

# REPORT

## Public Awareness Survey 2008



Carried out on behalf of The Data Protection  
Commissioner by



# Introduction

This report presents the findings from a Public Awareness Survey undertaken on behalf of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner by Landsdowne Market Research in April 2008.

The purpose of the Public Awareness Survey was to measure:

- The level of public awareness of data protection and privacy issues in general
- The extent to which the public is concerned with protecting their personal information
- The particular privacy issues of concern to them
- Where privacy issues fall in the range of issues of concern to the public

The questionnaire was included in the Landsdowne omnibus survey in April 2008 where a sample of 1,000 respondents aged 15+ were interviewed. This survey is designed to be representative (in terms of age, sex, social class, region and area) of the adult population aged 15 and over living in the Republic of Ireland. All respondents were interviewed face to face, in their own homes, by trained and experienced Landsdowne interviewers.

Previous research was undertaken in 2005, 2002 and 1997, where possible comparisons are shown.

Throughout the presentation key findings are highlighted with a red outline.

## Key Findings

- Nearly two thirds of the population believe they have personally experienced an invasion of privacy on some level.
- The survey found that 67% of people who use the internet nowadays are concerned about the amount of information requested when signing up or registering on a website. 65% of those surveyed were concerned about the information that might appear if someone entered their name into a search engine, or if information they deleted resurfaced on the internet in future, whilst 63% expressed concern about internet logs being retained and monitored. Also of note, almost 1 in 4 Dublin respondents stated they had “information, images or footage” of themselves posted on the internet without their consent in comparison with an overall national figure of 11%.
- Unsolicited direct marketing, regardless of the type of medium used, continues to cause concern to people. Unsolicited telephone or postal communications continue to be the approaches the public most dislike. However, discontent with unsolicited text and email marketing has significantly increased since 2005. This is an area that the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner has devoted considerable attention to.
- Not surprisingly, of the issues put before respondents a good health service (89%) and crime prevention (87%) were seen as the most important issues affecting them. This was followed by privacy of personal information with 84% of those surveyed indicating that privacy of personal information was very important to them.

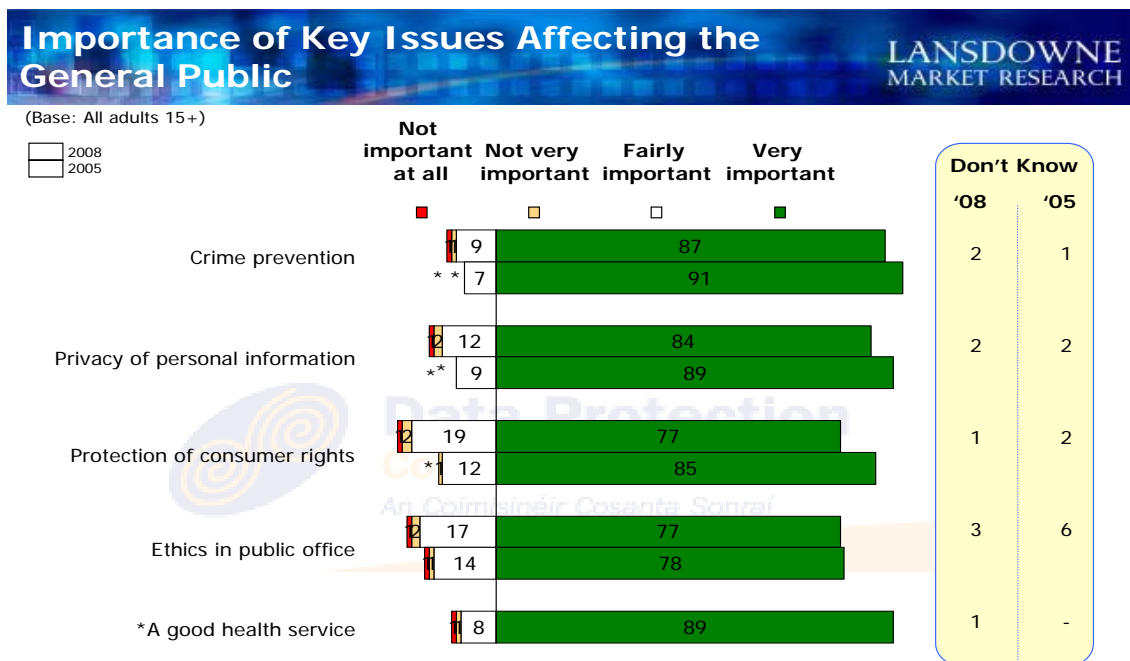
- Privacy in relation to medical records, financial history and credit card numbers rank as the top three matters considered to be very important. 'Medical records' has overtaken 'financial history' as the top concern in relation to privacy. 'Financial history' ranked as the top concern in both 2005 and 2002.
- 79% of respondents consider their personal public service number (PPSN) number as important from a privacy perspective. This has decreased by 5% since 2005 which may be attributable to the noticeable increase in public sector organisations seeking using PPSN as a means to identifying individuals. This is an issue which the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner is pursuing.
- The results somewhat surprisingly reveal strong opposition to the release of medical records for health research purposes. 42% of those surveyed indicated that they would not consent to the release of certain elements of their medical records to health researchers conducting research for particular conditions. In a related but more general question, 43% of those surveyed are opposed to allowing organisations access medical records for the purpose of advancing health research.
- 30% of respondents indicated (unprompted) that they would make a complaint about the invasion of their privacy to the Gardaí followed by 19% of people who indicated they would turn to the Data Protection Commissioner's Office.
- Almost one in five respondents believe that there is not appropriate access controls in place in both public sector and private sector organisations to prevent employees from accessing personal information inappropriately

## 1. Importance of key issues affecting the general public

Of the key issues that were put before respondents, a good health service was the most important issue identified, followed closely by crime prevention and privacy of personal information.

All the issues included that were previously included in the survey in 2005 have shown a decline in their 'very important' value. This is most likely due to the introduction of 'a good health service' as a new issue in 2008.

The value attached to the privacy of personal information was significantly higher among those who were aware of the Data Protection Commissioner ('very important rating' of 89%) than those who were not aware of DPC, where the 'very important rating' was 72%.



(Q.1) \*New statement

Overall, there were no significant differences in values attached to privacy of personal information geographically or across the social classification employed in the survey. However, respondents living in urban areas are more concerned about privacy of personal information than those in rural areas, with 88% of urban respondents stating that privacy of personal information was very important, in comparison to 77% of respondents in rural areas.

**Privacy of Personal Information Ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in Order of Importance** LANSDOWNNE MARKET RESEARCH

(Base: All aged 15+)

	Very important %	SEX		SOCIAL CLASS			REGION				AREA		AGE	
		Male %	Female %	ABC1 %	C2DE %	F %	Dublin %	Rest of Leinster %	Munster %	Conn/Ulster %	Urban %	Rural %	U35 %	35+ %
A good health service	89	89	89	88	90	90	90	92	82	94	92	84	86	91
Crime prevention	87	85	89	87	89	79	91	86	82	91	92	79	85	89
Privacy of personal information	84	85	83	84	84	81	85	85	81	84	88	77	81	86
Protection of consumer rights	77	75	78	78	78	65	82	80	70	70	82	68	73	80
Ethics in public office	77	76	78	78	76	74	84	72	72	78	83	67	73	79

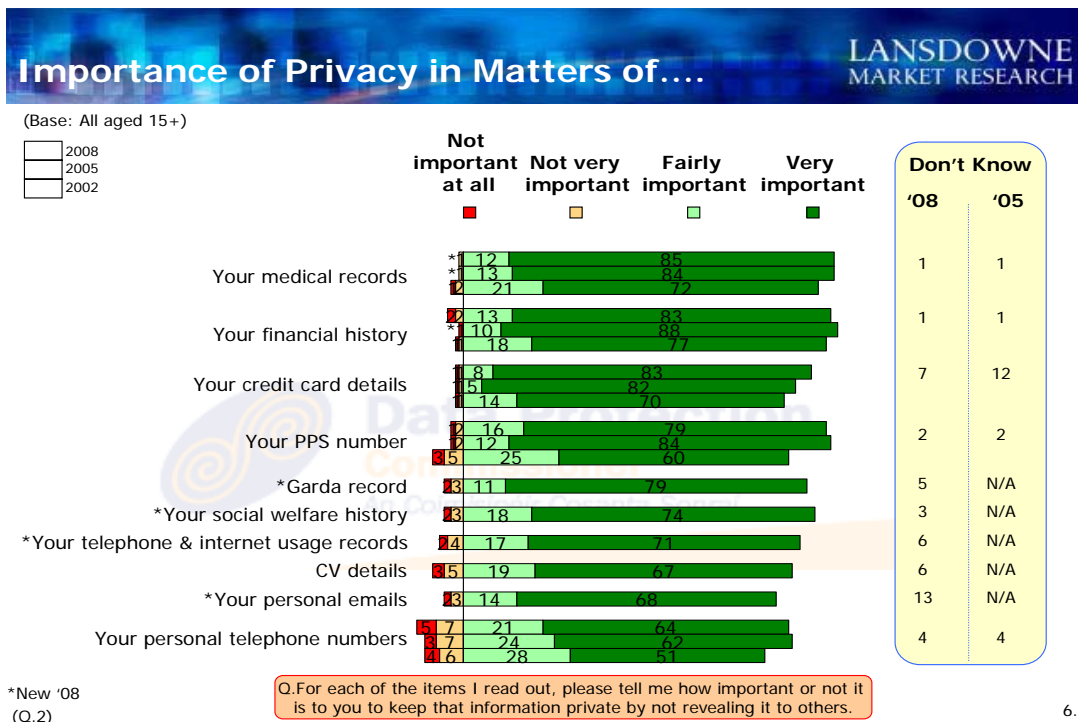
Over 35's and those living in urban areas are most concerned about key public issues

## 2. Importance of privacy in relation to key issues

People now attach a higher value on privacy in relation to medical records than financial history (which was the top ranking for both 2005 and 2002 survey).

Medical records, financial history and credit card details attach the highest levels of importance in terms of keeping this information private, with over 8 out of 10 respondents attributing a 'very important' rating to these issues.

In 2008, new key issues were introduced and it is noteworthy to find that over seven in ten respondents indicated a very important rating in relation to privacy of telephone and internet usage records and over two thirds of respondents specified a very important rating when asked about privacy in relation to personal emails.



# Importance of Privacy in Matters of....

(Base: All aged 15+)

	Very important %	AGE		SOCIAL CLASS			REGION				AREA	
		<35 %	>35 %	ABC1 %	C2DE %	F %	Dublin %	Rest of Leinster %	Munster %	Conn/ Ulster %	Urban %	Rural %
Your medical records	85	83	87	86	85	83	86	87	80	91	86	84
Your financial history	83	80	85	84	85	74	81	88	80	87	85	80
Your credit card details	83	84	83	88	82	71	93	78	75	91	89	74
Your PPS number	79	76	80	82	77	71	83	82	71	80	82	74
Garda record	79	78	80	82	79	68	81	68	84	84	84	71
Your social welfare history	74	71	76	75	76	58	77	74	74	71	80	65
Your telephone & internet usage records	71	69	72	76	70	51	79	67	67	69	79	58
Your personal emails	68	70	67	76	65	48	80	64	56	74	74	56
CV details	67	69	66	72	67	51	74	57	69	69	75	55
Your personal telephone numbers	64	63	64	66	64	55	78	60	59	54	70	54

(Q.2)

5.

The very important rating for privacy in relation to medical records was very evenly spread across all the social classifications used in the survey, ages and geographically.

Overall, the survey found that people living in urban areas were more likely to indicate a higher value on privacy in relation to all their personal records than those living in rural areas.

In most cases, female respondents indicated a higher value on privacy in relation to key issues, PPS number was the only issue where men specified a higher rating in relation to privacy than women.

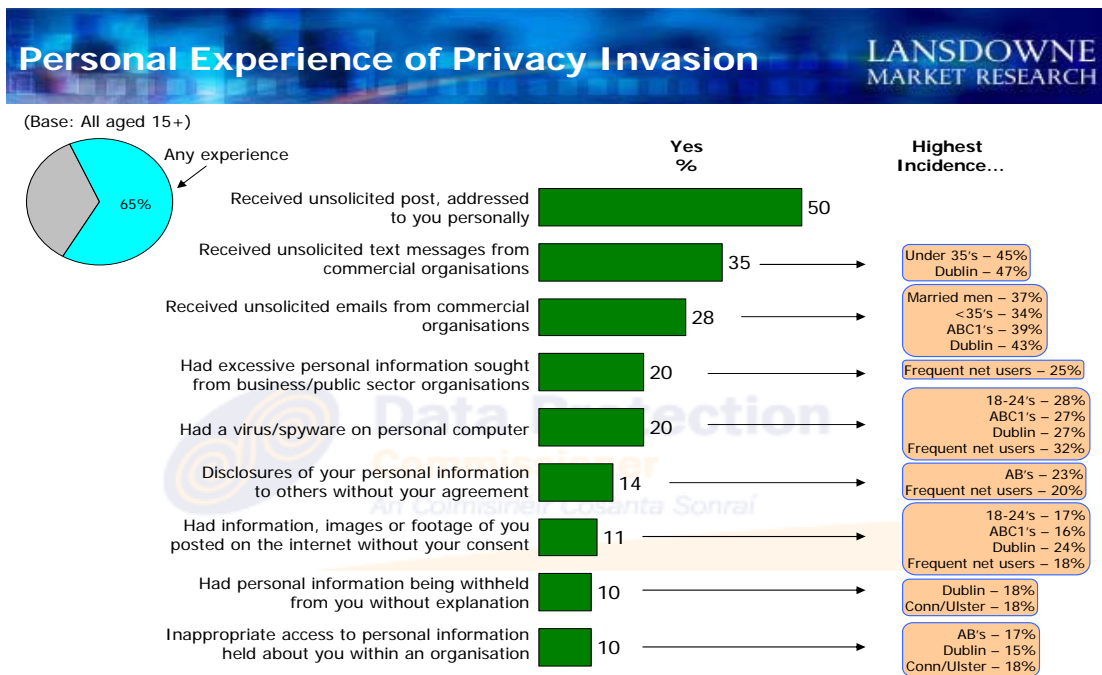
While personal telephone numbers achieved the lowest level of very importance, 64% of respondents considered it very important to keep this information private.

### 3. Experience of a privacy invasion in relation to personal information

A new question was introduced in 2008 to measure the extent of invasions of privacy in relation to personal information. It was surprising to find that almost two thirds of those surveyed believe they have experienced an invasion of privacy with regard to personal information, with 50% of respondents receiving unsolicited post, addressed to them personally. Over one third of respondents have received unsolicited text messages from commercial organisations, with the highest incidence being among under 35's (45%) and respondents in Dublin (47%).

Almost one in four of respondents based in Dublin have experience of information, images or footage of themselves posted on the internet without their consent in comparison with an overall national figure of 11%.

The survey found that the highest incidence of unsolicited emails from commercial organisation was among respondents living in Dublin and among the social class termed to be 'AB' where 43% of those surveyed indicating that they had received unsolicited emails from commercial organisations.

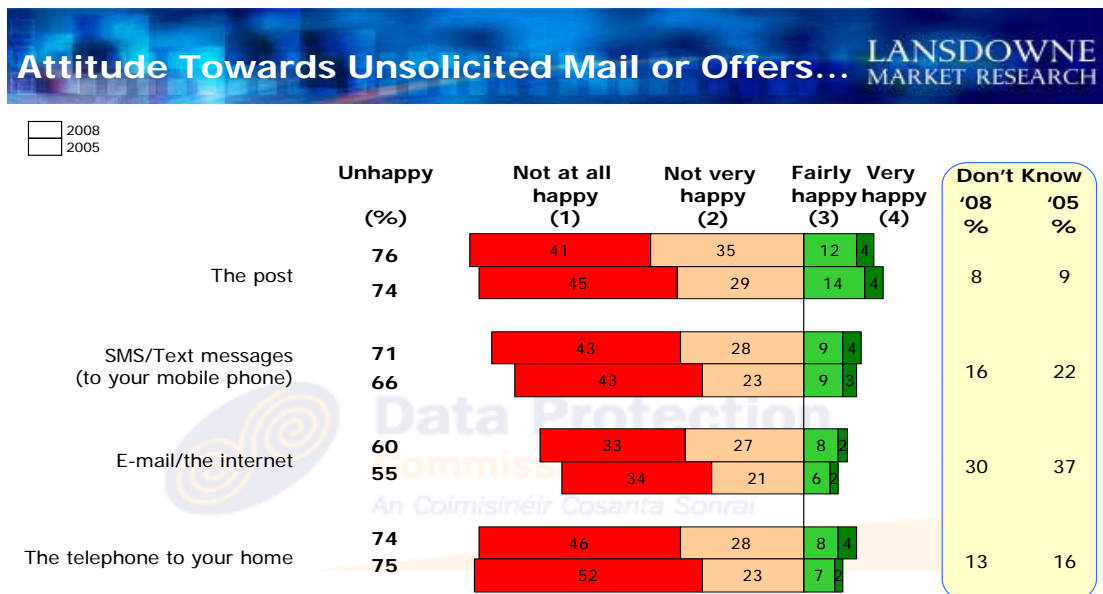


#### 4. Attitude to unsolicited communications

People continue to be displeased with receiving unsolicited direct marketing regardless of the medium used.

Unsolicited direct marketing via telephone or post continue to be the approaches the public most dislike. However, discontent with unsolicited text and email marketing has significantly increased since 2005.

The amount of respondents that are 'not happy at all' receiving unsolicited offers via the telephone to their home has significantly decreased since 2005, which may be attributable to the introduction of the National Directory Database in July 2005, where currently in excess of 900,000 people have registered their preference, via their service providers, to include their number on 'do not call' list for telemarketing purposes. Only 12% of respondents indicated they were agreeable to receiving unsolicited communications by way of telephone to their home.



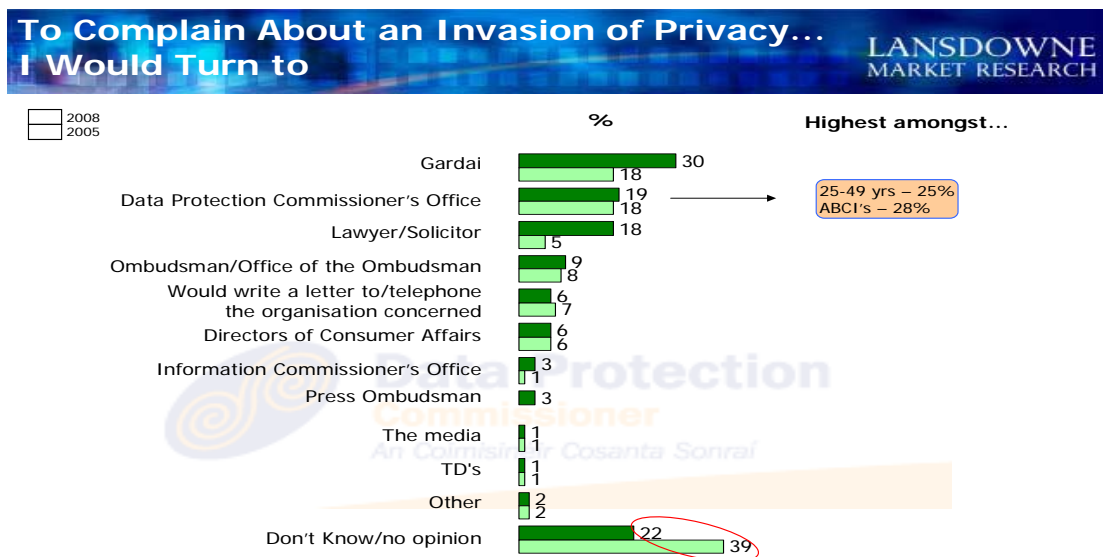
Q.How do you personally feel about receiving unasked for mail or offers from private companies via...

Unsolicited mail via telephone or post remain the approaches the public most dislike. However, irritation with text or e-mail contact has significantly increased since 2005.

## 5. Complaining about an invasion of privacy in terms of personal information

When asked where a person would go if they wished to make a complaint about an invasion of their privacy in terms of personal information, 30% of respondents indicated that they would turn to the Gardaí. This was followed by 19% of respondents indicating that they would turn to the Data Protection Commissioner's office. The survey found that there was a higher spontaneous mention of DPC from respondents in Dublin (29%) and among those who use the internet regularly (34%).

Encouragingly, in 2008, there was a marked decrease in 'don't know' responses from 2005 which would indicate that the general public are much more likely to be aware of options available to them for making a complaint about an invasion of privacy in terms of personal information, with significant increases in mentions of solicitors.

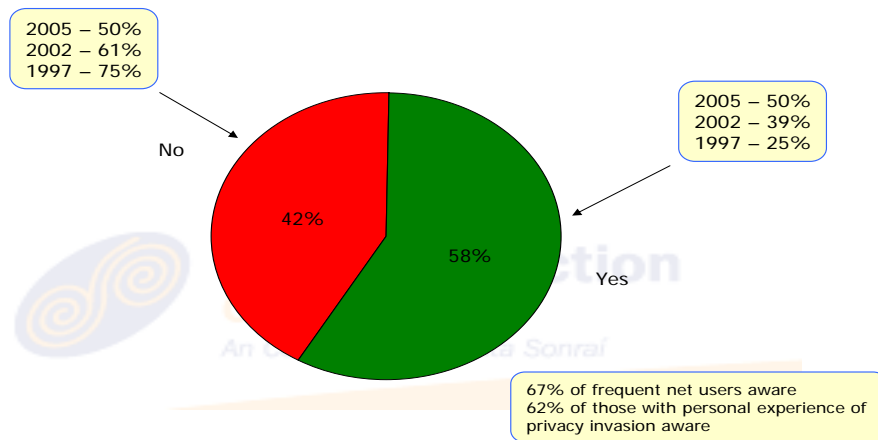


## 6. Awareness of the Data Protection Commissioner

Encouragingly, prompted awareness of the Data Protection Commissioner continues to increase, with 58% of respondents aware of the Data Protection Commissioner. This has continued to increase significantly since 1997 when only 25% of people surveyed were aware of the Data Protection Commissioner

### Prompted Awareness of the Data Protection Commissioner continues to increase

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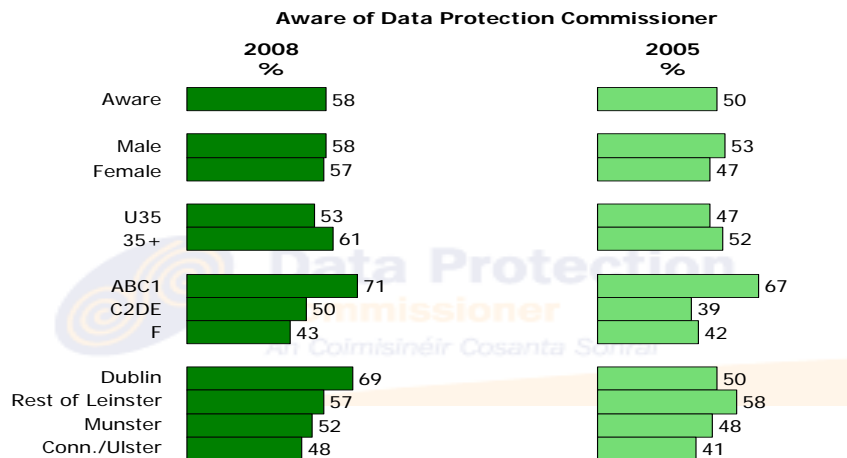
Q. Have you ever heard of the Data Protection Commissioner?

(Q.6)

1.

### Awareness – Commissioner & His Office

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(Q.6)

13.

## 7. Awareness of rights under Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003

### 2003

This question was introduced to measure awareness of individuals' rights under the Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003. It was encouraging to find that over 70% of respondents were aware of their right to:

- have their name removed from junk mail lists,
- have their telephone number removed from direct marketing lists,
- have inaccurate information about them corrected or deleted
- get a copy of information about them held by any organisation.

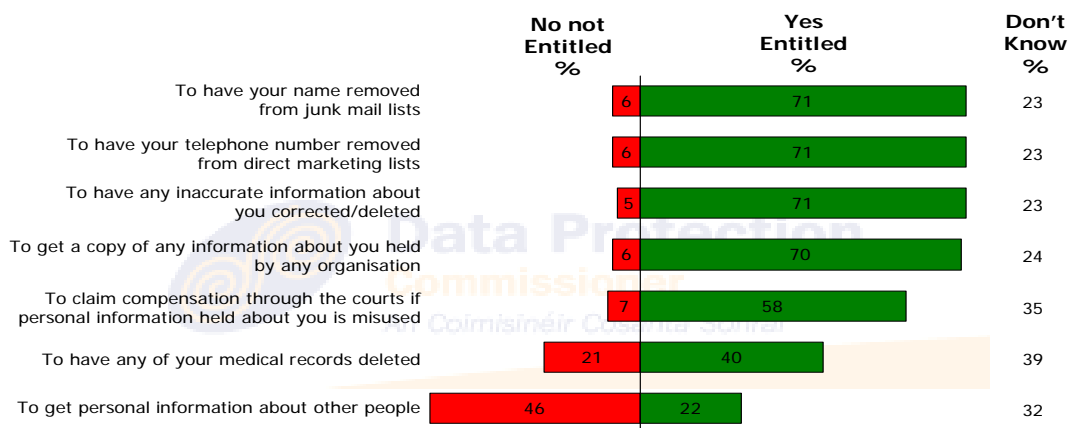
The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 provide a right for individuals to have personal data amended or deleted in certain instances. Of interest in this respect, 21% of respondents believed that they had no right to have 'any' of their medical records deleted.

Over one in five respondents (22%) believed they had the right to get personal information about other people.

### Awareness of Legal Entitlements

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(Base: All aged 15+)



Those aged over 65 and those in the lower socio-economic groups are most likely to be unsure of their entitlements

## 8. Concerns about personal information on the Internet

A new question was introduced in 2008 to measure concerns regarding personal information on the internet. 61% of respondents were internet users and the survey found a high level of concern amongst them in relation to their personal information on the net.

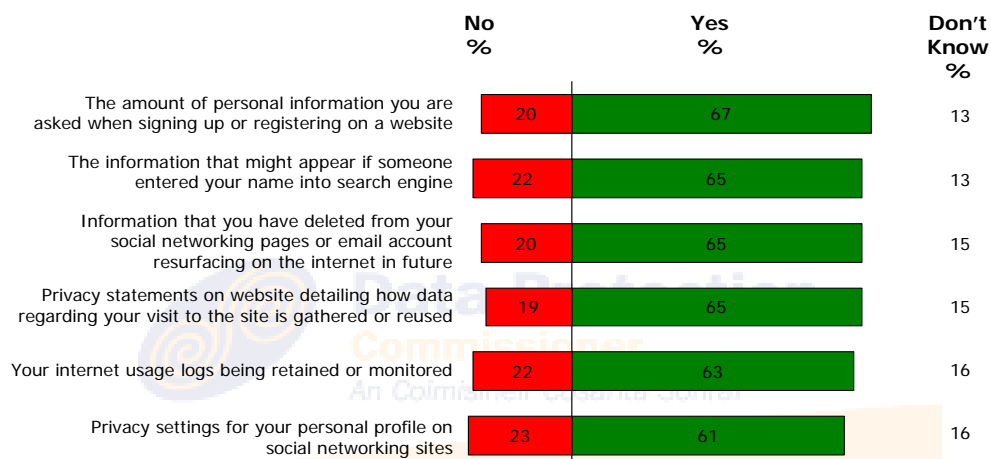
Over two thirds of respondents (67%) had concerns over the amount of personal information that is requested when signing up or registering on a website.

65% of those surveyed were concerned about the information that might appear if someone entered their name into a search engine. Equally, almost two thirds of those surveyed (65%) expressed a concern regarding information that they have deleted from social networking or email accounts resurfacing in the future.

The survey also found that 63% of people who used the internet expressed concerns regarding internet usage logs being retained or monitored.

### Concerns Regarding Internet Use LANSDOWNNE MARKET RESEARCH

(Base: All using the internet nowadays = 615)



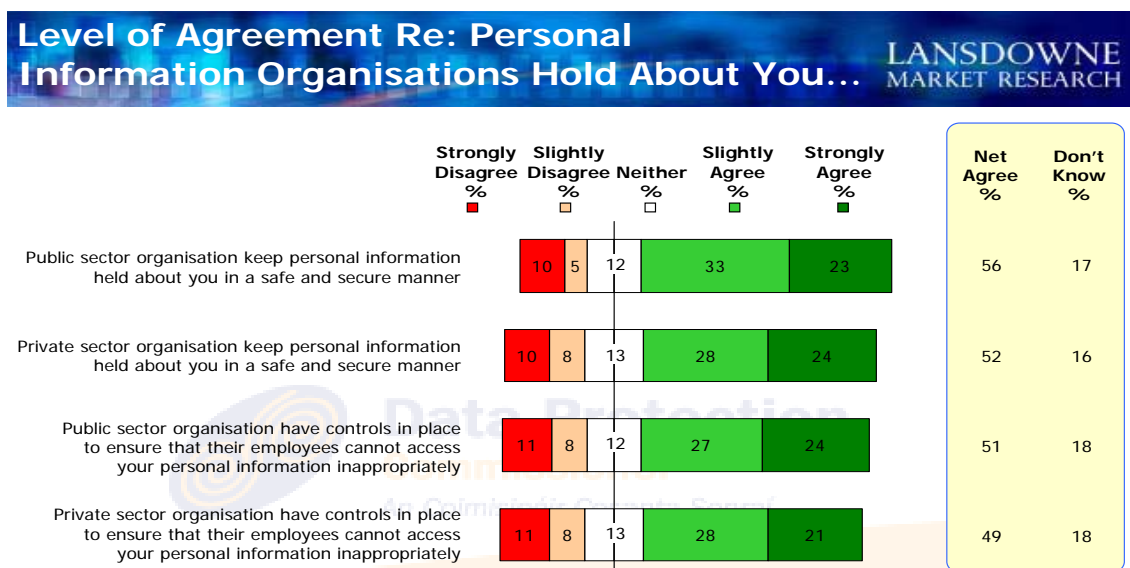
## 9. Perception of the level of security attached to personal information held in the Public & Private Sector

This question was introduced in 2008 to measure differences in perceptions to the level of security attached to personal information held within the Public and Private Sectors.

The survey found that overall there was a higher level of confidence for security controls within the public sector with 56% of respondents agreeing that information is kept in a safe and secure manner, and 51% agreeing that appropriate access controls are in place, in comparison to 52% and 49% for the private sector respectively.

However, the survey shows that less than one in four respondents indicated that they 'strongly agree' that appropriate security controls are implemented in both the public and private sectors.

10% of respondents stated that they 'strongly disagree' that both public and private sector organisations hold information in a safe and secure manner and 11% of those surveyed indicating that they 'strongly disagree' that public and private sector organisations having implemented controls to ensure that employees cannot inappropriately access your personal information.



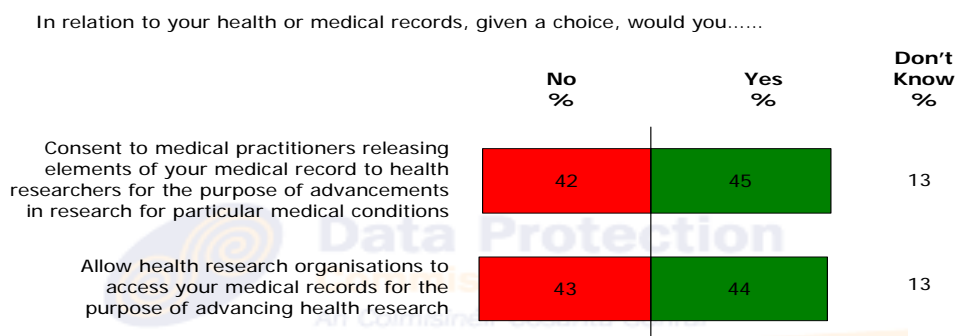
## 10. Attitude to accessing medical records

The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 do allow, under certain strict conditions, for access to medical records for health research purposes in certain situations. It is striking that even in this context, less than half of those surveyed (45%) would consent to medical practitioners releasing elements of their medical records to health researchers conducting research for particular conditions, with 42% indicating that they would not consent to the release of this information. Of the respondents based in Dublin, 53% of those surveyed indicated that they would not consent to the release of elements of their medical records to health researchers.

In a related but more general question, the survey also found that there is strong opposition to allowing health research organisations access medical records for the purpose of advancing health research with 43% of respondents indicating that, if they were given a choice they would not allow health researchers access to their records for this purpose.

The type of access to health records for health research purposes envisaged in the second question was intended to suggest a more general consent but given the similarity in responses to both questions, it is likely that the second question was not sufficiently distinct from the first to allow for a distinction to be made by respondents when answering.

### Attitudes Towards Access to Medical Records LANSDOWNE MARKET RESEARCH



Q. In relation to your health or medical records given a choice, would you?  
Those aged 35-49 & 65+ least likely to agree