

Classmate Relationships among Irish schoolchildren

HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams^{1,2} in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Dr Candace Currie of the University of Edinburgh. In 2002 HBSC Ireland surveyed 8,424 Irish children from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

Further information is available at:
<http://www.hbsc.org>
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>
<http://www.hbsc.org/countries/ireland.html>




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Summary

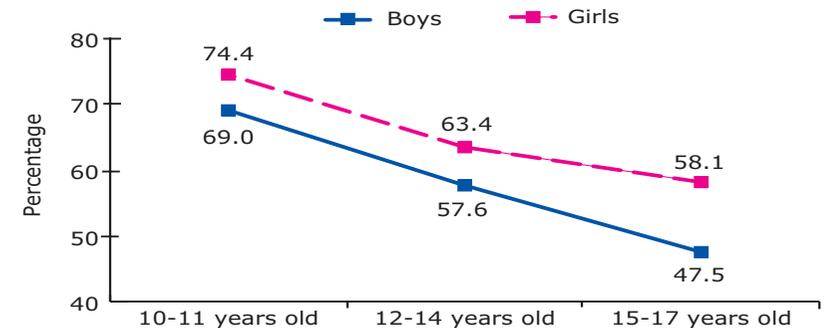
HBSC Ireland has found that 60.1% of children aged 10-18 report positive relationships with their classmates (55.9% of boys and 63.1% of girls). This figure has remained stable since 1998. However, the percentage of children reporting positive relationships with classmates decreases with age. Children who report positive relationships with their classmates report less frequent emotional and somatic symptoms and fewer episodes of drunkenness. They are more likely to be involved in physical activity and to report excellent health and happiness than those who do not experience positive relationships with their classmates.

Why this topic?

The school setting is an important arena for children for at least 10 years of their lives, 5-7 hours a day. As such, it plays an important role in the health of young people^{3,4}. One of the dimensions in school life is that of peer support⁵. Positive relationships with classmates in this factsheet refer to a combination of three questions, where children report that students enjoy being together, that students are kind and helpful and that other students accept them as they are.

Trends 1998 – 2002

Overall, the percentage of children reporting positive relationships with classmates has remained stable since 1998 (59.7% in 1998, 60.1% in 2002). An increase is found only among children aged 10-11 years old from 67.9% in 1998 to 71.9% in 2002, although this small increase and could fall within the statistical error margins.

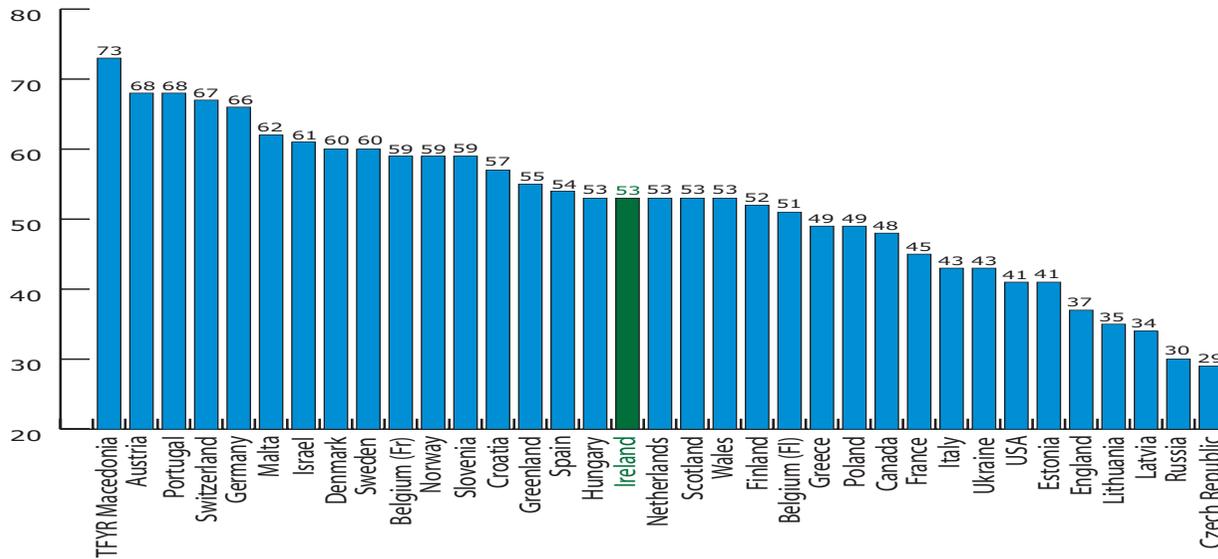


Percentage of children reporting positive relationships with classmates, by age and gender, HBSC 2002

School peer support in context

- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are more likely to report excellent health than students not reporting positive relationships with classmates (33% vs. 21%) and are also more likely to report that they feel very happy about their life (53% vs. 31%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to report frequent emotional symptoms than students not reporting positive relationships with classmates (11% vs. 19%) and also to report less frequent physical symptoms (22% vs. 30%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to have been drunk than students not reporting positive relationships with classmates (27% vs. 37%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to smoke than students not reporting positive relationships with classmates (15.7% vs. 22.5%).
- The quality of reported relationships with classmates is not associated with social class or with having a medically attended injury in the previous 12 months.

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Percentage of 15 years old children reporting positive peer support at school, by country

International

Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 17th among 35 countries in Europe and North America, with 53% reporting positive relationships with classmates. Overall, 68% Irish 11 years olds (rank 14th) and 62% Irish 13 years olds (rank 10th), report positive relationships with classmates.

Implications

More than half of Irish schoolchildren (60.1%) report that they enjoy positive relationships with classmates, and this figure has remained stable. However, given the associations between positive relationships with classmates and several risk and resilience factors, the 40% of children who do not experience positive relationships with classmates should not

be neglected. Efforts should be made to identify the children who are less socially integrated and provide them with other sources of support, alongside policy and activities that might enable less integrated students to become more socially involved in the class.

References

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