

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

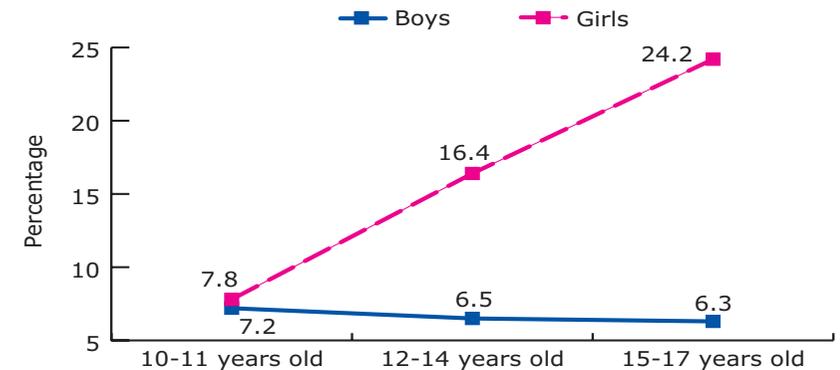
HBSC Ireland has found that 13.1% of Irish children report that they are currently on a diet (6.6% of boys and 17.9% of girls). This represents an increase since 1998. The percentage of girls that are engaged in dieting behaviour increases with age, from 7.8% of 10-11 year olds to 24.2% of 15-17 year olds, whereas the percentage of boys remains relatively stable with age, from 7.2% of 10-11 year olds to 6.3% of 15-17 year olds. Children who report being on a diet are less likely to: find it easy to talk to their parents, have excellent health and feel happy, while they are more likely to feel pressured by schoolwork. Dieting in this factsheet refers to children who report that they are on a diet or doing something to lose weight at present.

Why this topic?

Overweight and obesity is an important health issue in Ireland³. However, adolescents' perceived weight is sometimes associated with inappropriate weight control behaviours, such as excessive dieting, purging and over exercising⁴. In addition, it has been suggested that for many, the goal is not to be of normal weight, but instead, to be underweight⁵.

Trends 1998 – 2002

There has been an increase in the percentage of children who report that they are on a diet, from 8.1% in 1998 to 13.1% in 2002. Although a slight increase is evident among boys (4.2% to 6.6%), it is most prominent among girls (11.7% to 17.9%). The increase is seen across all age groups, however, is largest among 15-17 year olds.

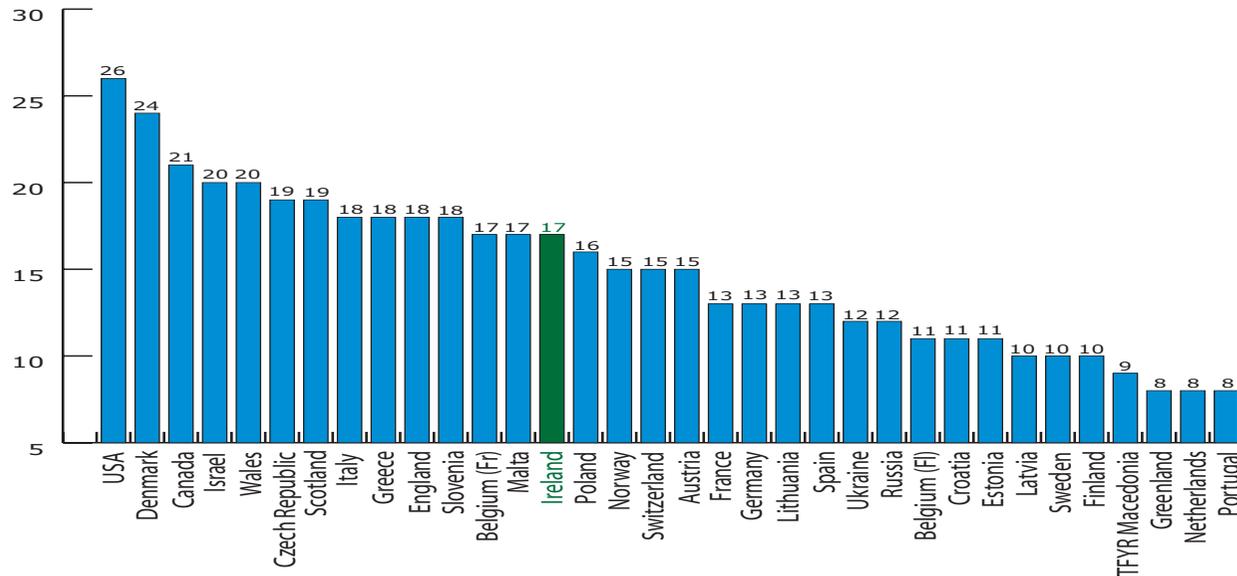


Percentage of children on a diet by age and gender, HBSC 2002

Dieting in context

- Children who report being on a diet are less likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (72% vs. 76%) and father (46% vs. 54%), than those who are not dieting.
- Children who report being on a diet are more likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, than those who are not (45% vs 34%).
- Children who report being on a diet are less likely to report excellent health (18% vs. 29%) and feeling happy about their life (31% vs. 46%), than those who are not.
- Dieting was not associated with social class, living with both parents, ease in talking with best friend, spending 4 evenings or more with friends and liking school.

...Dieting among Irish schoolchildren



Percentage of 15 years old children reporting they are on a diet, by country

International

Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 14th among 34 countries in Europe and North America, with 17% reporting that they were on a diet. Overall, Irish children are ranked joint 23rd among 11 year olds (8%) and 19th among 13 year olds (13%) who report being on a diet.

Implications

The overall percentage of young people in Ireland that reported being on a diet has substantially increased since 1998, and can be considered midrange between the rankings of other countries in Europe and North America. The data presented here indicate that dieting is related to poor self-rated health and not feeling happy with life. The findings also suggest that a good relationship with parents may be protective. On the basis of this increase in dieting among Irish children, especially among girls, there is a need

to investigate the factors related to dieting initiation and the kinds of weight control behaviours that are being employed by young people.

References

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4. Kilpatrick, M., Ohannessian, C., & Bartholomew, J.B. (1999). Adolescent weight management and perceptions: an analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of Sch Health*, 69, 148-152.
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