

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

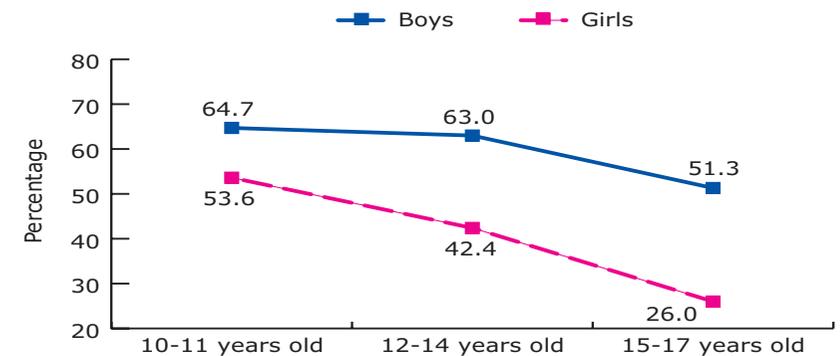
HBSC Ireland has found that 47.0% of Irish children report that they exercise 4 or more times a week (boys 59.2%, girls 37.9%), representing a decrease since 1998. The percentage of children exercising 4 or more times a week decreases with age, from 64.7% of 10-11 year old boys and 53.6% of 10-11 year old girls, to 51.3% of 15-17 year old boys and 26.0% of 15-17 year old girls. Children who exercise 4 or more times a week are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, while they are more likely to: find it easy to talk to their father, spend more than 4 evenings a week with friends, report excellent health and feel happy. Exercise in this factsheet refers to children who report exercising 4 or more times a week, outside school hours, so much that they get out of breath or sweat.

Why this topic?

Physical activity is associated with social, psychological and physiological health among children and adolescents³ and increasing levels of physical activity, both moderate and vigorous, are recommended⁴. Key determinants of exercise involvement are the physical environments in which young people live their lives⁵.

Trends 1998 – 2002

The percentage of children who report exercising 4 or more times a week has decreased between 1998 (53.5%) and 2002 (47.0%). This decrease is seen amongst both boys (62.4% to 59.2%) and girls (45.0% to 37.9%) and is seen across all age groups. However, the most pronounced decrease is among girls aged 12-14 (49.4% to 42.4%).



Percentage of children who exercise four or more times a week by age and gender, HBSC 2002

Exercise in context

- Children who report exercising 4 or more times a week are more likely to find it easy to talk to their father, than those who do not (59% vs. 48%).
- Children who report exercising 4 or more times a week are more likely to spend more than 4 evenings per week with friends, than those who do not (55% vs. 45%).
- Children who report exercising 4 or more times a week are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, than those who do not (33% vs. 37%).
- Children who exercise 4 or more times a week are more likely to report excellent health (36% vs. 20%) and to feel happy about their life (51% vs. 38%), than those who do not.
- Exercise is not associated with social class, living with both parents, ease of talking to mother or ease of talking to best friend.

International

This specific question was not asked across all countries in HBSC 2002, so an international comparison is not possible for 2002. However, the item was mandatory in 1998, hence an international comparison can be made for the 1998 survey. In 1998 Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) were ranked 4th highest among 29 countries in Europe and North America, with 42% reporting that they took part in exercise 4 or more times a week. In 1998, 63% of Irish 11 year olds (ranked 4th) and 57% of Irish 13 year olds (ranked 4th) reported taking part in exercise four or more times a week. In 2006, both national trends and international comparisons will be available for physical activity.

Implications

The percentage of young people in Ireland that report exercising four times or more a week has decreased since 1998. In addition, the percentage of children that were engaged in exercise 4 or more times a week in 1998 could be considered high compared with other countries in Europe and North America at the time. Although this comparison cannot be viewed as being directly representative of the current situation, it does provide an approximation of the international rankings. The findings presented in this factsheet indicate that children's relationships with their father and peers are associated with taking part in exercise. Furthermore, taking part in exercise appears to be related to positive self-ratings of health. Although not a substantial decrease, the lower percentage of children taking part in exercise in 2002 needs to be monitored, particularly in the context of concerns about obesity in society. Specifically, the low percentage of 15-17 year old girls taking part in exercise needs to be addressed. These patterns may suggest a need for a stronger emphasis on the provision of facilities to encourage exercise outside of school. Attention

should also be paid to the levels of exercise during school.

References

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3. Sallis, J.F., Prochaska, J.J. & Taylor, W.C. (2000). A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 32(5), 963-975.
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