarding the protection methods in front of risky situations that they could encounter while surfing the net.

Students prefer to receive this type of information directly from another person; parents in the first place are mentioned as potential key informants. TV shows on this subject are seen as interesting in the students' opinion, 33% of them stating that they wish to receive information in this way.