

# Youth Engagement and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study

Lunney, L., Maloney, R., Költő, A., Gavin, A., Brown, E., Nealon Lennox, O., Nic Gabhainn, S. & Kelly, C.

Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway

Correspondence: [louise.lunney@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:louise.lunney@universityofgalway.ie)

## BACKGROUND

Youth engagement is a fundamental aspect of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, in Ireland<sup>1</sup> and internationally<sup>2</sup>. As outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people are entitled to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives<sup>3</sup>. By meaningfully involving youth in research, HBSC aims to capture data that is relevant to young people, reflective of their experiences and will positively impact their lives.

## OBJECTIVES

The aim of this poster is to describe the range of research methodologies employed by HBSC to enable young people to play an active role in the research process, at both a national and international level.

## METHODS

**National:** In spring 2023, HBSC Ireland carried out a series of youth engagement workshops to involve young people in the identification and prioritisation of topics for inclusion in the first national report from the HBSC Ireland 2022 study. 123 students from 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class in primary school and 2<sup>nd</sup> year in post-primary school took part in the workshops. Students worked both individually and collectively to agree on priority health topics for inclusion in the HBSC Ireland 2022 National Report.

**International:** Throughout 2023, 78 young people aged 11-18 years from 18 countries across the HBSC network submitted their perspectives on youth health using video clips, audio clips and written text. Adolescents also attended and contributed to a HBSC network meeting held in Lithuania in June 2023. Their perspectives and ideas were used to inform international reports and future directions of the HBSC survey.

## RESULTS

**National:** In Ireland, six youth engagement workshops were conducted in primary and post-primary schools. In these workshops students provided their insights into health topics that are important to them. Across the youth engagement workshops, mental health was the highest ranked health priority.



Figure 1: Students' ranking of priority topics for inclusion in the HBSC Ireland 2022 National Report

**International:** Young people submitted audio clips, video clips and written text on their perspectives of health issues in their country. Their submissions reflected both contemporary health behaviours and emerging risky behaviours. Quotes extracted from their submissions have been included in the HBSC international reports and their data are being used to inform the development of the HBSC 2025/26 survey.

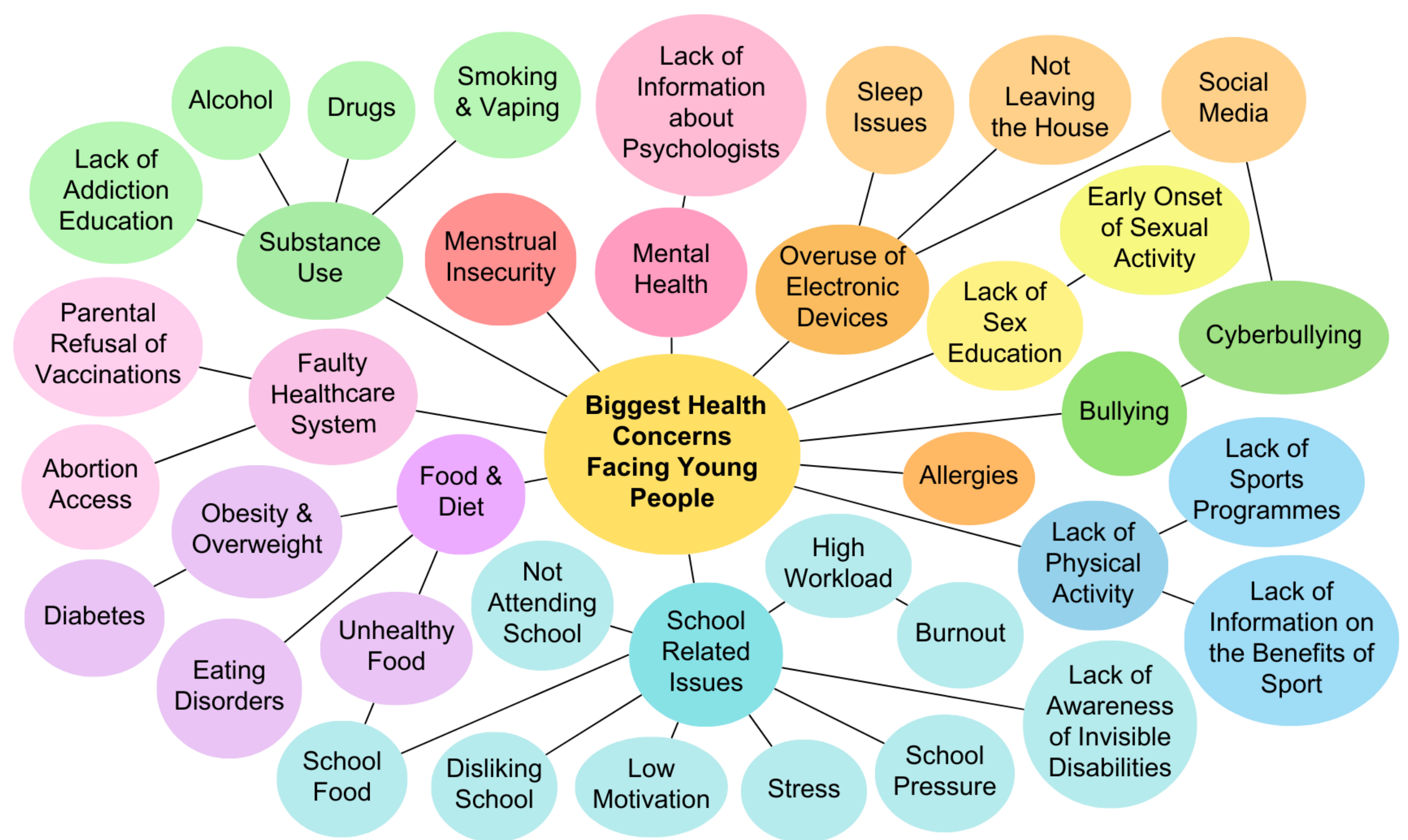


Figure 2: Mind map of international youth responses to the question 'what is the biggest health concern facing young people in your country?'

## CONCLUSION

Young people have a right to be heard and have valuable ideas to contribute on issues related to their health. There are many ways through which one can capture youth voices. Listening to the voices of young people can help to highlight current and emerging health issues and threats. Taking young people's perspectives into account increases the relevance and impact of youth health research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The HBSC Ireland study is funded by the Department of Health. Thank you to the young people who shared their valuable insights.

## REFERENCES

- Gavin, A., Költő, A., Lunney, L., Maloney, R., Walker, L., Nic Gabhainn, S., & Kelly, C. (2024). The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2022. Department of Health and University of Galway. <https://doi.org/10.13025/8whd-b114>
- Kelly, C., Branquinho, C., Dzielska, A., de Matos, M. G., Melkumova, M., Pavlova, D., Pickett, W., & Gabhainn, S. N. (2020). Youth participation in the health behaviour in school-aged children study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 66(6), S6-S8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.03.015>
- United Nations Convention on the rights of the child adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by general assembly resolution 44/ 25 of 20 November 1989. Entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.