

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland

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An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The HBSC study runs on a four-year academic cycle (www.hbsc.org). HBSC collects information on the key indicators of health, health attitudes and health behaviours, as well as the context of health for young people. The study was established in 1982. There has been a constant growth in the number of participating countries in the HBSC network: internationally, HBSC currently includes 50 countries from North America and the WHO European Region. Researchers from University of Galway, with the leadership of Professor Saoirse Nic Gabhainn, joined the network in 1994, with the first data collection taking place in 1998. The 2022 survey was the seventh time that Ireland has been involved in this international collaborative study.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the HBSC study is to gain new insight into young people's health and well-being; understand the social determinants of health; and inform policy and practice to improve young people's lives.

Design/Methods

The HBSC study is conducted in schools with data collected through self-completion questionnaires administered by teachers in the classroom. In 2022 the HBSC team introduced an online version of the questionnaire and schools self-selected their method of delivery (online or traditional pen and paper). The survey instrument is a standardised questionnaire developed by the international research network, which is supplemented by questions on issues of national importance for practice and policy development. The survey is administered to a representative sample of 11-, 13- and 15- year-old students in each participating country. In Ireland, primary (3rd-6th class) and post-primary (years 1st-5th) school pupils take part in the survey, thus children aged 9-17 years are represented in the sample. The most recent national data collection took place in 2022, with over 10,000 young people participating.

Public Patient Involvement

Young people actively participate in various stages of the HBSC research cycle, from formulating research and survey questions to prioritising topics for dissemination.

In 2023, the HBSC Ireland team carried out a series of youth engagement workshops in primary and post-primary schools, to involve young people in the identification and prioritisation of topics for inclusion in the first national report from the HBSC Ireland study.

Throughout 2023 young people from 18 countries (including Ireland) across the HBSC network submitted their perspectives on youth health using video clips and audio clips. Their perspectives and ideas were used to inform international reports and future directions of the HBSC study.

An overview of the central role children play in the study and the impact this has had on policy can be viewed [here](#).

Results

In 2023 and 2024 the main tasks for the HBSC Ireland Team were: carrying out youth engagement workshops; preparing and launching the 2022 HBSC Ireland national report; leading and assisting in the preparation of the HBSC international reports; and producing short reports, for schools, practitioners and policy makers. The HBSC team are currently working on a trends report to include data over seven survey cycles.

Dissemination

- Volume 1 of the HBSC International Reports '[A focus on adolescent mental health and well-being in Europe, Central Asia and Canada](#)' was launched in October 2023.
- In 2023, HBSC Ireland data appeared in 18 national reports, 16 international reports and in 17 peer reviewed papers.
- The [The Irish Health Behaviour in School Children \(HBSC\) Study 2022](#) was launched in May 2024.
- Volumes 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the HBSC International Reports were also published in 2024.
 - [A focus on adolescent peer violence and bullying in Europe, central Asia and Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 2.](#)
 - [A focus on adolescent substance use in Europe, central Asia and Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 3.](#)
 - [A focus on adolescent physical activity, eating behaviours, weight status and body image in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 4.](#)
 - [A focus on adolescent sexual health in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 5.](#)
- In 2024, HBSC Ireland data appeared in 3 national reports, 7 international reports and in 6 peer reviewed papers.

Knowledge Translation

The HBSC Ireland Team is involved in several forms of knowledge translation, addressing various topics on adolescent health for different audiences. HBSC Ireland operates a knowledge translation helpdesk to respond to data requests from health authorities, local governments, and fellow researchers. We continue to work on the Short Report series and the provision of specific requested analyses from government, NGO and the community sector. All outputs from HBSC Ireland are available at www.universityofgalway.ie/hbsc.