

By ALAN FRAM and TREVOR TOMPSON , Associated Press Writers

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Those things that go bump in the night? About one-third of people believe they could be ghosts.

And nearly one out of four, 23 percent, say they've actually seen a ghost or felt its presence, finds a pre-Halloween poll by The Associated Press and Ipsos.

One is Misty Conrad, who says she fled her rented home in Syracuse, Ind., after her daughter began talking to an unseen girl named Nicole and neighbors said children had been murdered in the house. That was after the TV and lights began flicking on at night. "It kind of creeped you out," Conrad, 40, of Hampton, Va., recalled this week. "I needed to get us out."



*Misty Conrad, right, of Hampton, Va, along with her daughter, Ariel Conrad, left, age 16, and son Taylor Conrad, center, age 14, in their home on Oct 25, 2007. It was bad enough when the TV and lights inexplicably flicked on at night, Misty Conrad says. When her daughter began talking to an unseen girl named Nicole and neighbors said children had been murdered in the house, it was time to move.*

About one out of five people, 19 percent, say they accept the existence of spells or witchcraft. Nearly half, 48 percent, believe in extrasensory perception, or ESP. The most likely candidates for ghostly visits include single people, Catholics and those who never attend religious services. By 31 percent to 18 percent, more liberals than conservatives report seeing a specter.

Those who dismissed the existence of ghosts include Morris Swadener, 66, a Navy retiree from Kingston, Wash. He says he shot one with his rifle when he was a child. "I woke up in the middle of the night and saw a white ghost in my closet," he said. "I discovered I'd put a hole in my brand new white shirt. My mother and father were not amused." Three in 10 have awakened sensing a strange presence in the room. For whatever it says about matrimony, singles are more likely than married people to say so.

Fourteen percent - mostly men and lower-income people - say they have seen a UFO. Among

them is Danny Eskanos, 44, an attorney in Palm Harbor, Fla., who says as a Colorado teenager he watched a bright light dart across the sky, making abrupt stops and turns. "I knew a little about airplanes and helicopters, and it was not that," he said. "It's one of those things that sticks in your mind."

Spells and witchcraft are more readily believed by urban dwellers, minorities and lower-earning people. Those who find credibility in ESP are more likely to be better educated and white - 51 percent of college graduates compared to 37 percent with a high school diploma or less, about the same proportion by which white believers outnumber minorities.

Overall, the 48 percent who accept ESP is less than the 66 percent who gave that answer to a similar 1996 Newsweek question.

One in five say they are at least somewhat superstitious, with young men, minorities, and the less educated more likely to go out of their way to seek luck. Twenty-six percent of urban residents - twice the rate of those from rural areas - said they are superstitious, while single men were more superstitious than unmarried women, 31 percent to 17 percent.

The most admitted-to superstition, by 17 percent, was finding a four-leaf clover. Thirteen percent dread walking under a ladder or the groom seeing his bride before their wedding, while slightly smaller numbers named black cats, breaking mirrors, opening umbrellas indoors, Friday the 13th or the number 13.

Generally, women were more superstitious than men about four-leaf clovers, breaking mirrors or grooms prematurely seeing brides. Democrats were more superstitious than Republicans over opening umbrellas indoors, while liberals were more superstitious than conservatives over four-leaf clovers, grooms seeing brides and umbrellas.

Then there's Jack Van Geldern, a computer programmer from Riverside, Conn. Now 51, Van Geldern is among the 5 percent who say they have seen a monster in the closet - or in his case, a monster's face he spotted on the wall of his room as a child.

"It was so terrifying I couldn't move," he said. "Needless to say I survived the event and never saw it again."

The poll, conducted Oct. 16-18, involved telephone interviews with 1,013 adults and had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.