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Summary

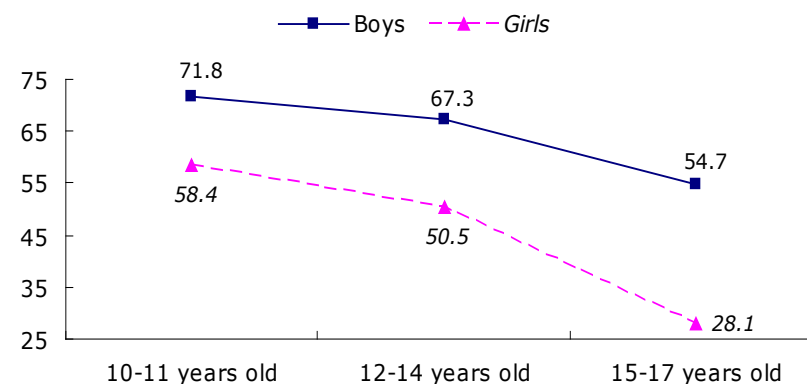
HBSC Ireland has found that 53% of schoolchildren in Ireland report that they exercise four or more times a week. This represents an increase from 2002 (47%), with substantially more boys (62.6%) than girls (43.3%) exercising to this extent. The percentage of children exercising four or more times a week is lower among older children; 71.8% of boys and 58.4% of girls aged 10-11 years, 54.7% of boys and 28.1% of girls aged 15-17 years. Children who exercise are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork. They are more likely to: find it easy to talk to their parents, spend more than four evenings a week with their friends, report excellent health, feel happy about their lives and live with both parents. Exercising in this factsheet refers to children who report exercising four or more times a week outside school hours, to the point where they get out of breath or sweat.

Why this topic?

Physical activity is associated with social, psychological and physiological health among children and adolescents², and increasing levels of physical activity, both moderate and vigorous, are recommended³. The prevalence of overweight and obesity among Irish children is high, emphasising the need for implementation of measures to reduce their calorie intake and increase participation in physical activity⁴.

Trends 2002-2006

Overall the percentage of children who report exercising four times or more per week has increased from 47% in 2002 to 53% in 2006. This increase is seen among boys (59.2% to 62.6%) and girls (37.9% to 43.3%) and across all age groups. The most pronounced increase is among girls aged 12-14 (42.4% to 50.5%) while the smallest increase is seen among girls aged 15-17 (26% to 28.1%).



Percentage of children who exercise four or more times a week outside school hours, by age and gender

Exercise in context

- Children who exercise are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (83.5% vs. 77.5%) and father (69.2% vs. 57.7%) and to live with both parents (82.6% vs. 79.1%) than those who do not.
- Children who exercise are more likely to spend more than four evenings per week with friends than those who do not (48.1% vs. 35.0%).
- Children who exercise are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork (37.3% vs. 43.9%) than those who do not.
- Children who exercise are more likely to report excellent health (42.1% vs. 24.1%) and feel happy about their lives (57.1% vs. 42.2%) than those who do not.
- Exercise participation is not associated with social class.

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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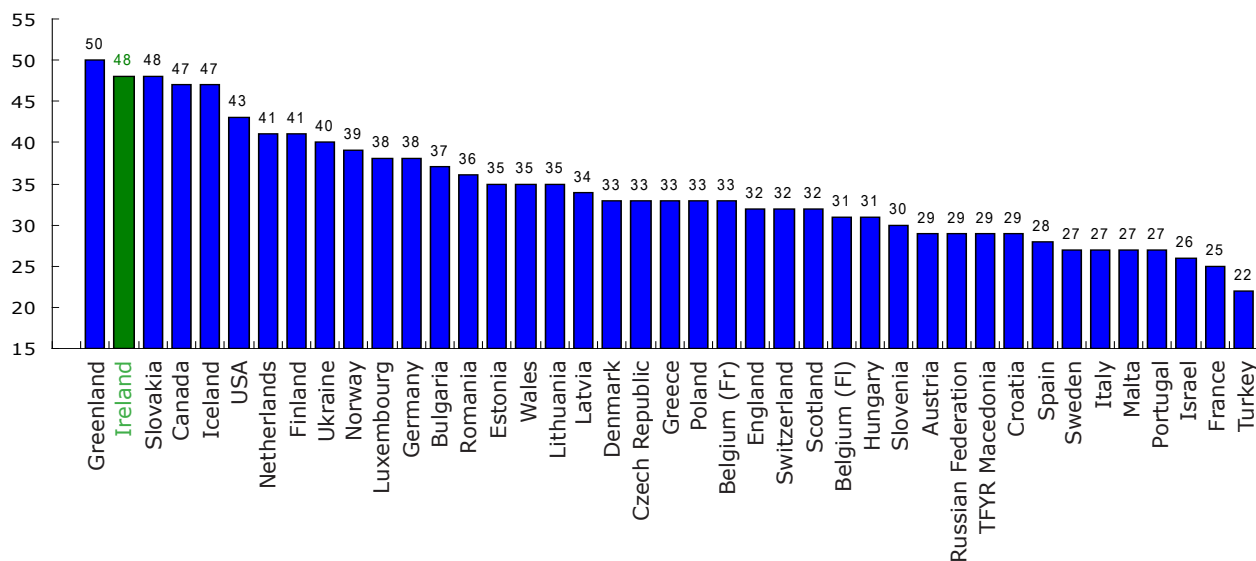


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Department of
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AN ROINN SLÁNTE AGUS LEANAÍ

...Exercise among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year old children reporting exercise four or more times a week outside school hours, by country

International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 2nd among 41 countries in Europe and North America with 48% reporting that they exercise four or more times per week. Overall 63% of 11 year olds (ranked 4th) and 59% of 13 year olds (ranked 1st) reported exercising four or more times per week.

Implications

The percentage of young people that report exercising four times or more a week has increased since 2002. In comparison to other European and North American countries Ireland ranks high with over half of young people stating they exercise four or more times weekly. These findings indicate that strong relationships with family are associated with taking part in exercise. Furthermore, taking part in exercise appears related to positive

self ratings of health. It is important that participation in exercise among Irish schoolchildren continues to increase especially amidst the context of concerns about obesity in society. However particular attention needs to be focused on why participation rates, particularly among girls, drops so severely from the 12-14 to the 15-17 year old age groups. These patterns may suggest a need for stronger emphasis on the provision of facilities to encourage exercise outside of school or even gender appropriate exercise programmes.

References

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3. Department of Health and Children (2005). *Obesity- the Policy Changes: The report of the National Taskforce on Obesity*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.
4. Whelton H., Harrington J., Crowley E., Kelleher V., Cronin M. & Perry I.J. (2007). Prevalence of overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland: Results from the North South Survey of Children's Height, Weight and Body Mass Index, 2002. *BMC Public Health*, 7, 18.

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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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