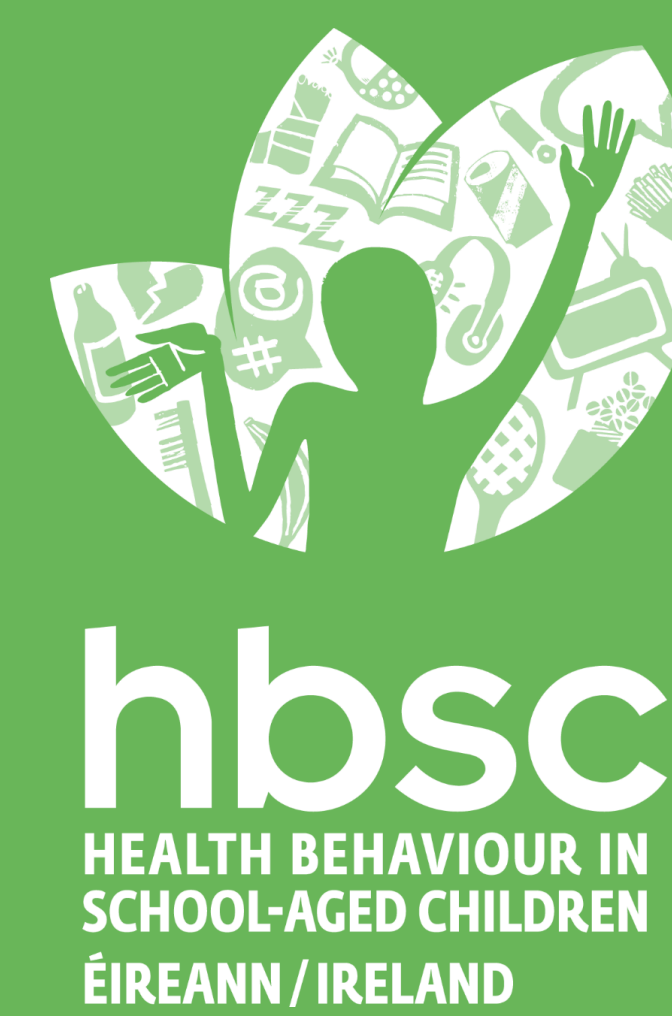


# How Important is Mental Health to Children? Youth Voice in The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study

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## Background

Youth engagement is a fundamental aspect of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study<sup>1,2</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.

## Objective

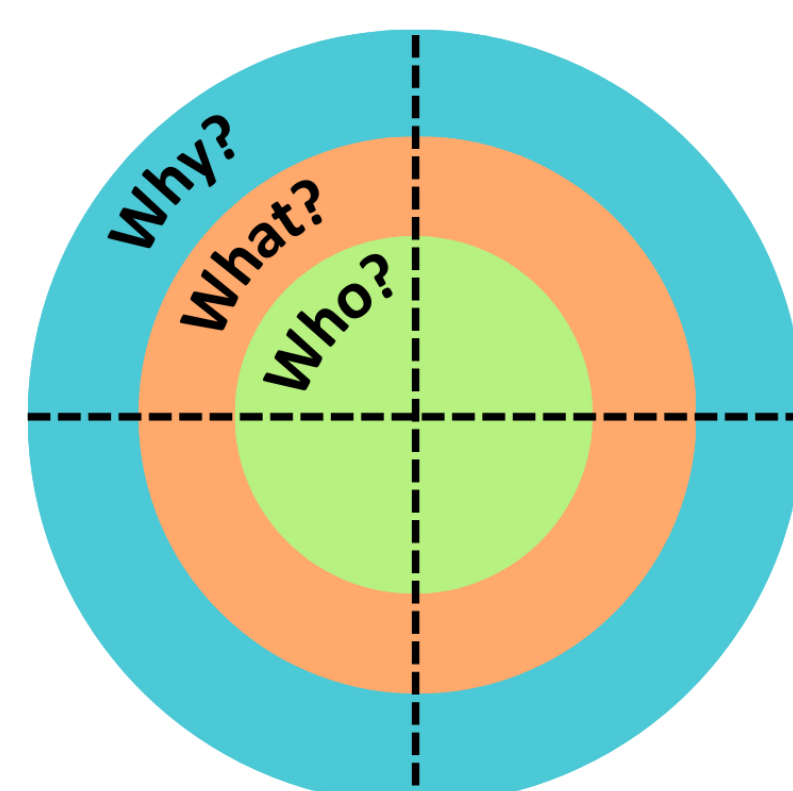
To outline how young people were involved in identifying and prioritising topics for inclusion in the HBSC Ireland 2022 national report, and to describe some of the key insights that they shared regarding the importance of mental health.

## Method

A series of youth engagement workshops were carried out in primary and post-primary schools between April and May 2023. Six youth engagement workshops were conducted, with a total of 123 children taking part. The youth engagement workshops followed a participative protocol which allowed students to work both individually and collectively. Students were divided into groups and given a bundle of ten cards which corresponded to health topics covered in previous HBSC national reports, as well as new topics that had been included in the 2022 survey. Students discussed the health topics within their groups. Each student received three stickers to place on the cards that they believed were most important to children and young people. The number of votes were counted to establish priority health topics for the class.

Priority health topics were explored using a 'pizza chart activity', where students worked together in groups and outlined:

- (1) Why the topic was important to them
- (2) What could be done to address issues related to the topic
- (3) Who could help to make the suggested changes



## Findings

Mental health was the overall priority topic, receiving 21% of all votes and was consistently chosen as a priority topic across all workshops.

Across the six workshops, 31 pizza charts were completed on mental health. Students discussed many reasons as to why they thought mental health was an important issue. They devised a range of solutions to improve mental health and identified stakeholders who could help to implement their suggestions.



Figure 1: Examples of mental health 'pizza charts' created by students



Figure 2: Verbatim comments from students' mental health 'pizza charts'

## Conclusion

The youth engagement workshops provided insight into health topics that are important to children and adolescents. The ideas generated by the students during the workshops helped to shape the HBSC Ireland 2022 national report. Mental health was the overall top health priority for students, illustrating that mental health is a relevant and prominent issue for children.

Young people have a right to be heard and have valuable ideas to contribute on issues related to their health. The workshops demonstrate an approach to successfully involve young people in research report production and highlight the need for stakeholders to prioritise mental health for children and adolescents.

## Acknowledgements

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## Supplementary materials

References and a PDF version of the poster are available at the QR code and link below:  
<https://tinyurl.com/MentalHealthHBSC>



See <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/hbsc/> for further information about the HBSC Ireland Study.

