

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

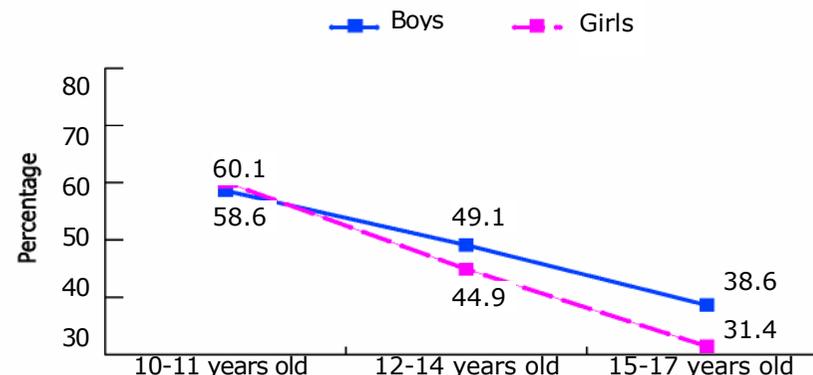
HBSC Ireland has found that 44.2% of Irish children report that they are very happy about their life, (boys 47.1%, girls 42.1%), representing a slight increase since 1998. The percentage of children reporting being very happy decreases with age, from 58.6% of 10-11 year old boys and 60.1% of 10-11 year old girls, to 38.6% of 15-17 year old boys and 31.4% of 15-17 year old girls. Children who feel very happy are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, while they are more likely to: live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents and best friend, spend more than 4 evenings a week with friends and report excellent health. Very happy in this factsheet refers to children who report feeling very happy about their life at present.

Why this topic?

Emotional health is equally important as physical health to the overall well-being of a person. It has a significant impact on a person's quality of life as well as their contribution to society³. Adolescence is a key period in shaping patterns of emotional health⁴.

Trends 1998 – 2002

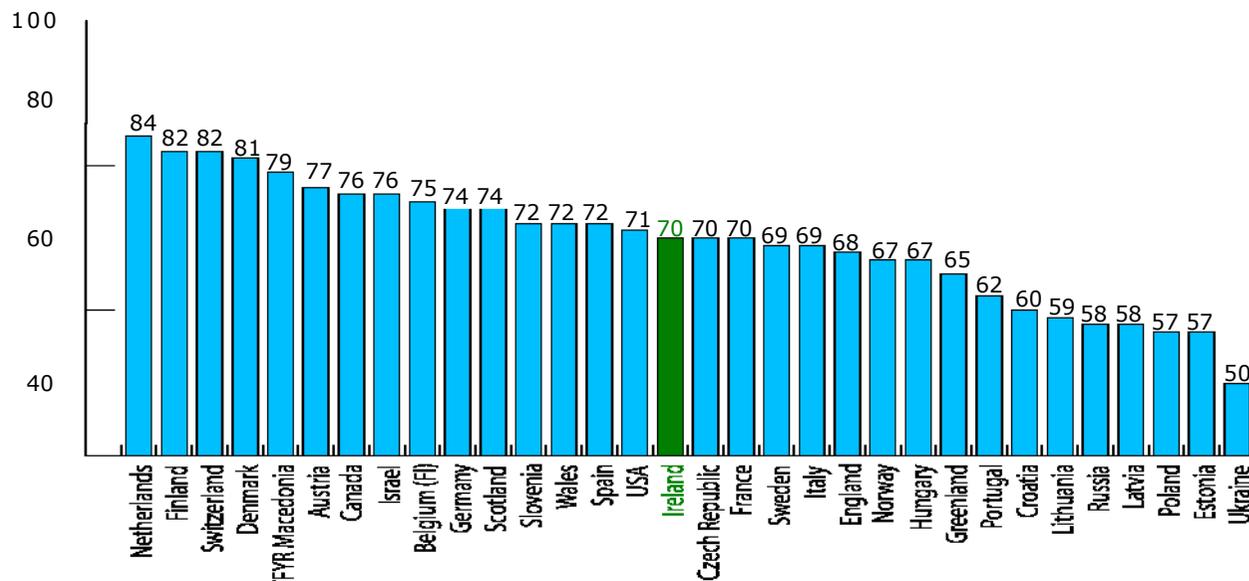
Overall, the percentage of children who report being very happy about their life, has increased slightly between 1998 (42.2%) and 2002 (44.2%). This increase is seen among both boys (44.5% to 47.1%) and girls (40% to 42.1%) and across all age groups. The most pronounced increases are seen among boys aged 15-17 (32.7% to 38.6%) and girls aged 15-17 (24.8% to 31.4%).



Percentage of children who reported being very happy by age and gender, HBSC 2002

Well-being in context

- Children who are very happy are more likely to live with both parents, than those who do not (45% vs. 37%).
- Children who are very happy are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (84% vs. 69%) and father (66% vs. 43%), than those who are not.
- Children who are very happy are more likely to find it easy to talk to their best friend, than those who are not (87% vs. 83%).
- Children who are very happy are more likely to spend 4 or more evenings a week with friends, than those who are not (43% vs. 37%).
- Children who are very happy are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, than those who are not (26% vs. 43%).
- Children who are very happy are more likely to report having excellent health (43% vs. 16%), than those who are not.
- Feeling very happy is not associated with social class.



Percentage of 15 years old children reporting high life satisfaction, by country

International

The question on level of happiness was not asked internationally, therefore an international comparison is presented above on self-reported life satisfaction. Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 16th among 32 countries in Europe and North America, with 70% reporting that they have high life satisfaction. Overall 83% of Irish 11 year olds (ranked 12th) and 77% of Irish 13 year olds (ranked 6th) report having the best possible life.

Implications

The percentage of young people in Ireland that report being very happy has shown a slight increase since 1998. In addition, the percentage of children with high life satisfaction can be considered midrange among the rankings of other countries in Europe and North America.

From the findings presented in this factsheet, it is evident that strong family and peer relationships are associated with self-rated happiness. Attention should focus on those children that rate their happiness and life satisfaction as being poor, with special emphasis placed on the underlying reasons for such ratings. Support structures should be developed and implemented to address specific adolescent issues of well-being and mental health.

References

1. Currie, C., Samdal, O., Boyce, W. & Smith, R. (eds.) (2001). Health behaviour in school-aged children: a WHO cross-national study (HBSC): research protocol for 2001/2002 survey. Edinburgh: CAHRU, University of Edinburgh.
2. Currie, C., Roberts, C., Morgan, A., Smith, R., Settertobulte, W., Samdal, O. & Barnakov-Rasmussen, V. (eds.) (2004). Young people’s health in context. Health Policy for Children and Adolescent No. 4. Copenhagen: WHO-Europe.
3. Department of Health and Children (2000). *The National Health Promotion Strategy 2000-2005*. The Stationary Office.
4. WHO (2000). Cross-national comparisons of the prevalence and correlates of mental disorders. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 78(4), 413-26.

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