

SEXUAL PRACTICES OF ADOLESCENTS IN IRELAND: Findings and future research plans of the Health Behaviour in School- aged Children (HBSC) study.

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**A designated WHO Collaborating Centre
for Health Promotion Research.**

Sexual health: current situation for young people in Ireland

- STIs
 - Increasing trend in STI notifications
 - 60.1% of STI notifications among 20 to 29 years in 2013
 - 11.1% of STI notifications from under 20 years in 2013
 - 1995 (n=147), 2011 (n=1536)
- Crisis Pregnancy
 - 66% of females and 31% of males aged 18-25 years reported crisis circumstances of pregnancy (ICCP)
 - 1,639 births to mothers who were under the age of 20 years in 2012 (Central Statistics Office, 2013)
- Abortion
 - 31% of crisis pregnancies resulted in abortion (ICCP)
 - 3,982 women gave Irish addresses in UK abortion clinics in 2012 (HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme)

(Health Protection Surveillance Centre 2014, ICCP 2010)

Sexual health: current situation for young people in Ireland

- 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
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Sexual health strategies & policies

**National
AIDS
Strategy
(2000)**

**National Health
Promotion
Strategy
(2000-2005)**

**Crisis
Pregnancy
Programme
(2012-2016)**

**Crisis
Pregnancy
Agency
(2007-2011)**

**Eastern Health
Board: The
Sexual Health
Strategy
(2005)**

**Southern
Health Board:
Strategy to
Promote
Sexual Health
(2001-2011)**


**Western
Health Board:
Towards a
Sexual Health
Policy for the
West (2006)**

Sexual health strategies & policies

New Sexual Health Strategy for Ireland...

- June 2012 – Steering group announced
 - Department of Health, HSE, Sexual Health Professionals, NGOs, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills, and Institute of Public Health.
- The improvement of the nation's sexual health and wellbeing.
 - surveillance, testing, treatment, and prevention of HIV and STI's, crisis pregnancy and sexual health education and promotion.


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
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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%
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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?
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Aim

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




Measures: Socio-demographic & Lifestyle

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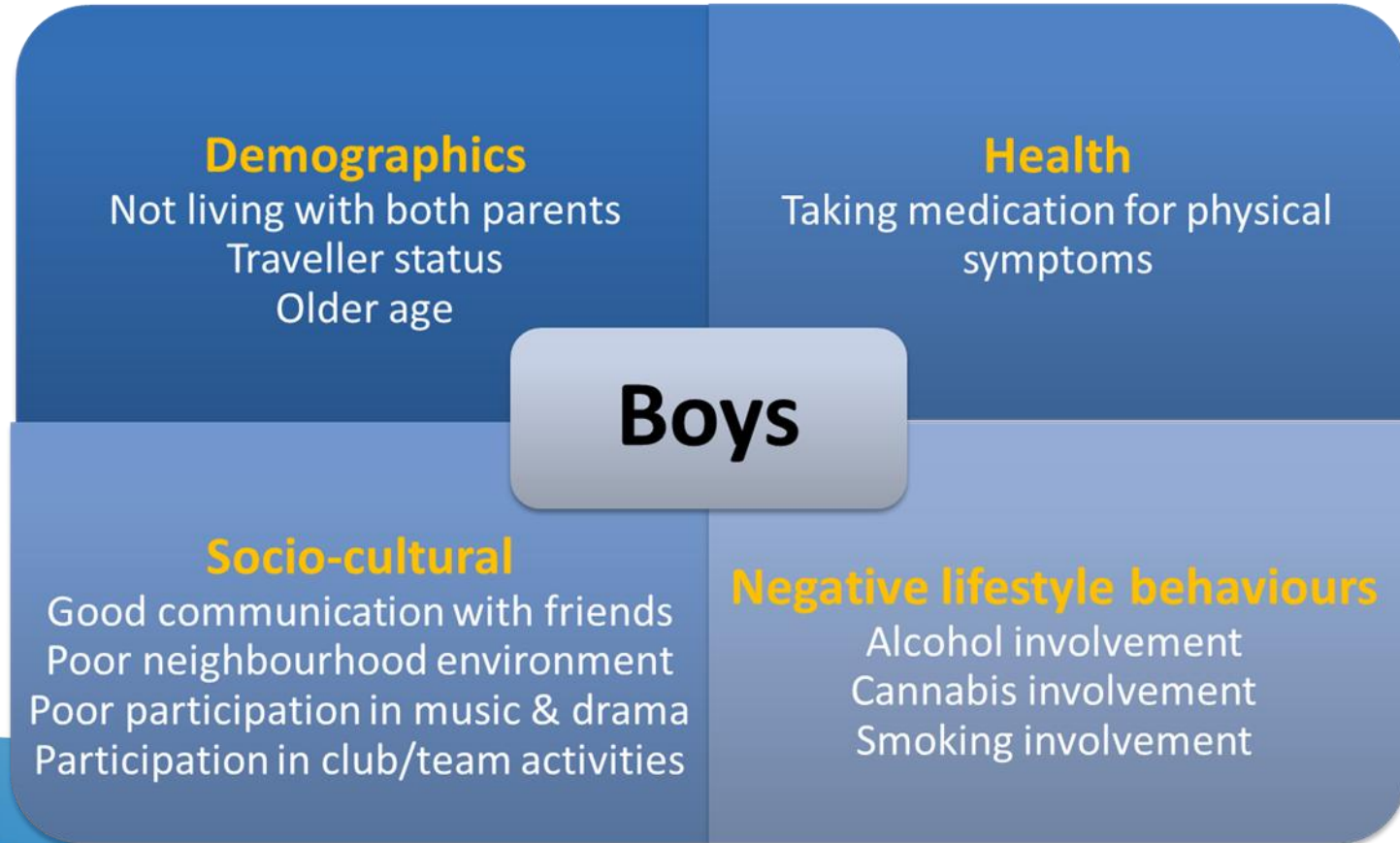
Data Management

- 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)
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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
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Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse



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
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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

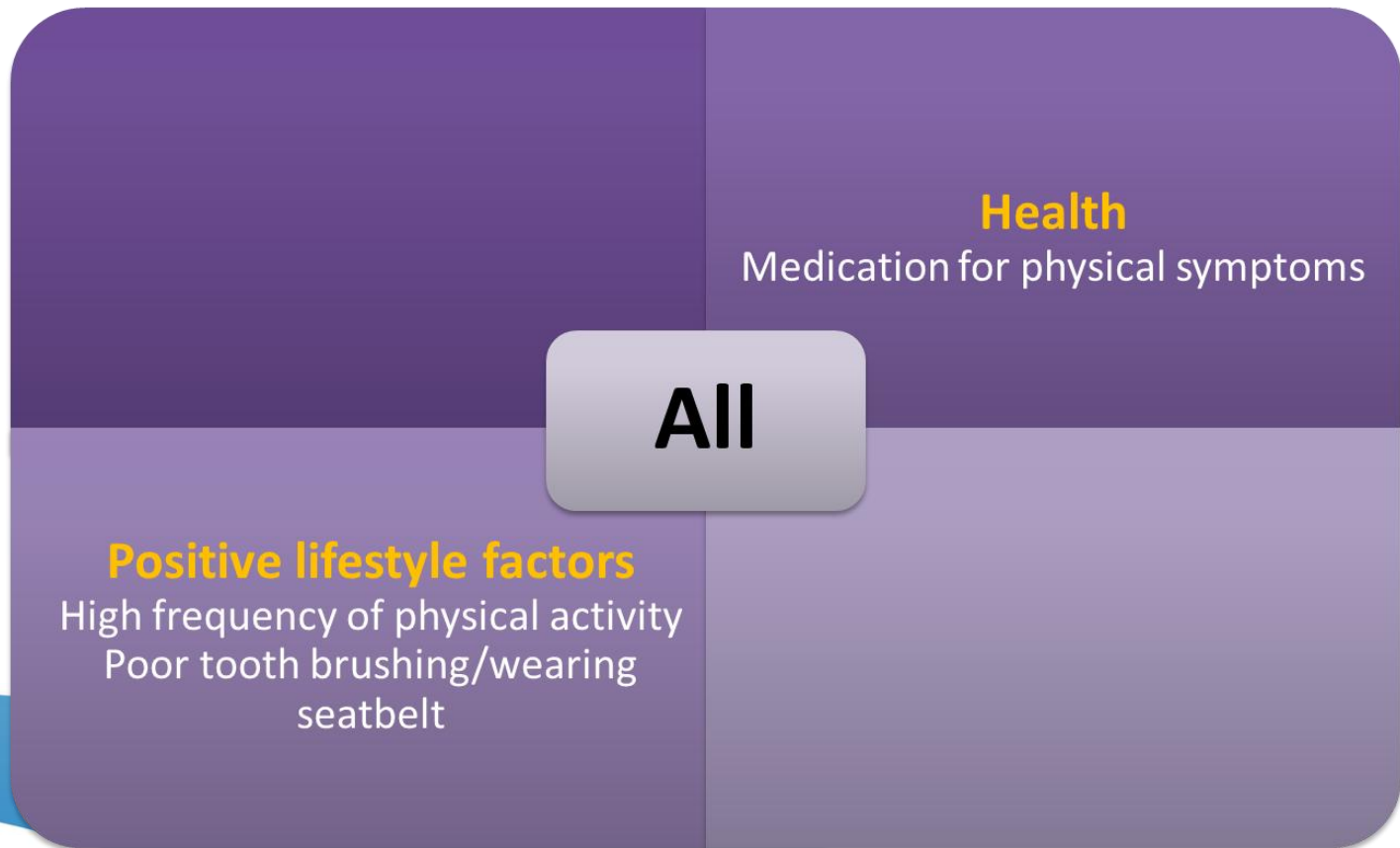
Contraceptive Methods Used at Last Intercourse

- 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



Predictors of Non-Dual Contraceptive Use at Last Sexual Intercourse

Demographics


Younger age
Boys

Negative lifestyle behaviours


Alcohol involvement

All


Summary

- Around 1/4 of school-attending 15-18 year olds in Ireland report engagement in sexual intercourse
 - Around 4/5 of the sexually active school population reported using condoms and 1/5 reported the contraceptive pill and dual use
 - communication
 - Alcohol involvement is significant predictor of sexual engagement, very early initiation and non-dual contraceptive use
 - Current data does not provide a profile of alcohol use at the time of intercourse
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Sexual behaviour questions: background

- 2001/2002 four standardised questions related to sexual behaviour have been included as mandatory HBSC questions (2010 Ireland)
 - Derived from the US Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) asked by all countries of 15 year-old students
 - Limited information about sexual practice
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Optional packages

- Romantic Experiences
 - Significant impact on mental health, development and future romantic relationships
 - First sexual intercourse
 - Relate to other risk behaviours and both psychosocial and physical health outcomes
 - Not previously included as mandatory or optional package in HBSC
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2014 optional questions

- Romantic Experiences
 - Experience of being in love
 - Experience of a romantic relationship
 - First Sexual Intercourse
 - Age of partner at first sexual intercourse
 - Contraception use at first sexual intercourse
 - Perception of timing of first sexual intercourse
 - Substance use prior to first sexual intercourse
 - Perception of age of first sexual intercourse
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HBSC 2014 pilot study: Aim

- Provide guidance to the international network on the sexual health items
 - acceptability, understandability, answerability, translatability and relevance

HBSC 2014 pilot study

- **Participants:** 233 school students aged 16-19 from deliberately contrasting socio-economic backgrounds and educational contexts
 - (5 schools, 12 classes)
 - **Methodology:** Questionnaire administration and/or qualitative exploration
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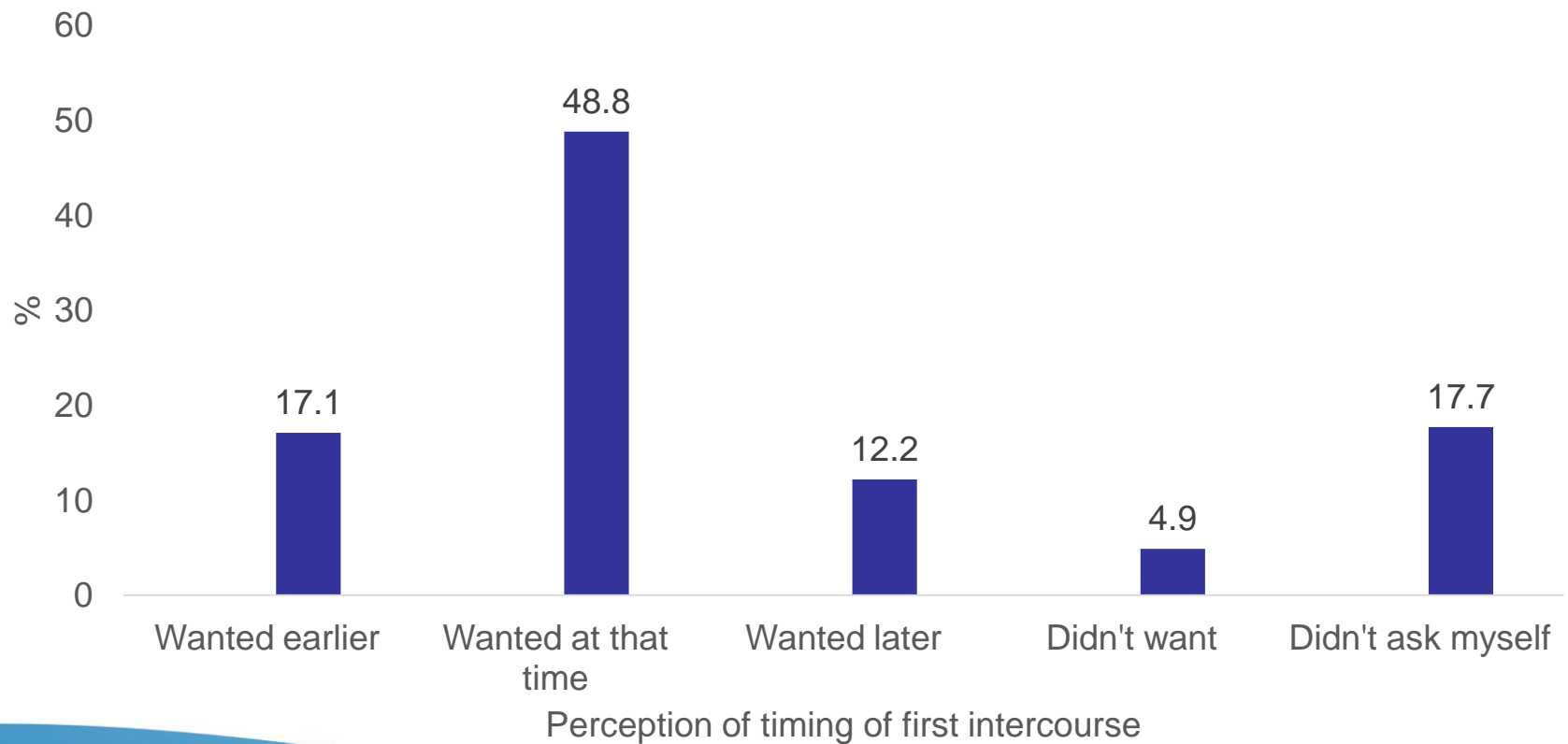
Age of partner at first intercourse



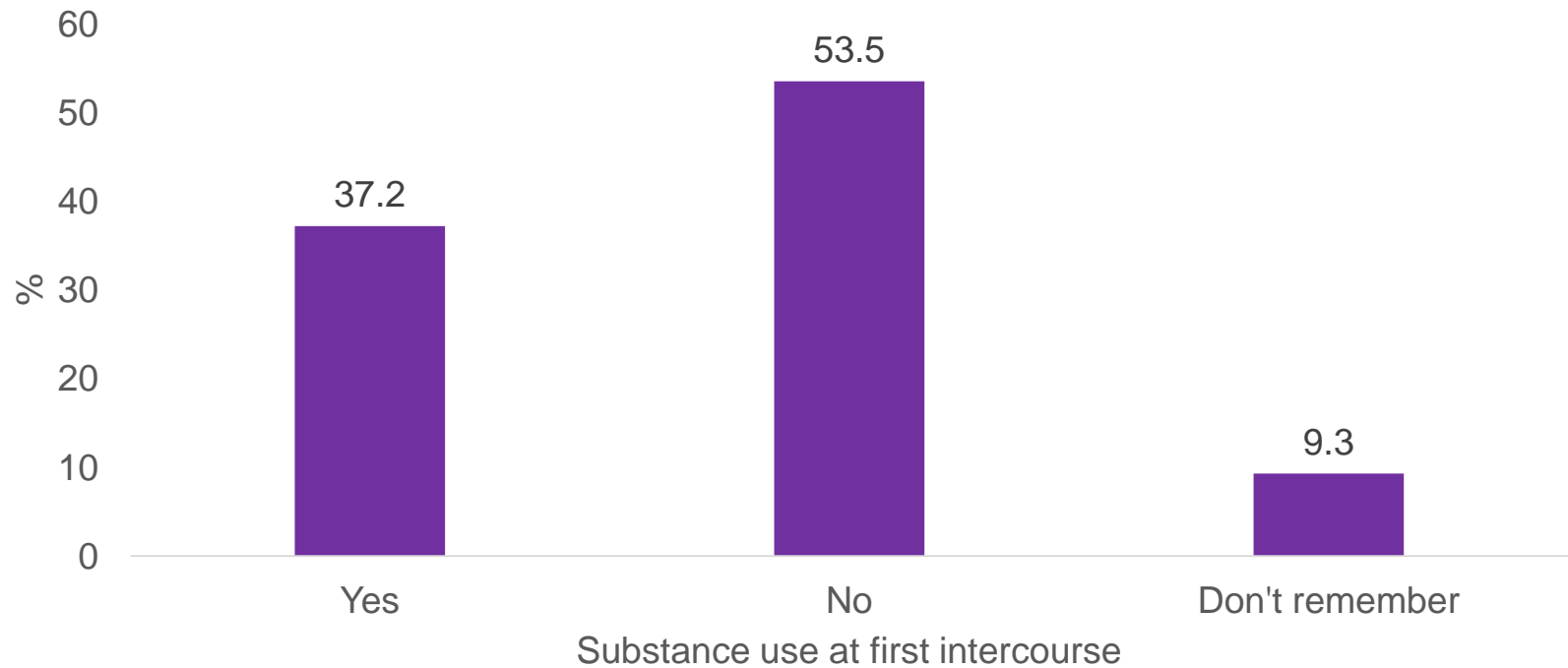
Perception of timing of first intercourse

	When you first had sexual intercourse, would you personally say:
1 <input type="checkbox"/>	you wanted it to happen earlier
2 <input type="checkbox"/>	you wanted it to happen at that time
3 <input type="checkbox"/>	you would rather have had it later
4 <input type="checkbox"/>	you did not really want to have intercourse
5 <input type="checkbox"/>	you did not ask yourself that


Perception of timing of first intercourse (%)



Substance use at first intercourse (%)

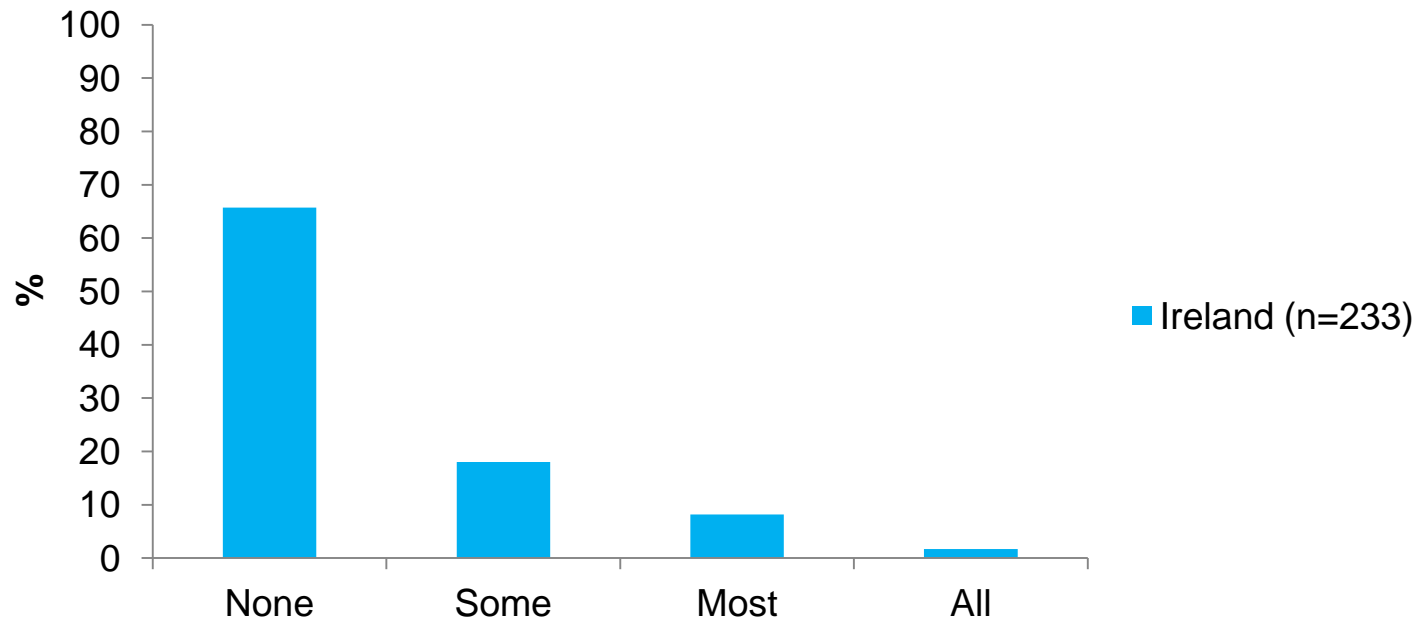


Acceptability and appropriateness

- Small number of students commented that the questions were too personal or too private (n=3/628)
 - Overall, high response rate, no issues with appropriateness of the questions or difficulty in understanding
 - Phrasing and age-targeting of the questions were considered appropriate
 - Overall, no specific issues with the questions were identified
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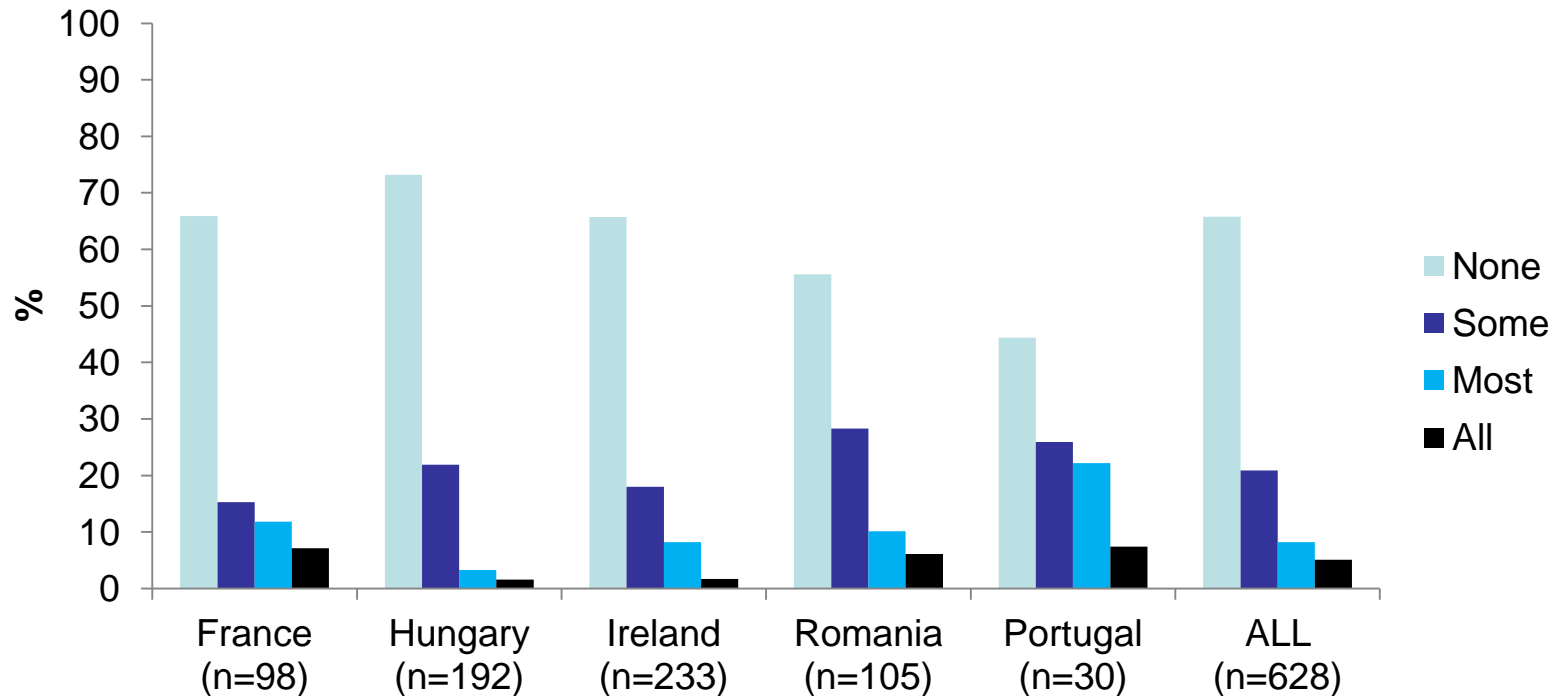
Overall results

- *Figure 1: Inappropriateness of the pilot sexual behaviour questions*




Overall results


- *Figure 1: Inappropriateness of the pilot sexual behaviour questions*




Summary

- 2/3 of the sexually active sample were happy with the timing of their sexual initiation
 - Around half do not report using any substance at first sexual intercourse
 - Over 80% of respondents found **no** questions or **some** questions **inappropriate**
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Implications for HBSC 2014

- Provided guidance for the mandatory and optional sexual behaviour questions
 - Questions which have conceptual cohesion within the study
 - Questions which are understandable, acceptable and of relevance to adolescents
 - Informed a standardised protocol which will enable the collection of internationally comparable data on adolescents' sexual behaviours
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Summary

- Prevalence of sexual intercourse, initiation and contraceptive use among school-going boys and girls aged 15-18 years
 - Profile of young people who are sexually active and also those at risk (of early initiation and non-contraceptive use)
 - Clusters of risk behaviours (including alcohol and drug involvement)
 - Gender and adolescent specific
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Conclusion

- HBSC study provides a unique opportunity to examine sexual behaviours across a wide variety of contexts in a systematic and comparable fashion
 - More detailed, nationally representative findings following 2014 on context of first sexual intercourse
 - Inform and influence population health, health services and health education policy
 - In particular for those not using effective contraceptive methods / not happy with age of initiation
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