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Summary

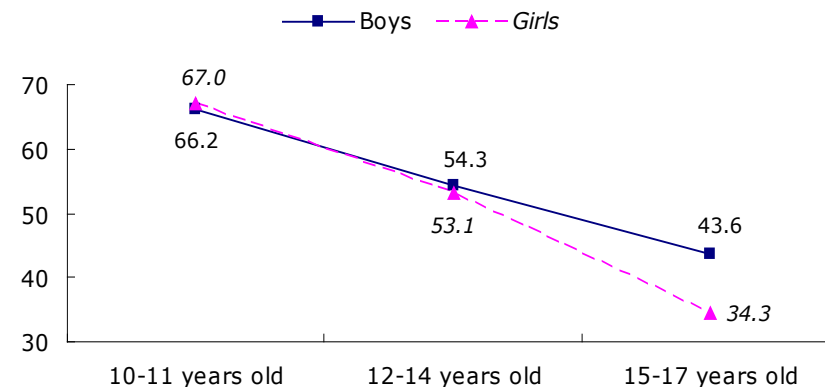
HBSC Ireland has found that 49.7% of schoolchildren in Ireland report that they are very happy about their lives (51.1% of boys and 48.2% of girls), representing a continued increase since 1998 (42.2%). The percentage of children reporting being very happy is higher among younger children; 66.2% of boys and 67% of girls aged 10-11 years, 43.6% of boys and 34.3% of girls aged 15-17 years. Children who feel very happy are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork, while they are more likely to: find it easy to talk to their parents and best friends, spend four or more evenings with friends, live with both their parents, like school and report excellent health than those who do not. Emotional well-being in this factsheet refers to children who report feeling very happy about their lives at present.

Why this topic?

Emotional health is as important as physical health to overall well-being. It has a significant impact on a person's quality of life as well as their contribution to society². Adolescence is a key period in shaping patterns of emotional health³. There has been a substantial rise in psychosocial disorders such as behavioural and emotional problems, depression and suicide affecting young people over the past 50 years⁴. It is important to create social environments that offer protective factors for emotional health and limit exposure to risk factors for mental disorders.

Trends 2002-2006

The overall percentage of children who report feeling very happy about their lives has increased from 2002 (44.2%) to 2006 (49.7%). This increase is seen among boys (47.1% to 51.1%) and girls (42.1% to 48.2%) and across all age groups. The most pronounced increase is seen amongst girls aged 12-14 years (44.9% to 53.1%) and boys aged 10-11 years (58.6% to 66.2%).



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 find it easy to talk to their mother (89.5% vs. 71.8%), father (76.5% vs. 51.6%) and best friends (90.7% vs. 85.0%), than those who do not.
- Children who report feeling very happy are more likely to live with both parents (84.5% vs. 76.7%) and are more likely to spend four or more evenings per week with friends (45.5% vs. 38.9%) than those who do not.
- Children who report feeling very happy are less likely to feel pressured by schoolwork than those who do not (31.2% vs. 50.4%).
- Children who report feeling very happy are more likely to report liking school (76.5% vs. 59.4%) and having excellent health (49.3% vs. 17.5%) than those 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 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.hbcs.org>
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbcs/>



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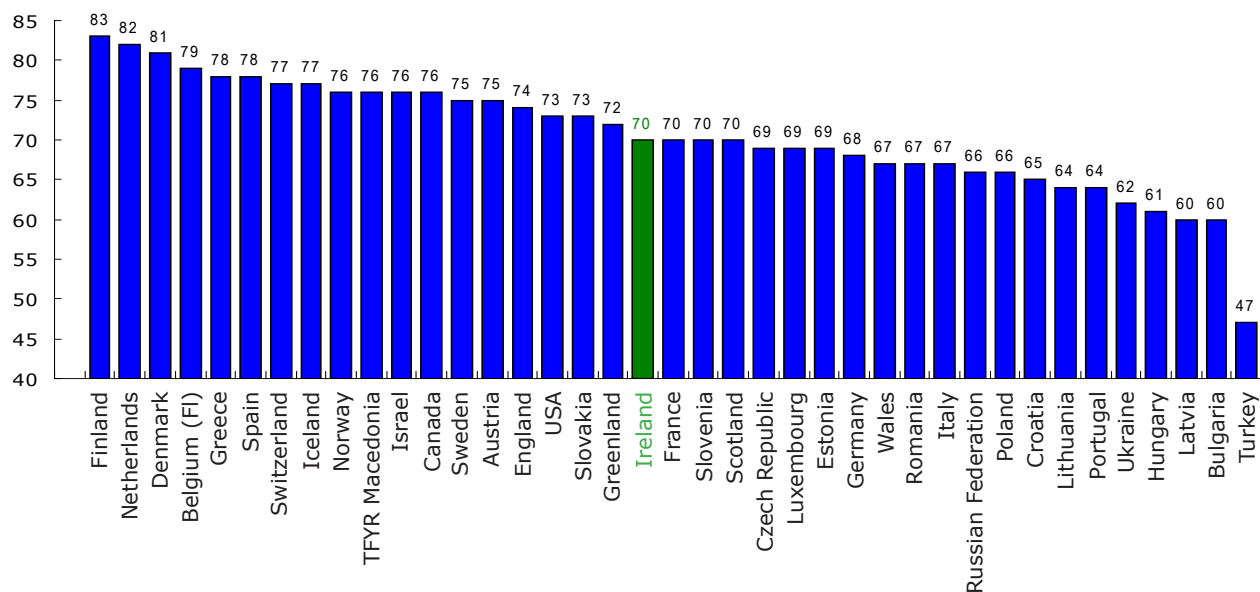


Office of the Minister for
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agus Ghlúthai Óige



Department of
Health & Children
AN ROINN SLÁNTE AGUS LEANAÍ

...Emotional well-being among schoolchildren in Ireland



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

International

The question on level of happiness was not asked internationally; therefore an international comparison is presented above on self-reported life satisfaction. Using the Cantril ladder⁵ 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 19th among 39 countries in Europe and North America with 70% reporting high life satisfaction. Overall 86% of 11 year olds (ranked 10th) and 80% of 13 year olds (ranked 12th) report high life satisfaction.

Implications

The percentage of young people in Ireland that report feeling very happy has increased since 2002. In addition,

the percentage of children reporting high life satisfaction can be considered mid-range among 15 year olds and high for all other age groups compared to other European and North American countries. These data indicate that good family relationships are associated with self-reported happiness. Attention should focus on those children that rate their happiness and life satisfaction as being poor, particularly those in the 15-17 age group, with special emphasis placed on the underlying reasons for such ratings. Support structures should also be developed and implemented to address specific adolescent issues around well-being and emotional health.

References

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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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