

Short Report

HBSC Ireland: age related patterns in alcohol consumption among Irish children

Aoife Gavin, Aingel De Roiste and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn

HBSC Ireland, Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland, Galway

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Introduction

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (European Office). The study runs on a four-year cycle and in 2006 there were 41 participating countries across Europe and North America. HBSC collects data on key indicators of health, health attitudes and health behaviours, as well as the contexts of health for young people. The study is a school-based survey with information collected from students through self-completion questionnaires in classrooms. Further information on the International HBSC study can be found at www.hbsc.org.

The most recent HBSC Ireland dataset comprises 10,344 children from 5th class in primary school to 5th year in post-primary schools. The methods employed comply with the International HBSC protocol and are detailed in the first national report from the 2006 survey, which can be found at www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc.

Focus

This short report presents a brief analysis of alcohol use among Irish schoolchildren by age and gender. This short report includes data taken from the following HBSC Ireland questions:

- ‘At present how often do you drink anything alcoholic, such as beer, wine, spirits, alcopops or cider?’ with response options for each - every day; every week; every month; rarely; never.
- ‘Have you ever had so much alcohol that you were really drunk?’ with response options – no, never

- ‘At what age did you first get drunk?’ with response options - never; 11 years old or less; 12 years old; 13 years old; 14 years old; 15 years old; 16 years or older.
- ‘At what age did you first drink alcohol (more than just a small amount)?’ with response options - never; 11 years old or less; 12 years old; 13 years old; 14 years old; 15 years old; 16 years or older.

Findings:

Table 1 presents an overview of the size of the sample when broken down by age and gender. Tables 2-5 present percentages by age and gender for alcohol consumption; ever, weekly, ever been drunk and been drunk twice or more often. The final two tables present retrospective data from those aged 16-18 years, by gender, on how old they were when they first had an alcoholic drink and they first got drunk, if ever.

Table 1: Sample sizes by age and gender

Age	Boys <i>n</i>	Girls <i>n</i>	All <i>n</i>
11 years old	226	377	604
12 years old	608	743	1351
13 years old	754	765	1519
14 years old	986	791	1777
15 years old	911	760	1672
16 years old	897	783	1681
17 years old	643	605	1250
18 years old	223	164	387

Table 2: Percentages reporting that have ever had an alcoholic drink, by age and gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
11 years old	20	9	13
12 years old	23	12	17
13 years old	37	26	31
14 years old	52	46	49
15 years old	67	61	64
16 years old	78	80	75
17 years old	85	82	84
18 years old	89	85	87

Table 3: Percentages reporting that they drink alcohol weekly, by age and gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
11yearsold	1	0	0
12yearsold	2	1	2
13 years old	3	1	2
14 years old	9	7	8
15 years old	14	14	14
16 years old	22	20	21
17 years old	37	31	34
18 years old	43	36	40

Table 4: Percentages reporting that they have ever been drunk by age and gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
11yearsold	5	2	2
12yearsold	7	3	5
13yearsold	12	7	10
14 years old	23	12	23
15 years old	40	38	39
16 years old	56	53	55
17 years old	72	69	70
18 years old	78	77	78

Table 5: Percentages reporting that they have been drunk twice or more often by age and gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
11yearsold	1	0	0
12yearsold	2	1	2
13yearsold	6	3	4
14 years old	14	13	13
15 years old	27	22	27
16 years old	41	37	39
17 years old	54	54	54
18 years old	60	58	59

Table 6: Percentages of 16-18 year olds reporting when they had their first alcoholic drink (more than a small amount) by gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
Never	18	18	18
11 years old or less	9	6	8
12yearsold	11	8	9
13 years old	14	15	14
14 years old	16	20	18
15 years old	20	21	20
16 years or older	13	12	12

Table 7: Percentages of 16-18 year olds reporting when first got drunk by gender.

Age	Boys %	Girls %	All %
Never	31	35	33
11 years old or less	3	1	2
12yearsold	4	3	3
13yearsold	8	9	9
14 years old	15	13	14
15 years old	20	20	20
16 years or older	19	19	19

Key Findings

- Although girls are initiated into drinking and drunkenness slightly later than boys, by the age of 14/15 the percentages who have ever drunk alcohol or have ever been drunk are roughly similar for boys and girls.
- Otherwise there are remarkably few substantial differences between boys and girls.
- While a relatively small proportion have drunk alcohol and report drinking weekly during primary school, the percentages increase substantially year on year during the junior cycle phase (ages 13-16).
- Weekly drinking and reported drunkenness continues to increase into the senior cycle phase (ages 16-18).

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For further information on HBSC Ireland contact:

Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn, HBSC Ireland, Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway, 12 Distillery Road, Galway Ireland.

hbsc@nuigalway.ie or see www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc