

Natasha Clarke and the HBSC Ireland Team, Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway

Summary

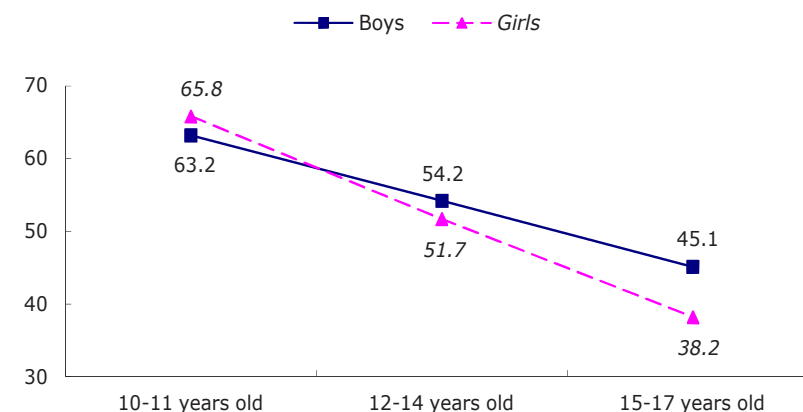
HBSC Ireland 2010 has found that 50.4% of schoolchildren in Ireland report that they are very happy about their lives, remaining stable since 2006 (49.7%). Overall boys are more likely to report they are very happy about their lives (51.9% vs. 48.8%). The percentage of children reporting being very happy is higher among younger children; 63.2% of boys and 65.8% of girls aged 10-11 years, 54.2% of boys and 51.7% of girls aged 12-14 years and 45.1% of boys and 38.2% of girls aged 15-17 years. Older girls are less likely to report being very happy compared to boys of the same age. Schoolchildren in Ireland who report being very happy are more likely to live with both parents, communicate easily with their parents and best friends and report liking school and spend four or more evenings a week with friends. Emotional well-being in this factsheet refers to children who report feeling very happy about their lives at present.

Why this topic?

When young people are in good physical and emotional health, it enables them to deal with the challenges of growing up and eases their transition into adulthood¹. Adolescence is a developmental stage during which multiple changes in an individual's life happen, calling for new psychological adaptations². The transition into adolescence can be associated with an increase in psychological problems such as depression and anxiety³. Girls are found to exhibit more emotional problems in adolescence compared to boys². Poor emotional health in adolescence can have significant long-term risks for adult mental health³, thus it is essential that supportive environments for youth mental health be created.

Change 2006-2010

The percentage of schoolchildren reporting that they are very happy about their lives has remained stable since 2006 (49.7% to 50.4%). A decrease in reports of happiness is evident among boys aged 10-11 years (66.2% to 63.2%) however an increase is evident among girls aged 15-17 years (34.3% to 38.2%). Older boys and girls are less likely to report they are very happy with their lives than younger children.



Percentage of children who report feeling very happy about their lives, by age and gender

Emotional well-being in context

- Children who report feeling very happy are more likely to report living with both parents (77.6% vs. 72.1%) and liking school (79.3% vs. 62.4%) than children who do not.
- Children who report feeling very happy are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (90.1% vs. 73.5%) and to their father (77.6% vs. 55.3%) than children who do not.
- Children who report feeling very happy are more likely to find it easy to talk to their best friend (91.4% vs. 85.3%) and to spend four or more evenings with friends (42.2% vs. 35.6%) than children who do not.
- Children who report feeling very happy are less likely to report feeling pressured by school work (30.5% vs. 46.9%) than children who do not.
- Feeling happy 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 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.

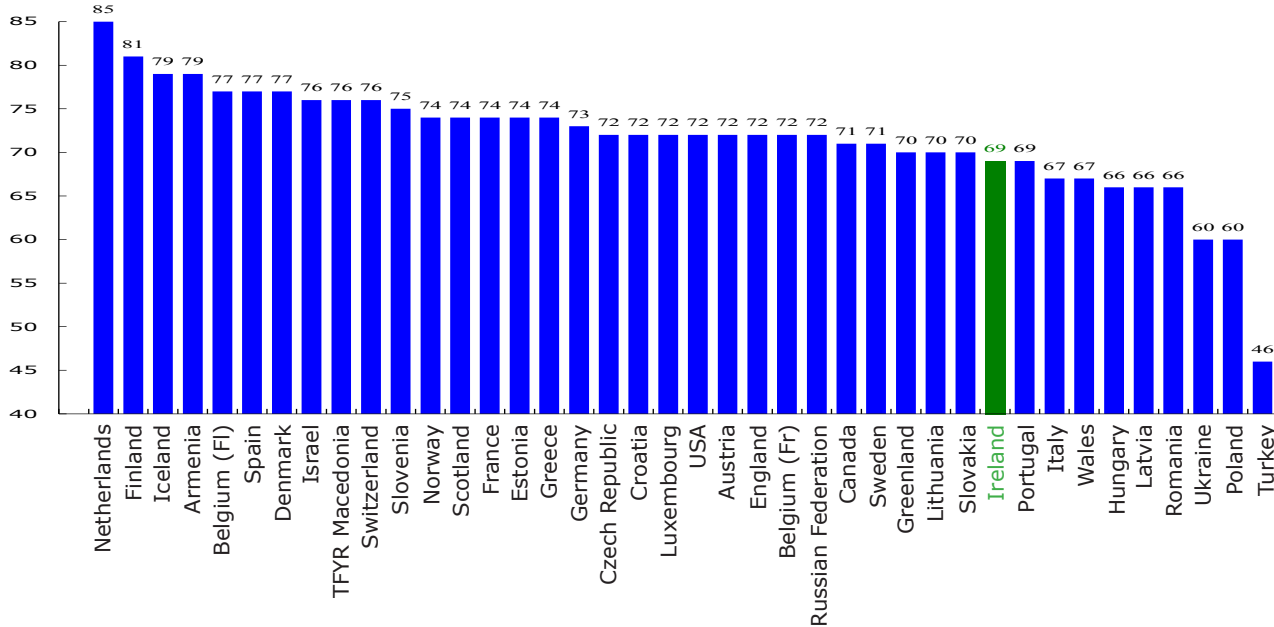
Further information is available at:
<http://www.hbsc.org>
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>



hbsc
HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



...Emotional well-being among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year old children reporting high life satisfaction, by country

International

The question on happiness was not asked internationally; therefore an international comparison is presented above on self-reported life satisfaction. Using the Cantril ladder⁴ which has 10 steps; young people were asked to indicate the step of the ladder at which they would place their lives at present. The cut off points for the steps used were zero to six for poor life satisfaction and seven to ten for high life satisfaction. Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 31st among 40 countries in Europe and North America with 69.2% reporting high life satisfaction. Ireland is ranked 8th (79.8%) among 13 year old children, and 17th (83.2%) among 11 year old children.

Implications

The percentage of young people in Ireland that report feeling very happy with life has remained stable since 2006. However compared to other European and North American countries in

Ireland 15 year olds rank low, 13 year olds rank high and 11 year olds rank in midrange. These data indicate that a strong association exists between family relationships and living with both parents and those who report feeling very happy with life. Ease of talking to best friend is also associated with feeling very happy, indicating the relevance of a strong social network. Attention should be focused on the lower levels of happiness among older children.

References

1. Currie, C., Zanotti, C., Morgan, A., Currie, D., de Looze, M., Roberts, C., Samdal, O., Smith, R., & Barnekow, V. (eds). (2012). Social determinants of health and well-being among young people. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2009/2010 survey. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 6).
2. Moksnes, U., Espnes, G., & Lillefjell, M. (2012). Sense of coherence and emotional health in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 35, 433–441.
3. Schepman, K., Collishaw, S., Gardner, F., Maughan, B., Scott, J., & Pickles, A. (2011). Do changes in parent mental health explain trends in youth emotional problems? *Social Science & Medicine*, 73, 293-300.
4. Cantril, H. (1965). *The pattern of human concern*. New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press.

HBSC Ireland is funded by the Health Promotion Policy Unit of the Department of Health.

We would like to thank all the children, teachers and schools who participated and acknowledge the contribution of our colleagues in the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway.

All factsheets and other HBSC publications and reports can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc>

Contact us at: hbsc@nuigalway.ie

This factsheet was prepared by Mary Callaghan, Natasha Clarke, Aoife Gavin, Colette Kelly, Michal Molcho, Saoirse Nic Gabhainn and Larri Walker.