

HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams^{1,2} in col-

laboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Dr Candace Currie of the University of Edinburgh. In 2002 HBSC Ireland surveyed 8,424 Irish children from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

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



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Summary

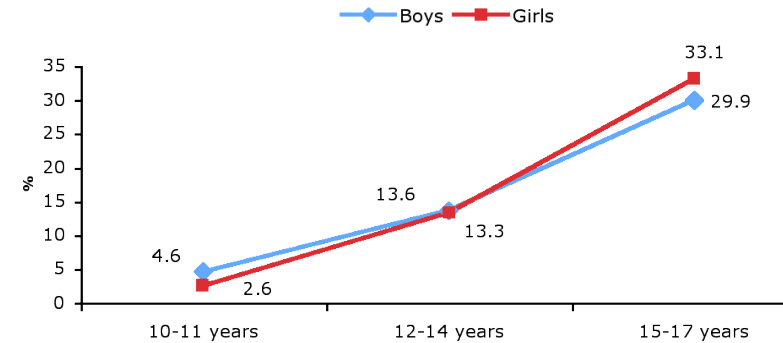
HBSC Ireland has found that 18.6% of children report that they currently smoke, representing a small reduction since 1998. The percentage of smokers increases with age, from 4.6% of 10-11 year old boys and 2.6% of 10-11 year old girls, to 30% of 15-17 year old boys and 33% of 15-17 year old girls. Those who smoke report more negative school perceptions, poorer communication with their parents, and report feeling less healthy and less happy about their lives compared to non-smokers. Smokers are more likely to have good relationships with their friends and to spend more evenings out with their friends than non-smokers.

Why this topic?

Smoking is a leading cause of premature illness and death in developed countries³. Although the majority of smoking-related deaths occur later in life, smoking is often established in adolescence. Young smokers may become addicted before reaching adulthood, making them less able to quit and more likely to have tobacco-related health problems⁴. Current smoking in this factsheet refers to children who report that they smoke at least monthly could fall within the statistical error margins.

Trends 1998 – 2002

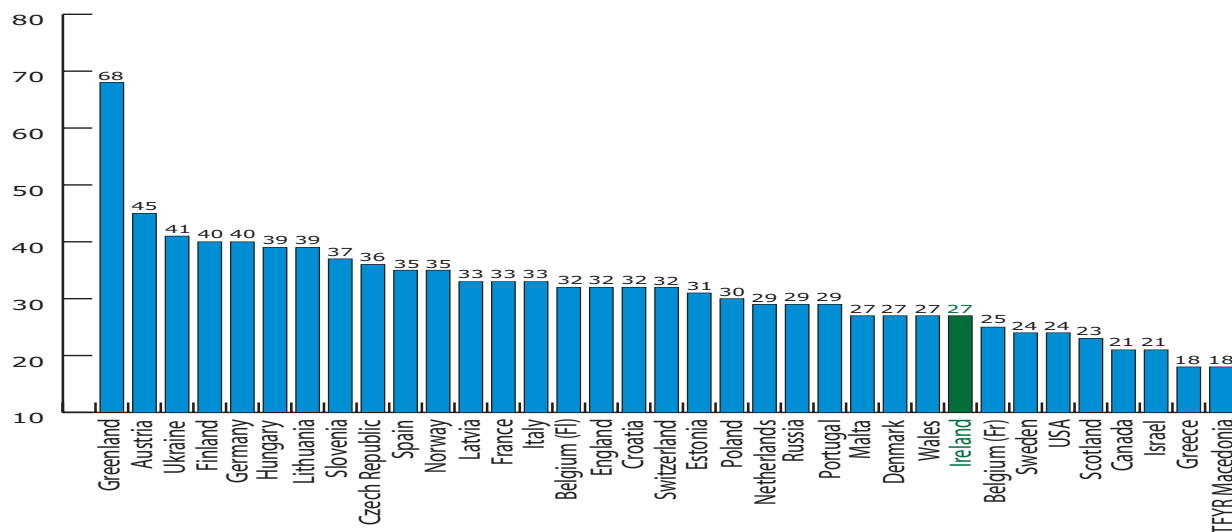
There has been a decrease in the percentage of children who report they are smokers from 21.2% in 1998 to 18.6% in 2002. The decrease is more pronounced among boys (from 21.2% to 17.9%) than among girls (from 21.2% to 19.2%). The decrease is most marked among children aged 12-14. However, these decreases are relatively small and could fall within the statistical error margins.



Percentage of current smokers by age and gender

Smoking behaviour in context

- Smokers are less likely to live with both parents than non-smokers (17% vs. 28%).
- Smokers are less likely than non-smokers to find it easy to talk to their mothers (35% vs. 78%) and fathers (37% vs. 57%).
- Smokers are more likely to find it easy to talk to their best friend than non-smokers (20% vs. 14%).
- Smokers are more likely to spend 4 evenings or more a week with their friends than non-smokers (26% vs. 13%).
- Smokers are more likely to report that they don't like school than non-smokers (49% vs. 27%).
- Smokers are less likely than non-smokers to report excellent health (14% vs. 31%) and to report that they feel very happy about their life (32% vs. 47%).
- Smoking is not related to social class or to feeling pressured by schoolwork.



Percentage of 15 year olds currently smoking, by country

International

Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 27th among 35 countries in Europe and North America, with 27% reporting that they currently smoke. Overall, 5% of Irish 11 year olds (rank 9th) and 10% of Irish 13 year olds (rank 30th), report that they are current smokers.

Implications

The percentage of young people reporting they currently smoke has decreased over the years and is relatively low in Ireland compared to other countries in Europe and North America. However, about one third of those between 15-17 years smoke at least monthly. These data suggest that good relationships with parents may play a protective role, whereas peer relationships may increase the likelihood of smoking. Renewed attention should be directed at both the prevention of smoking initiation and support for smoking cessation for young people.

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References

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3. Murray, C.J.L. & Lopez, A.D. (1996). *The global burden of disease. A comprehensive assessment of mortality and disability from disease, injuries, and risk factors in 1990 and projected to 2020*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard School of Public Health.
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