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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 St Andrews. This factsheet is based on data collected in 2010 from 12,661 10-17 year olds in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

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HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



Summary

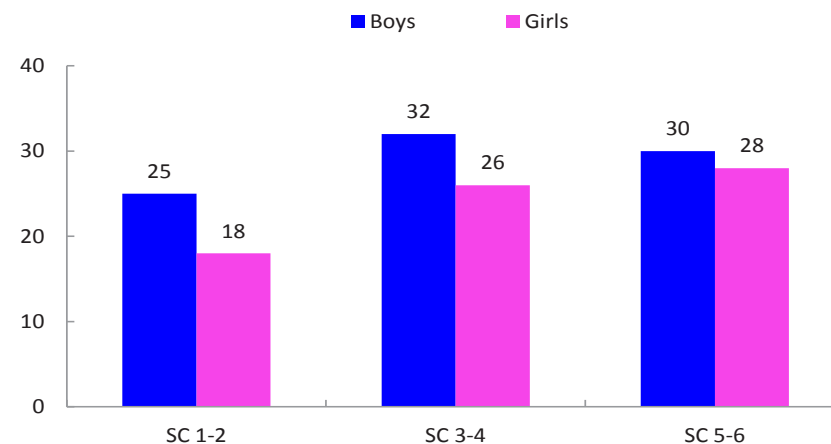
HBSC Ireland 2010 has reported for the first time on sexual behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland. Overall 27.3% of 15-17 year olds report that they have ever had sex. Questions on sexual behaviour were not asked of younger children. Boys are more likely than girls to report having had sex. Those who have had sex are less likely than those who have not to report that they live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their mother and to report liking school. They are more likely to report that they spend four or more evenings out with friends per week than those who have not had sex. Having had sex in this factsheet refers to children who reported that they have had sexual intercourse at least once in their life.

Why this topic?

Sexual health is fundamental to human health². However, the potential risks associated with sexual behaviour in adolescents are primarily linked to the emotional and behavioural characteristics of this developmental stage. Approximately half of sixteen year olds are sexually active worldwide and partner turnover, which assists the spread of sexually transmitted infections, is at its peak among young people³. Early sexual initiation has been linked with a range of negative health outcomes for young people⁴. It is therefore vital to determine patterns of first vaginal sex and outcomes associated with adolescent sexual behaviour in order to promote healthy sexual development⁵.

Change 2006-2010

This is the first time that HBSC Ireland has been able to report on rates of sexual behaviour and thus there are no previous data to compare with the 2010 figures. While the overall rate is 27.3% for all children aged 15-17 years, there is a substantial gender difference. Boys are more likely to report having had sex (30.9%) than girls (23.1%).

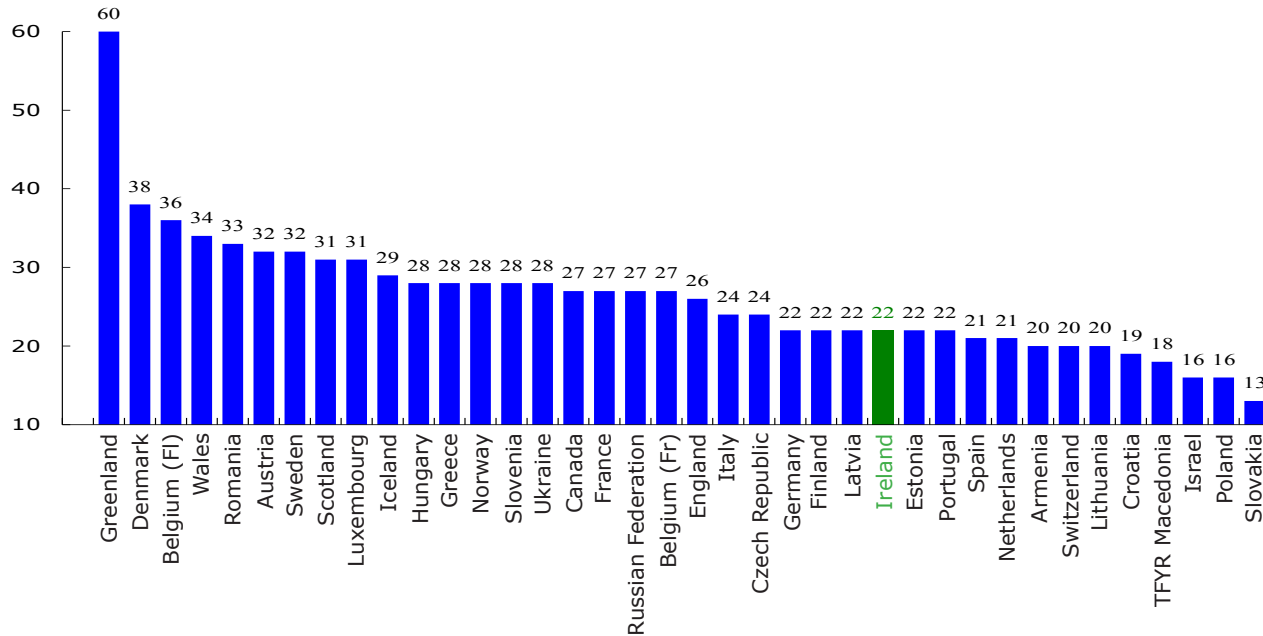


Percentage of 15-17 year olds who report having ever had sex, by social class and gender

Having sex in context

- Children who have had sex are less likely to report living with both parents (66.5%) compared with those who have not (79.7%).
- Children who have had sex are less likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (73.7% vs. 77.3%) than those who have not.
- Children who have had sex are more likely to spend four or more evenings per week out with friends than those who have not (50.8% vs. 26.8%).
- Children who have had sex are less likely than those who have not to report liking school (52.7% vs. 71.7%).
- Children from higher social classes are less likely to report that they have ever had sex; social classes 1-2 21.4%, social classes 3-4 29.3% and social classes 5-6 29.2%.

...Sexual behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year olds who have ever had sex, by country

International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 27th among 39 countries in Europe and North America with 22.3% reporting that they have had sex. The countries with the highest rates are Greenland (59.8%) and Denmark (37.7%) and those with the lowest rates are Slovakia (12.7%) and Poland (15.7%). Having sex was only asked of 15 year olds internationally and there are no available comparisons for younger children.

Implications

Having sex among schoolchildren in Ireland has been asked for the first time in 2010. Future survey rounds will track any changes in these rates. Ireland ranks relatively low among countries involved in HBSC 2010, with rates of having had

sex higher in many European countries compared to Ireland. These data suggest that good relationships with parents may play a protective role whereas negative school experiences may increase the likelihood of having sex. Having sex is not necessarily a health risk as long as those involved are engaging freely and have had adequate emotional and physical preparation for this developmental milestone.

References

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