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

Health Promotion Research Centre,
National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

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
Sexual health strategies & policies

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
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%
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?
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Lifestyle</th>
<th>Positive lifestyle behaviours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Socio-cultural</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social class</td>
<td>Communication with friends</td>
<td>Active travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family affluence</td>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>Healthy food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traveller status</td>
<td>Neighbourhood environment</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Household composition</td>
<td>Bullying others</td>
<td>Teeth/seatbelt</td>
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<td>Disability or Chronic Illness</td>
<td>Music &amp; drama</td>
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<td>Being bullied</td>
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<td>Club/team activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Good adult communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Health check-ups</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>Symptoms</td>
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<td>Quality of life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Medication for physical symptoms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Medication for psychological symptoms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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
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)
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
Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

**Demographics**
- Not living with both parents
- Traveller status
- Older age

**Socio-cultural**
- Good communication with friends
- Poor neighbourhood environment
- Poor participation in music & drama
- Participation in club/team activities

**Health**
- Taking medication for physical symptoms

**Boys**

**Negative lifestyle behaviours**
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement
- Smoking involvement
Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

**Demographics**
- Social class (middle)
- Older age

**Socio-cultural**
- Good communication with friends
- Poor neighbourhood environment
- Being bullied and bullying others
- Poor participation in music & drama

**Positive lifestyle behaviours**
- Inactive modes of travel

**Negative lifestyle behaviours**
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement
- Smoking involvement
- Unhealthy food consumption

**Girls**
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.
Predictors of Sexual Initiation Before 14 Years

Demographics
- Rural area

Socio-cultural
- Poor communication with friends
- Bullying others
- Lack of health check-ups

Health
- Less symptoms
- Medication for psychological symptoms

Negative lifestyle behaviours
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement

All
Contraceptive Methods Used at Last Intercourse

- Contraceptive methods of those who reported engaging in sexual intercourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contraceptive type</th>
<th>Boys (%)</th>
<th>Girls (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contraceptive pill</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual (Condom &amp; contraceptive pill)</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
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- **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

- **Health**: Medication for physical symptoms
- **Positive lifestyle factors**: High frequency of physical activity, Poor tooth brushing/wearing seatbelt

**All**
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
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
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
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
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
Age of partner at first intercourse

Age of partner at first intercourse

- 12 years
- 13 years
- 14 years
- 15 years
- 16 years
- 17 years
- 18 years
- 19 years
- 20 years and older
- Don't know
Perception of timing of first intercourse

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>you wanted it to happen earlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>you wanted it to happen at that time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>you would rather have had it later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>you did not really want to have intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>you did not ask yourself that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When you first had sexual intercourse, would you personally say:
Perception of timing of first intercourse (%)

- Wanted earlier: 17.1%
- Wanted at that time: 48.8%
- Wanted later: 12.2%
- Didn't want: 4.9%
- Didn't ask myself: 17.7%
Substance use at first intercourse (%)

- Yes: 37.2%
- No: 53.5%
- Don't remember: 9.3%
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
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
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
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
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
Acknowledgements

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• The Department of Health (HBSC Study)

• HBSC Ireland Team