

**NATIONAL  
SEXUAL  
HEALTH  
AWARENESS  
WEEK**

**SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR,  
INITIATION AND  
CONTRACEPTIVE USE  
AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN  
IRELAND**

Findings from the 2010 Health  
Behaviour in School-aged Children  
(HBSC) Ireland study

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# The Health Behaviour in School aged-Children (HBSC) study

- World Health Organisation (WHO) cross-national research project
- Improve understanding of young people's health and wellbeing, including sexual behaviours
- 200,000 school children aged 11, 13 and 15 years across 43 countries every 4 years



# HBSC Ireland

- Carried out in Ireland since 1998
- Data collection in Ireland extended to include young people aged 9 to 18 years
- Sample is representative of geographical population distribution of children in Ireland based on census data
- In HBSC Ireland 2010:
  - 256 schools were recruited - response rate of 67%
  - 16,060 school children took part - response rate of 85%



# Adolescent Sexual Health

- Adolescence is an influential stage of life
- Sexual behaviours such as inconsistent condom use, multiple partners and casual sex are recognised risk factors for unplanned pregnancy and STI transmission
- Early onset of first intercourse associated with poor sexual health outcomes
- Limited data on adolescent sexual health and behaviours available in Ireland



# Aim

- Adolescents' sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraceptive use at last intercourse in relation to socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics



# Measures: Sexual Health Behaviour

- Mandatory sexual health questions introduced in 2002 (Ireland in 2010)
  - Have you ever had sexual intercourse? (Sometimes this is called “making love”, “having sex” or “going all the way”)
  - How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?’
  - The last time you had sexual intercourse, what method(s) did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy?
  - The last time you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom?



# Measures: Socio-demographic & Lifestyle

Demographic	Lifestyle	
<p><b>Age</b> <b>Social class</b> <b>Family affluence</b> <b>Traveller status</b> <b>Household composition</b> <b>Disability or Chronic Illness</b></p>	<p><b>Socio-cultural</b> Communication with friends Sense of community Neighbourhood environment Bullying others Music &amp; drama Being bullied Club/team activities Poor adult communication Local resources Health check-ups</p>	<p><b>Negative lifestyle behaviours</b> Alcohol involvement Cannabis involvement Unhealthy food from parents Smoking involvement Unhealthy food consumption</p>
	<p><b>Health</b> Symptoms Quality of life Medication for physical symptoms Medication for psychological symptoms</p>	<p><b>Positive lifestyle behaviours</b> Exercise Travel Healthy food Breakfast Teeth/seatbelt</p>



# Methods

- 4,494 school children aged **15-18 years**
- Sexual health behaviour
- Socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics
  - **Chi-square tests** - relationships between categorical variables
  - **Logistic regression** - examine the predictors of sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraceptive non-use



# Data Management

- Data inconsistencies
  - Rigorous decision-making process
  - Issues associated with self-report data
- What to report?
  - **Sample / Relevant Sample** (e.g., all participants / all those who reported having sex)
  - **Respondents** (e.g., all those who responded to a question)



# Experience of Sexual Intercourse

- **26.1%** of adolescents aged 15-18 years reported having engaged in sexual intercourse ( $n=1065/4088$ )
- **28.8%** of boys ( $n=619$ ) and **22.8%** ( $n=439$ ) of girls reported they ever had sexual intercourse



# Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

## Demographics

Not living with both parents  
Traveller status  
Older age

## Health

Taking medication for physical symptoms

## Boys

## Socio-cultural

Good communication with friends  
Poor neighbourhood environment  
Poor participation in music & drama  
Participation in club/team activities

## Negative lifestyle behaviours

Alcohol involvement  
Cannabis involvement  
Smoking involvement



# Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

## Demographics

Social class (middle)  
Older age

## Positive lifestyle behaviours

Inactive modes of travel

## Girls

## Socio-cultural

Good communication with friends  
Poor neighbourhood environment  
Being bullied and bullying others  
Poor participation in music & drama

## Negative lifestyle behaviours

Alcohol involvement  
Cannabis involvement  
Smoking involvement  
Unhealthy food consumption



# Age of Sexual Initiation Before 14 Years

- **3.2%** boys ( $n=141$ ) and **1.3%** girls ( $n=59$ ) of the whole sample ( $n=4494$ ) were sexually active before age 14 years
- Of those young people who reported being sexually active, **22.8%** of boys ( $n=141/619$ ) and **13.4%** of girls ( $n=59/439$ ) reported being sexually active before age 14 years



# Predictors of Sexual Initiation Before 14 Years

## Demographics

Rural area

## Health

Less symptoms

Medication for psychological  
symptoms

All

## Socio-cultural

Poor communication with friends

Bullying others

Lack of health check-ups

## Negative lifestyle behaviours

Alcohol involvement

Cannabis involvement



# Contraceptive Methods Used At Last Intercourse

- Contraceptive methods of those who reported engaging in sexual intercourse

Contraceptive type	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Condom	79.0	80.0
Contraceptive pill	19.4	26.9
Dual (Condom & contraceptive pill)	17.0	23.3
Withdrawal	14.5	14.6

- **10.5%** of boys and **6.8%** of girls reported using no reliable method of contraception at last intercourse



# Predictors of Non-Condom Use At Last Sexual Intercourse

## Health

Medication for physical symptoms

All

## Positive lifestyle factors

High frequency of physical activity  
Poor tooth brushing/wearing  
seatbelt



# Predictors of Non-Dual Contraceptive Use At Last Sexual Intercourse

## Demographics

Younger age  
Boys

## Negative lifestyle behaviours

Alcohol involvement

All



# Summary

- Prevalence of sexual intercourse, initiation and contraceptive use among boys and girls aged 15-18 years
- Socio-demographic and lifestyle predictors of sexual intercourse, initiation and contraceptive use
- Profile of young people who are sexually active and also those at risk (*of early initiation and non-contraceptive use*)
- Gender and adolescent specific



# Final Thoughts...

- Socio-demographic variables associated with sexual behaviours.
- Adolescents are a distinct group with unique influences on their sexual health and behaviour
- Develop and implement specifically targeted policy and interventions which take a holistic approach in addressing the needs of those most at risk
- More research required to further the understanding of the sexual health and practices of adolescents' across Ireland



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