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Single-sex schools in Ireland: Exploring school & wellbeing indicators

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University
ofGalway.ie

School Experience

Adolescents spend a large proportion of their time in school.

School experiences influence academic outcomes and have broader impacts on adolescents' health and wellbeing.

International findings have shown an increase in school pressure and a decline in teacher and classmate support.



Post-Primary Schools in Ireland

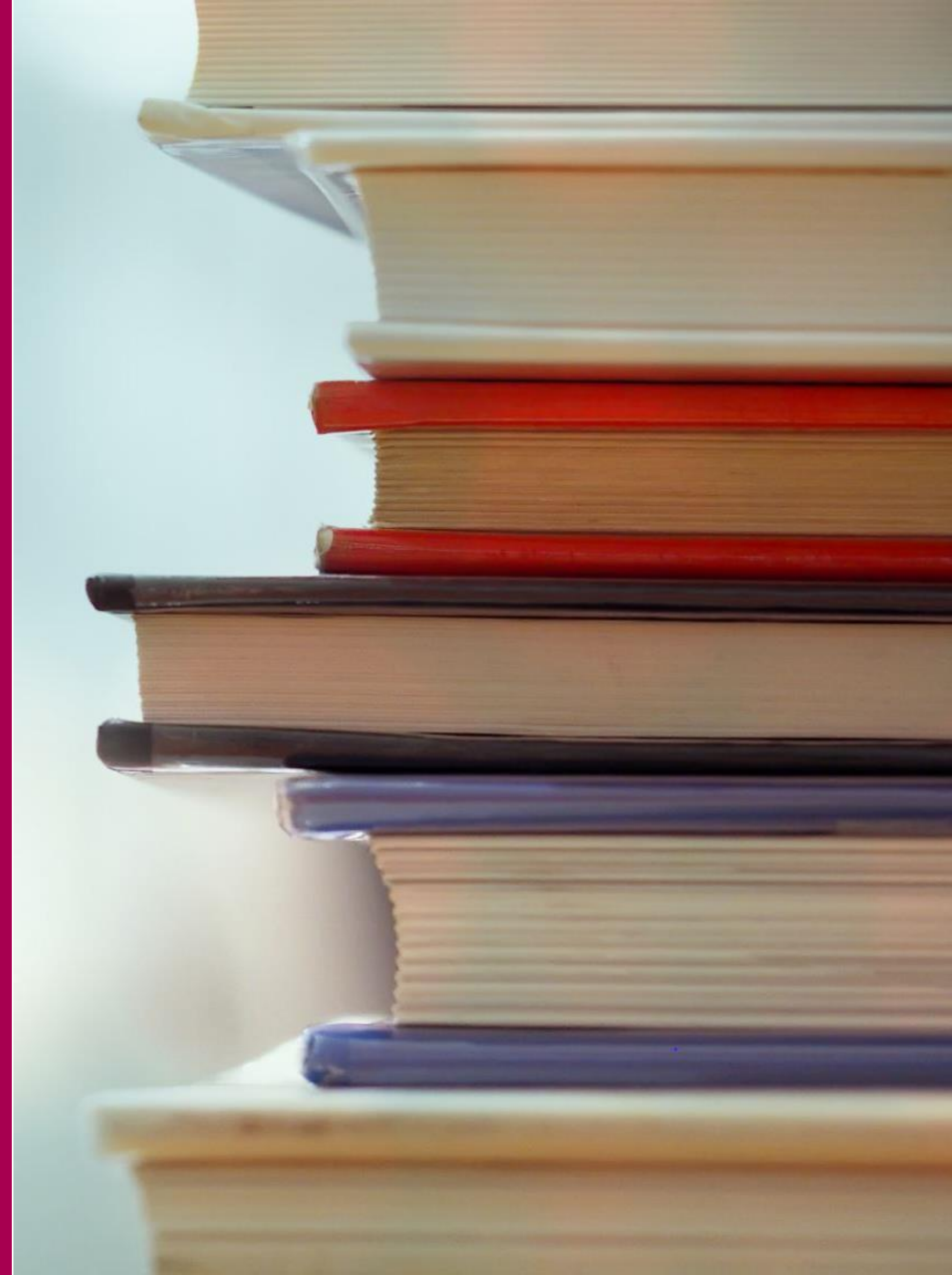
12 to 18 years

~ 30% of post-primary schools are single-sex

Differs to most other European countries



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Single-sex schools in Ireland



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Academic performance

No significant difference in academic outcomes after controlling for individual, parental and school-level factors (Clavel & Flannery, 2022).

Student Preferences and Trends

Students favour coeducational settings (ESRI, 2024).

No new single sex schools opened in Ireland since 1998.

What is the relationship between school gender-mix on school experience and wellbeing?

Objectives

1. Examine **trends** in school experiences in Ireland.
2. Compare adolescents in **single-sex vs. mixed-sex** schools in Ireland across school experience and wellbeing indicators.





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Methods

O1- Irish Trends in School Experiences

Irish HBSC data from seven survey cycles (1998 to 2022) used for trends analysis

Age 10-17; n = 70,533

**Liking
school**

**Been
bullied**

**School
pressure**

**Teacher
support**

Descriptive analyses - weighted proportions

Statistically significant overall trends



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O2 - Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex Schools

2022 Irish HBSC data

Single-sex post-primary schools **matched** to mixed post-primary schools

Matched based on **school characteristics**

Location

School size

Disadvantaged Status



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O2 - Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex Schools

8 **Girls** Schools and 4 **Boys** Schools

Unable to match 2 of the Girls Schools

Girls

School Gender	n
Girls Schools	644
Matched Mixed Schools	266

Boys

School Gender	n
Boys Schools	263
Matched Mixed Schools	105



O2 - Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex Schools

INDICATORS

School Experience

Liking school
Been bullied at school
School pressure
High teacher support

Wellbeing

Life satisfaction
Happy with life
Loneliness
Feeling low
WHO-5

Chi-squared test



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Results



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Results Trends Analysis

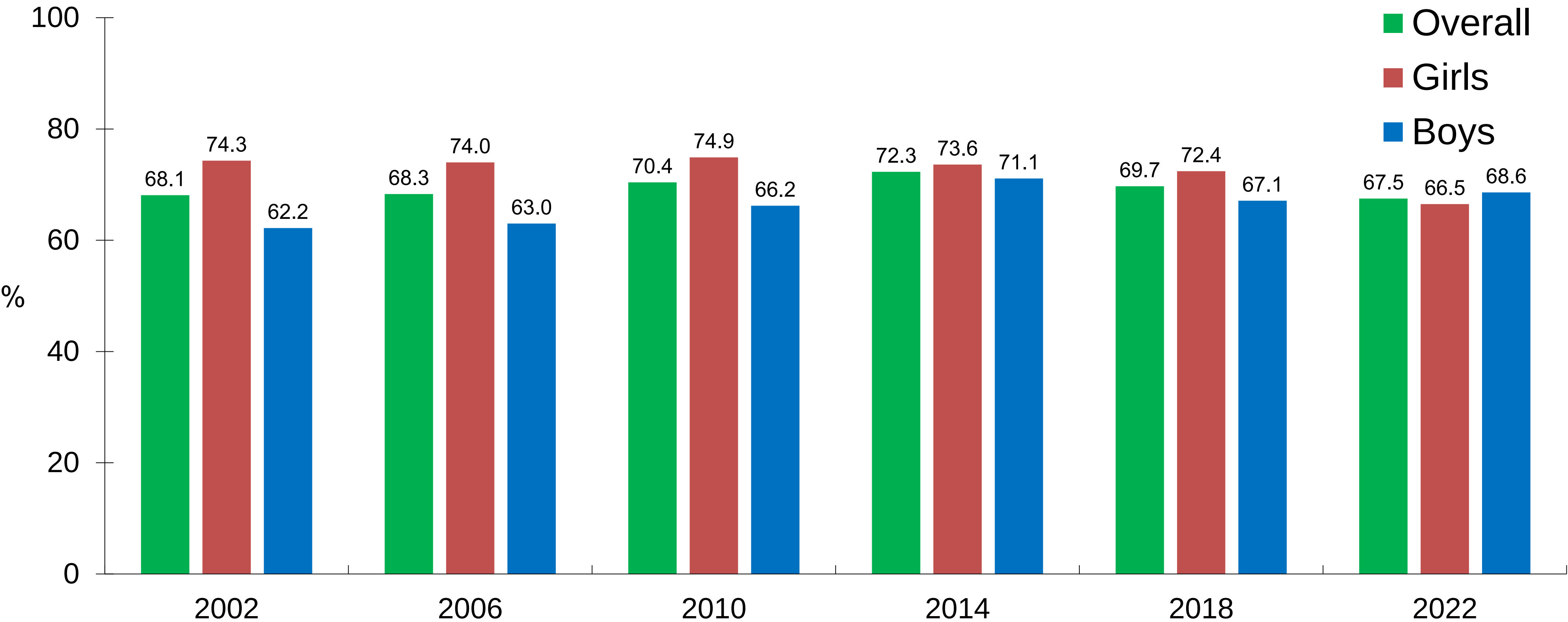
Trend: Liking School



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Girls ↓

Boys ↑



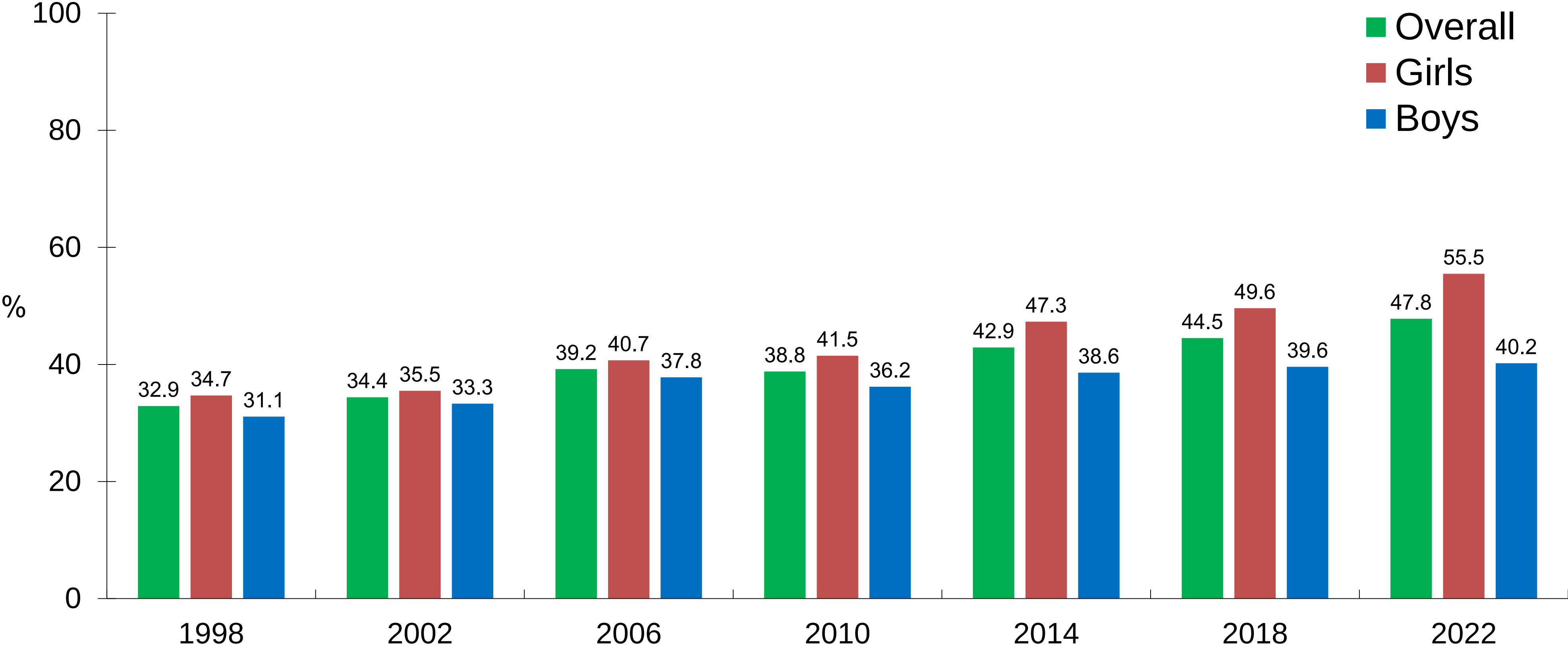
Trend: School Pressure



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Girls ↑ ↑ ↑

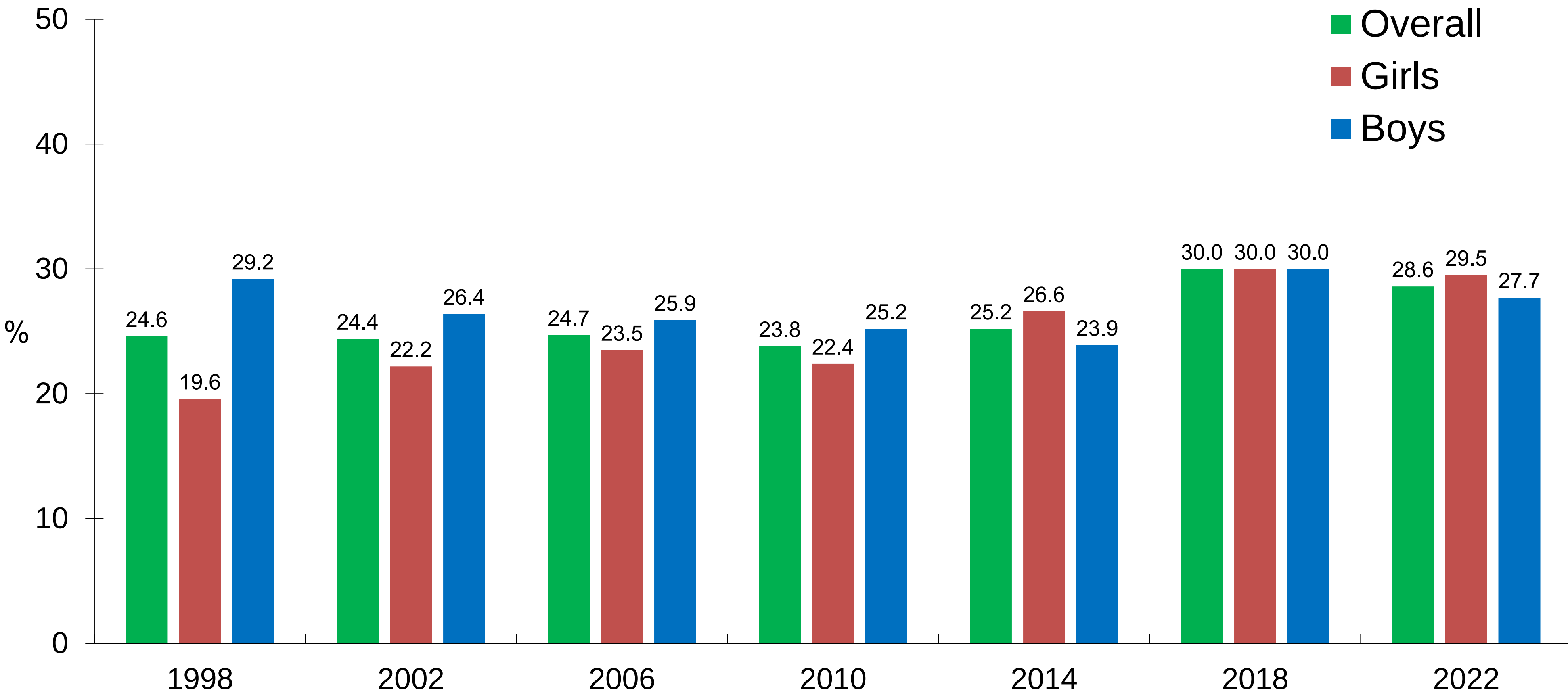
Boys ↑ ↑



Trend: Been Bullied



Girls ↑ ↑ ↑ Boys -



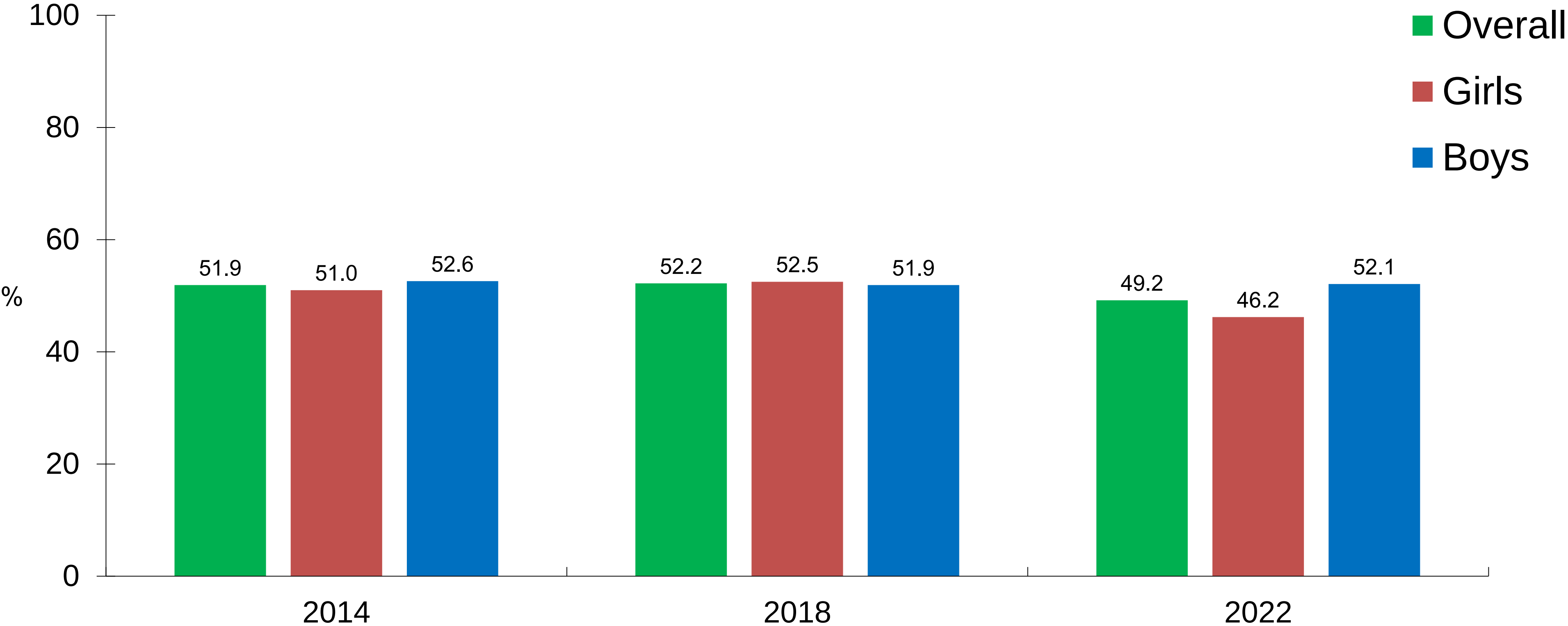
Trend: Teacher Support



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Girls ↓

Boys ↓



Summary – Trends in School Experience

Decline in positive indicators
Increasing negative indicators

	Girls	Boys
Liking School	↓	↑
Pressured by Schoolwork	↑ ↑ ↑	↑ ↑
Been Bullied	↑ ↑ ↑	-
Teacher Support	↓	↓

Trends indicate greater challenges for girls

Youth Perspectives



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The leaving cert has become a much bigger deal now than it ever was. I feel like every year, the pressure to do better and better, and to come out with the best points available. It grows and grows and grows. (Boy, age 16)

Students have a higher expectation of teacher support than in years past.
(Girl, age 16)

Smaller intimate classrooms may improve a relationship with teachers.
(Girl, age 15)

Girls feel more pressure to be book smart, whereas boys are okay with being just more practical. (Girl, age 16)

I think that social media and those body image expectations might contribute to girls teasing each other and just being nastier, maybe that's why there's been a small drop in the liking school. (Girl, age 15)



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Results

Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Girls

Liking School

	Liking school %	Not liking school %
Girls Schools	63.7	36.3
Mixed Schools	60.5	39.5

$$X^2(1) = 0.788, p = 0.375$$

Boys

	Liking school %	Not liking school %
Boys Schools	72.5	27.5
Mixed Schools	65.0	35.0

$$X^2(1) = 1.950, p = 0.163$$

Teacher Support

	High teacher support %	Low teacher support %
Girls Schools	40.9	59.1
Mixed Schools	37.4	62.6

$$X^2(1) = 0.924, p = 0.336$$

	High teacher support %	Low teacher support %
Boys Schools	49.4	50.6
Mixed Schools	48.5	51.5

$$X^2(1) = 0.022, p = 0.882$$



Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Girls

Boys

Been Bullied

	Been Bullied %	Not been bullied %
Girls Schools	25.7	74.3
Mixed Schools	38.5	61.5

$$X^2(1) = 13.518, p < 0.001, V = 0.129$$

	Been Bullied %	Not been bullied %
Boys Schools	26.7	73.3
Mixed Schools	28.3	71.7

$$X^2(1) = 0.093, p = 0.761$$

School Pressure

	Pressured %	Not pressured %
Girls Schools	64.0	36.0
Mixed Schools	64.0	36.0

$$X^2(1) = 0.000, p = 0.998$$

	Pressured %	Not pressured %
Boys Schools	47.3	52.7
Mixed Schools	46.6	53.4

$$X^2(1) = 0.013, p = 0.909$$



Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Girls

Boys

**Life
Satisfaction**

	High Life Satisfaction %	Low life satisfaction %
Girls Schools	49.9	50.1
Mixed Schools	46.0	54.0

$$X^2(1) = 1.077, p = 0.299$$

	High Life Satisfaction %	Low Life Satisfaction %
Boys Schools	70.9	29.1
Mixed Schools	60.0	40.0

$$X^2(1) = 3.857, p = 0.050$$

**Happy
with life**

	Very happy %	Not very happy%
Girls Schools	17.3	82.7
Mixed Schools	18.2	81.8

$$X^2(1) = 0.104, p = 0.747$$

	Very happy %	Not very happy%
Boys Schools	27.2	72.8
Mixed Schools	31.1	68.9

$$X^2(1) = 0.550, p = 0.458$$



Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Girls

Loneliness

	Lonely %	Not lonely%
Girls Schools	28.0	72.0
Mixed Schools	31.9	68.1

$$X^2(1) = 1.290, p = 0.256$$

Feeling low

	Feeling low %	Not feeling low%
Girls Schools	64.0	36.0
Mixed Schools	62.6	37.4

$$X^2(1) = 0.155, p = 0.694$$

Boys

	Lonely %	Not lonely %
Boys Schools	11.0	89.0
Mixed Schools	25.7	74.3

$$X^2(1) = 11.950, p < 0.001, V = 0.186$$

	Feeling low %	Not feeling low %
Boys Schools	34.3	65.7
Mixed Schools	37.9	62.1

$$X^2(1) = 0.415, p = 0.520$$



Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

WHO-5

Girls

	Risk of depression %	Low mood %	Positive mood %
Girls Schools	20.3	31.0	48.7
Mixed Schools	18.7	37.8	43.4

$$X^2(2) = 3.750, p = 0.153$$

Boys

	Risk of depression%	Low mood %	Positive mood %
Boys Schools	6.1	16.8	77.0
Mixed Schools	10.5	16.8	72.6

$$X^2(2) = 1.954, p = 0.376$$



Summary - Single-sex vs. Mixed-sex schools

Minimal differences between single-sex and mixed-sex schools

Similar patterns across most school experience and wellbeing indicators

Two significant differences

Been Bullied – Girls in mixed schools more likely to report being bullied

Loneliness – Boys in mixed schools more likely to report feeling lonely



Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

Unable to match two Girls Schools

Small number of single-sex schools in the sample

Single time-point comparison (2022 only)

Future Directions

Explore the effects of school gender over time through trends analysis



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Implications

Minimal differences between single-sex and mixed schools, suggesting that other factors are more important

Prioritise improving student wellbeing – regardless of school type

Need for increased support and funding to address student needs



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Conclusion

Overall decline in school experience over time – **especially for girls**

School gender mix shows **limited impact** on school experiences

Focus should be on overall **declining trends** across all schools

Both single-sex and mixed schools need **increased support and resources**





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Thank you

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