

Short Report

HBSC Ireland: bullying and disability among Irish schoolchildren

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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 10,334 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 the relationship between disability or long-term illness and bullying among Irish schoolchildren. The HBSC Ireland questionnaire measures bullying with two questions;

- “How often have you been bullied in school in the past couple of months?” with the response options - I have not been bullied at school, it has only happened once or twice, two or three times a month, about once a week and several times a week.

- “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?” with the response options - I have not bullied another student at school, it has only happened once or twice, two or three times a month, about once a week and several times a week.

Disability or long-term illness is assessed with three questions:

- “Do you have a long-term illness, disability or medical condition that has been diagnosed by a doctor?” with the response options - yes and no.
- “Do you take medicine for your long-term illness, disability or medical condition? with the response options – I do not have a long-term illness, disability or medical condition, yes and no.
- “Does your long-term illness, disability or medical condition affect your attendance and participation in school?” with the response options - I do not have a long-term illness, disability or medical condition, yes and no.

Analyses are presented separately by age group and for boys and girls.

Findings:

Table 1 presents the number of students in each group, and should be read vertically. Taking the second column, there are 5121 boys in the sample for whom we have information on both disability and bullying, and who report that they do not have a disability or long-term illness. There are a total of 1066 boys who report that they do have a disability or long-term illness, and of these, 645 who report that they take medicine and 287 that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school.

Table 1: Numbers of students by disability status, gender and age group

Gender	Boys				Girls			
	All	1011	1214	1517	All	1011	1214	1517
Those without disability or long-term illness	5152	552	2467	2039	5035	950	567	222
Those with disability or long-term illness	1066	19	506	405	950	148	424	356
Taking medicine for their disability or long-term illness	645	70	322	241	576	91	243	228
Disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school	287	30	149	101	222	32	84	98

Tables 2 and 3 present the percentages of students who report that they have been bullied, while tables 4 and 5 concern those who report that they have bullied others, in each case by disability status, gender and age-group.

Table 2: Percentages of boys reporting that they have been bullied by another student

	All	Age10-11	Age12-14	Age15-17
Those without disability or long-term illness	24.3	26.8	27.5	20.1
Those with disability or long term illness	30.7	31.8	30.8	30.4
Those who report taking medicine for their disability or long-term illness	31.8	32.9	30.4	33.6
Those who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school	33.8	36.7	32.2	35.6

Table 3: Percentages of girls reporting that they have been bullied by another student

	All	Age 10-11	Age 12-14	Age 15-17
Those without disability or long-term illness	21.9	29.7	22.2	18.0
Those with disability or long-term illness	29.1	31.8	30.9	25.3
Those who report taking medicine for their disability or long-term illness	28.3	29.7	28.0	26.8
Those who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school	30.6	31.3	29.8	30.6

Table 4: Percentages of boys reporting that they have bullied another student

	All	Age 10-11	Age 12-14	Age 15-17
Those without disability or long-term illness	29.1	22.0	28.6	31.6
Those with disability or long-term illness	30.7	19.5	30.6	34.7
Those who report taking medicine for their disability or long-term illness	28.5	17.1	29.8	30.4
Those who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school	32.3	30.0	36.1	27.7

Table 5: Percentages of girls reporting that they have bullied another student

	All	Age 10-11	Age 12-14	Age 15-17
Those without disability or long-term illness	14.1	14.4	15.2	12.3
Those with disability or long term illness	14.8	9.6	16.1	15.8
Those who report taking medicine for their disability or long-term illness	14.5	10.0	15.3	15.5
Those who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school	16.4	15.6	13.3	19.6

Key findings:

1. Boys and girls with a disability or long-term illness are more likely to report that they have been bullied than those without a disability or long-term illness, and this is particularly apparent in the eldest groups (age 15-17 years for boys and age 12-17 for girls).
2. The percentages of boys who report they have been bullied remains stable with age for those with a disability or long-term illness, but decreases with increasing age among those without a disability or long-term illness. This difference is not found among girls.
3. Assuming the use of medicine is indicative of more severe disability or long-term illness and that interference with school participation indicates even more severe disability or illness, as the severity of disability or long-term illness increases boys are more likely to report having been bullied. For girls, this pattern is found only amongst the eldest group (age 15-17 years).

4. Bullying others increases with age for boys in all groups, except those who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their participation in school.
5. In the eldest age group (age 15-17 years), boys who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their school participation are less likely than others to report bullying others. The opposite pattern is found for girls; girls aged 15-17 who report that their disability or long-term illness influences their school participation are more likely than others to report that they have bullied another students.

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