

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

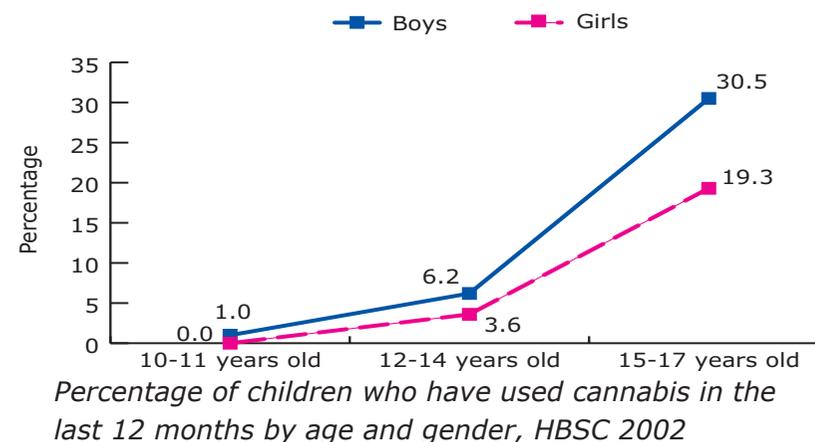
HBSC Ireland has found that 11.1% of children report having taken cannabis in the past 12 months (13.7% of boys and 9.1% of girls). This figure has remained relatively stable since 1998. The percentage of children that have taken cannabis increases with age, from 1.0% of 10-11 year old boys and 0% of 10-11 year old girls, to 30.5% of 15-17 year old boys and 19.3% of 15-17 year old girls. Children who have taken cannabis in the last 12 months are less likely to: live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents, like school, have excellent health and be happy with their lives, while they are more likely to: find it easy to talk to their best friend, spend 4 evenings or more a week with their friends and feel pressured by schoolwork. Cannabis use in this factsheet refers to children who report having taking cannabis once or more in the last 12 months.

Why this topic?

Drug use among young people is a major concern because of its threat to public health and its associations with antisocial and criminal behaviour³. Early cannabis use also is associated with social, psychological and substance use problems in older adolescents and adulthood^{4, 5}.

Trends 1998 – 2002

The percentage of children reporting having taken cannabis in the past 12 months has remained relatively stable between 1998 (10.3%) and 2002 (11.1%). There has been a slight increase in the number of girls who have taken cannabis (6.7% to 9.1%), which is most evident among 15-17 year olds (16.1% to 19.3%). However, the most

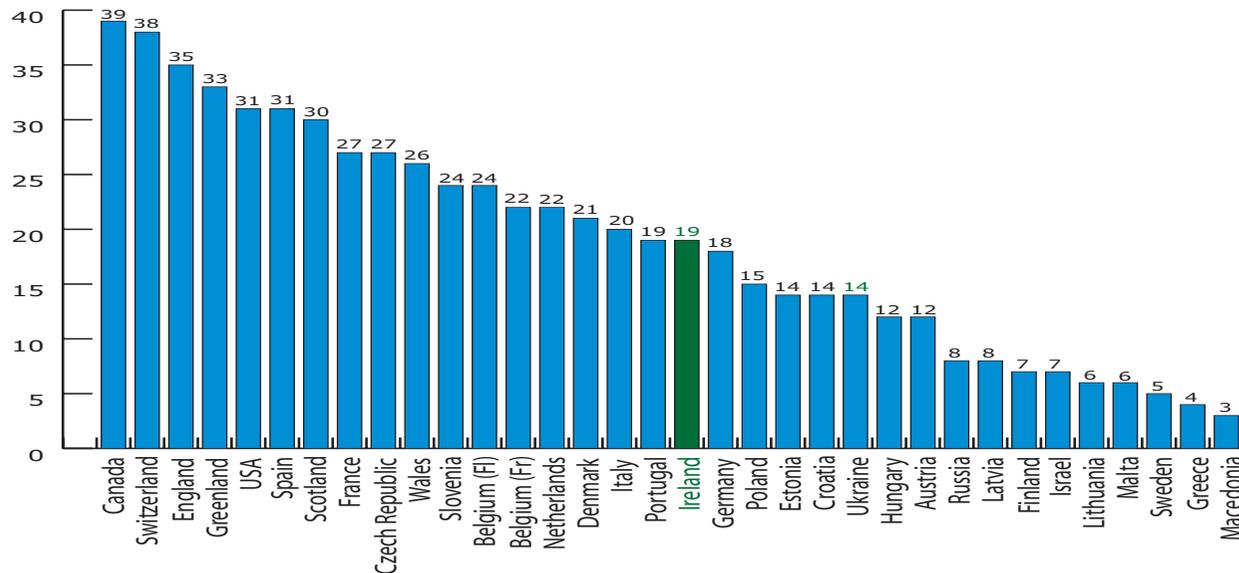


prominent increase is among boys aged 15-17 years (26.5% to 30.5%), while the percentage of boys who have taken cannabis in the younger age groups has dropped, particularly among 12-14 year olds (10.6% to 6.2%).

Cannabis use in context

- Children who have used cannabis in the last 12 months are less likely to live with both parents, than children who have not (24% vs. 10%).
- Children who have used cannabis are less likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (64% vs. 77%) and father (38% vs. 55%), than those who have not.
- Children who have used cannabis are more likely to find it easy to talk to their best friend, than those who have not (88% vs. 84%).
- Children who have used cannabis are more likely to spend more than 4 evenings a week with friends, than those who have not (57% vs. 37%).
- Children who have used cannabis are less likely to like school, than those who have not (49% vs. 72%).

...Cannabis use among Irish schoolchildren



Percentage of 15 years old children used cannabis in the last 12 months, by country

- Children who have used cannabis are more likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, than those who have not (40% vs. 35%).
- Children who have taken cannabis are less likely to report excellent health (16% vs. 29%) and feeling happy about life (32% vs. 46%), than those who have not.
- Cannabis use is not associated with social class.

International

Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 18th among 34 countries in Europe and North America, with 19% reporting having used cannabis in the last 12 months. There are no international rankings for 11 and 13 year olds as this question was only asked of 15 year olds.

Implications

The overall percentage of young people in Ireland that reported having taken cannabis in the last 12 months

has remained stable since 1998 and can be considered midrange between the rankings of other countries in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, a quarter of 15-17 year olds have used cannabis in the last 12 months. The findings outlined in this factsheet suggest that strong relationships with family may help to prevent cannabis use, while peer relationships may be related to an increase in the likelihood of its use. Attention should be focused on prevention of drug use initiation and support for drug use cessation.

References

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5. Grant, B.F. & Dawson, D.A. (1998). Age of onset of drug use and its association with DSM-IV abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 10, 163-173.

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