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## Introduction

Recent media coverage has highlighted failures in the current system safeguarding the welfare of at risk or vulnerable children & adolescents under HSE care.

The lack of an "at risk childrens registry" in our health system has made it difficult track such children & adolescents especially when they may cross "health board" regions.

National guidelines for the protection and welfare of children [1] state that "the hospital is in a pivotal position to identify cases where reasonable grounds for concern exist about child protection and to participate in the assessment of those concerns".

Emergency departments around the country receive regular communications from the HSE regarding potentially at risk or vulnerable children/adolescents who may present for treatment. How these communications are dealt with forms the basis of this survey.



## Aims

The aim of this survey was to highlight the need for a national child protection registry and a shared accessible electronic database between appropriate HSE staff.

Such systems have been successfully implemented in neighbouring health services. The NHS uses "CPoL" (Child protection online) which allows appropriate NHS staff secure online access to a subset of data on the Child Protection register.

## Materials and Methods

A 4 part questionnaire was sent to Emergency Consultants, EM SpR's, Emergency department CNM's and ED social workers either via an online survey, or by direct telephone questionnaire.

The survey responses were collected over a 4 month period from May to August 2010.

Participants were asked to provide their position and emergency Department in which they worked.

Question 2:

Who receives communications regarding at risk/vulnerable children & adolescents in your department?

Question 3:

Does your Emergency department have a procedure/policy for dealing with notifications of at risk/vulnerable/missing children & adolescents?

Question 4:

Is there an alert system in place to flag these individuals when they present to the emergency department? Eg computer alert/triage noticeboard or file/verbal communication, other

Question 5:

Has this led to any particular actions occurring?

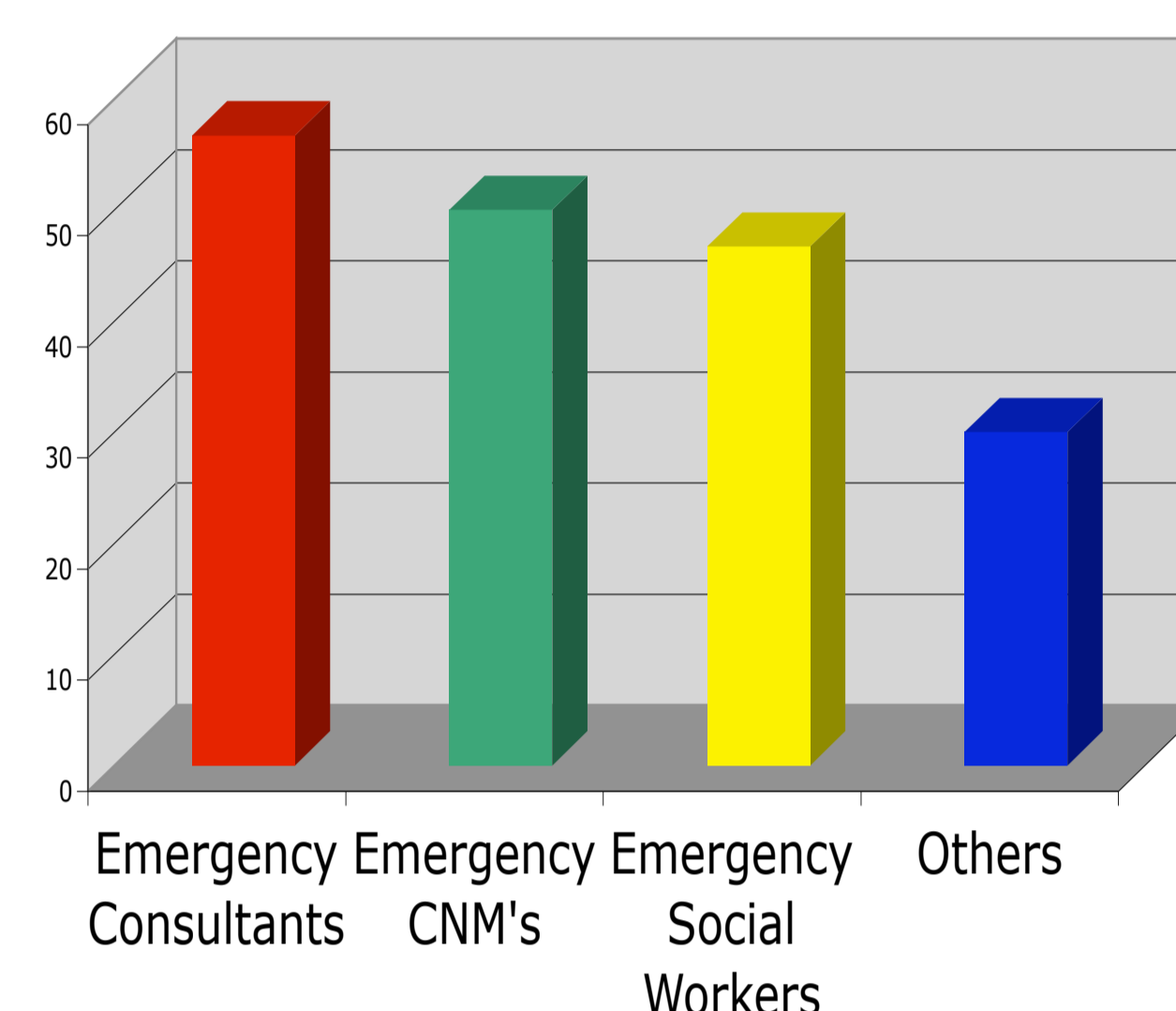
## Results

A total of 30 questionnaires were fully completed. Data from 16 different national Emergency departments were represented in the survey.

All the HSE regional areas were represented.

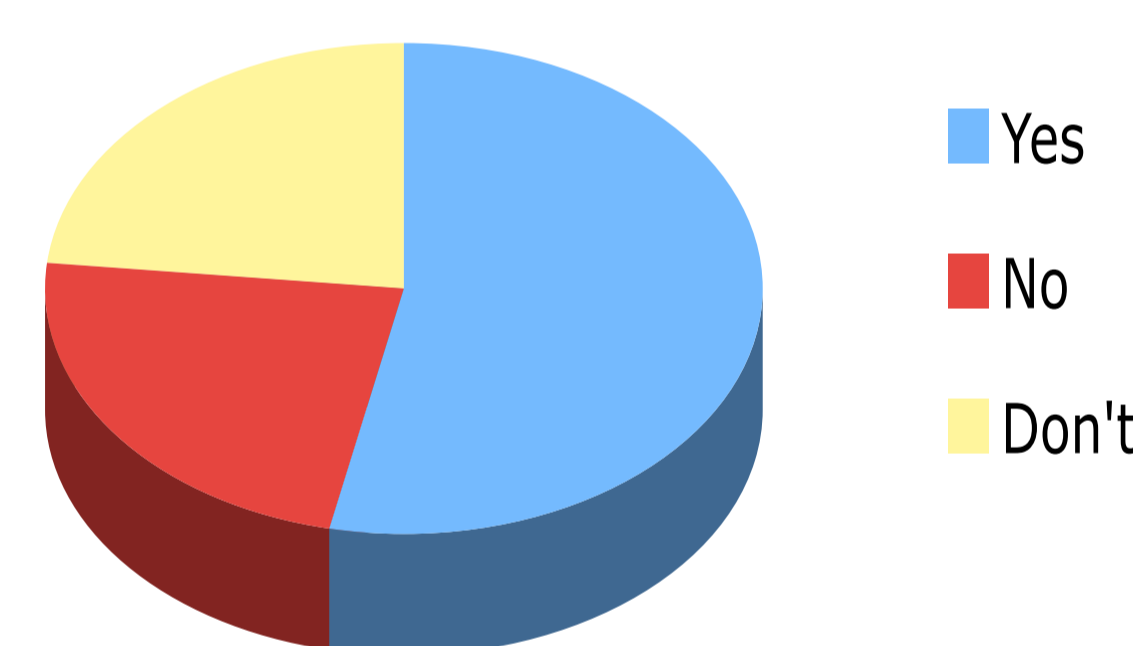
## Results

### Who receives communications?



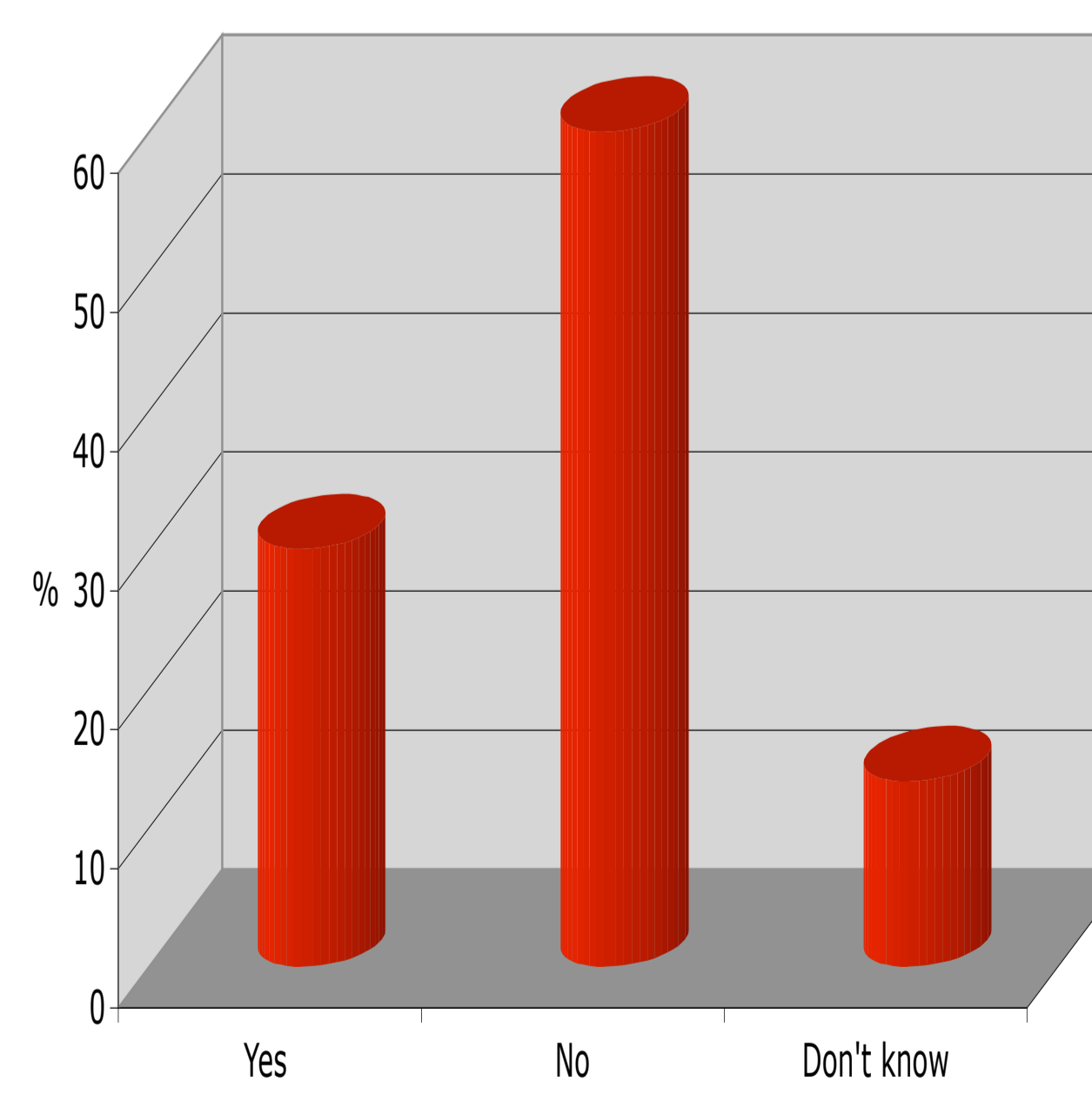
Communications from the HSE regarding at risk children/adolescents are sent regularly to ED consultants, ED CNM's and ED social workers.

### Does your Department have a policy for dealing with these communications?



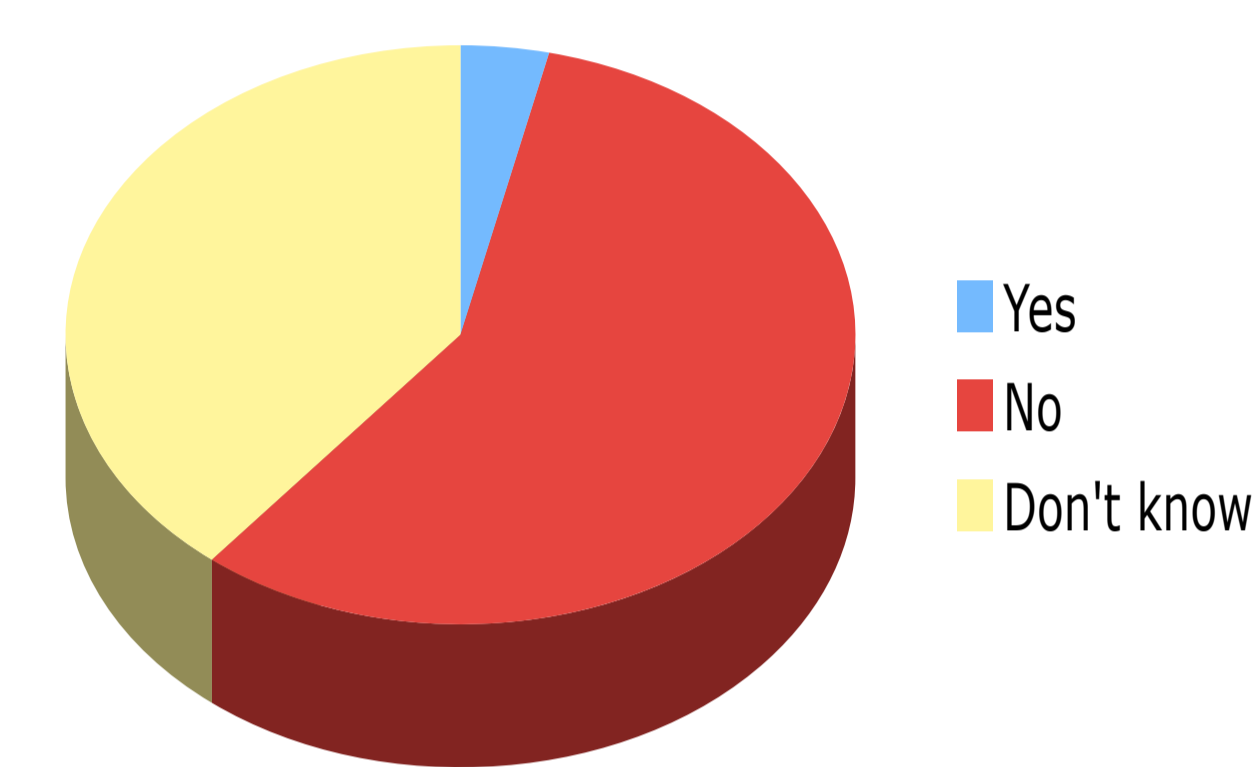
The majority of Irish Emergency departments that participated in the survey had a formal policy/procedure in dealing with notifications regarding at risk children/adolescents

### Is there an Alert system in place?



58% of Emergency departments have no alert system in place if known at risk individuals were to attend. Of those that exist, the form varies between verbal communication, notice boards with attached memos & a computerised local registry of at risk children.

### Has this led to any action occurring?



Very few actions occurred at a result of the implemented departmental policies. Some departments review the communications at regular intervals with ED social workers.

## Conclusion

The results from this survey of Irish Emergency Departments indicate that most departments have a formal policy in dealing with notifications from the HSE regarding at risk individuals.

However there are limited alert systems in place that would be required to ensure Emergency staff were able to recognise this when needed.

Some local databases do exist but their application has been limited.

Because we have a relatively small population base, a national online secure database would be potentially easier to implement compared to other countries. This would allow HSE staff identify those at risk and participate in the assessment of those concerns as stated in the Children first<sup>[1]</sup> guidelines.

## References

[1] Children first ; National Guidelines for the Protection and welfare of Children in Ireland