

HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams¹ in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Professor Candace Currie of the University of Edinburgh. In 2006 HBSC Ireland surveyed 10,334 schoolchildren in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

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



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HPRC
Health Promotion Research Centre



Office of the Minister for
Children and Youth Affairs
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Department of
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AN ROINN SLÁNTE AGUS LEANAÍ

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Summary

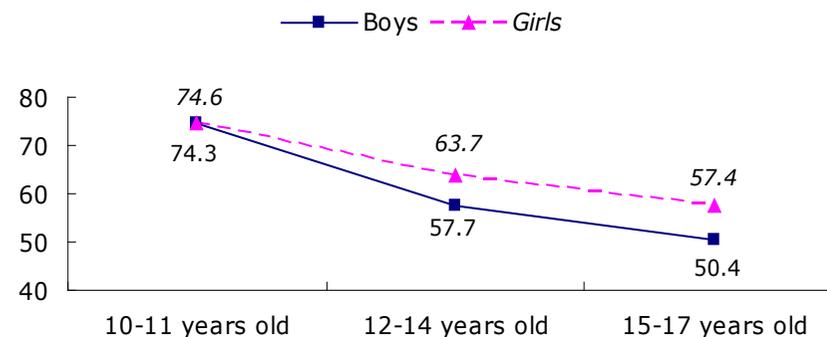
HBSC Ireland 2006 has found that 59.7% of schoolchildren aged 10-18 years report positive relationships with their classmates (56.7% of boys and 62.9% of girls). This figure has remained stable since 2002 (60.1%). The percentage of children reporting positive relationships with classmates is higher among girls across all age groups. The largest gender difference in reporting positive relationships is in the 15-17 year age group (girls 57.4%, boys 50.4%). Children who have positive relationships with their classmates are less likely to report episodes of drunkenness, being current smokers and experiencing emotional and physical symptoms. They are more likely to report excellent health and happiness and being involved in physical activity. For this factsheet students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements 'students in my class(es) enjoy being together', 'most of the students in my class(es) are kind and helpful' and 'other students accept me as I am' were classified as having positive classmate relationships.

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. Consequently it plays an important role in the health of young people. One of the dimensions of school life is peer support and children who have a friend in school report fewer psychological complaints². Peer social skills and early classroom adjustment have been identified as being protective against adolescent depression³.

Trends 2002-2006

Overall the percentage of children reporting positive relationships has remained stable since 2002 (60.1% in 2002, 59.7% in 2006). There remains a trend for a decrease in positive classmate relationships with age.

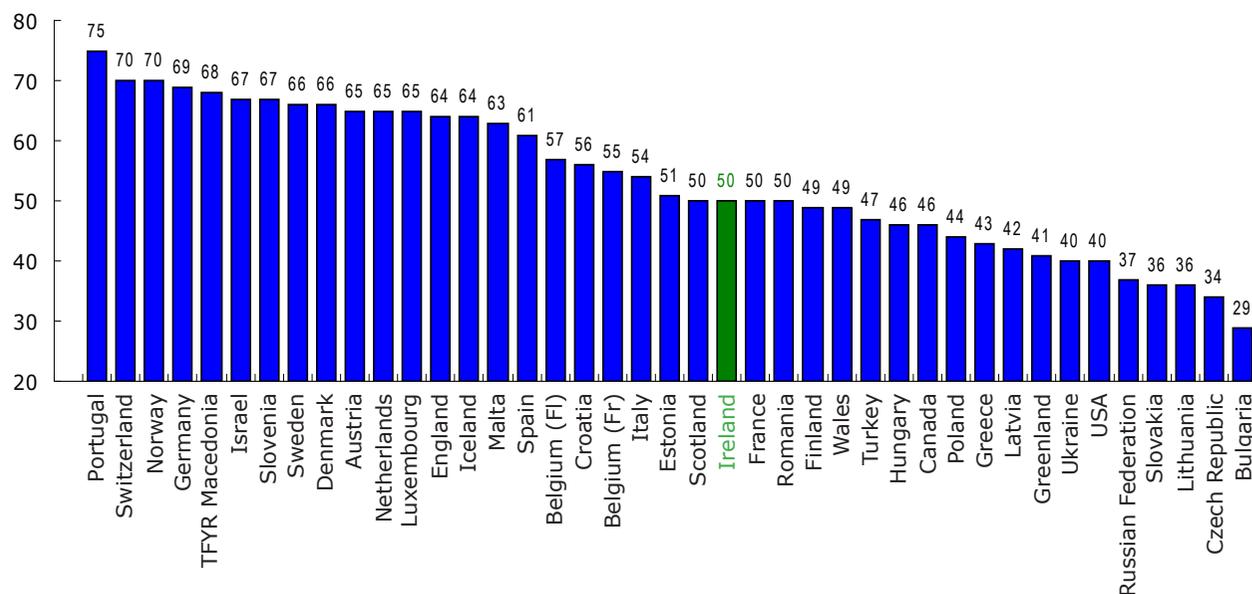


Percentage of children who report positive classmate relationships, by age and gender

School peer support in context

- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to be current smokers than students not reporting such relationships (13.1% vs. 18.4%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to have been drunk than students not reporting such relationships (28.1% vs. 38.6%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are more likely to report being physically active than students not reporting such relationships (56.9% vs. 49.7%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are more likely to report excellent health than students not reporting such relationships (38.2% vs. 26.0%) and are also more likely to report that they feel very happy about their lives (59.2% vs. 35.6%).
- Students reporting positive relationships with classmates are less likely to report frequent emotional symptoms than students not reporting such relationships (26.6% vs. 39.9%) and they also report less frequent physical symptoms (28.3% vs. 40.8%).
- The quality of reported relationships with classmates is not associated with social class.

...Classmate relationships among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year old children reporting positive classmate relationships, by country

International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 23rd among 41 countries in Europe and North America with 50% reporting positive relationships with classmates. Overall 75% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 12th) and 60% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 22nd) report positive relationships with classmates.

Implications

Given the associations between classmate relationships and several risk and resilience factors, the issue of school children who do not experience positive relationships with classmates needs to be addressed. We should examine the features and structures of our education system with a view to improving the experiences of all children and with a particular focus on those who are socially excluded. Policy and practice should aim to prevent and remedy such marginalisation.

References

1. Currie, C., Nic Gabhainn, S., Godeau, E., Roberts, C., Smith, R., Currie, D., Pickett, W., Richter, M., Morgan, A. & Barnekow, V. (eds.) (2008). *Inequalities in young people's health: HBSC international report from the 2005/2006 Survey*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 5).
2. Brodin Låftman, S. & Ostberg, V. (2006). The pros and cons of social relations: an analysis of adolescents' health complaints. *Social Science & Medicine*, 63(3), 611-23.
3. Smokowski, P. R., Mann, E. A., Reynolds, A. J. & Fraser, M. W. (2004). Childhood risk and protective factors and late adolescent adjustment in inner city minority youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(1), 63-91.

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All factsheets and other HBSC publications and reports can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc>

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