

INTRODUCTION

Body weight and body image concerns are common among adolescents and various strategies are used to achieve an 'ideal' body weight or shape. Much of the research to date has focused on girls and demonstrates that unhealthy dieting practices and body dissatisfaction are associated with numerous physical, psychological and emotional negative outcomes ⁽¹⁾.

Dieting and other weight control behaviours are not normative for boys, unlike for girls. Moreover, boys do not report or openly discuss weight and body image concerns ⁽²⁻³⁾. Thus the type of body weight concern and the risks as well as the protective factors associated with weight control behaviours may differ by gender.

The role of the family in the development of weight control behaviours of adolescents has been explored but primarily with a focus on girls and attempts at weight loss ⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾ rather than desires or attempts at weight gain.

OBJECTIVES

The current study aimed to investigate the prevalence of weight concerns among boys in Ireland and to explore the role of the family environment on reported weight concerns. In particular, associations between family mealtimes, relationships and family structure and reported weight concerns were explored.

METHODS

Data for this paper is based on the 2006 Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, a large WHO collaborative study (www.hbsc.org). A nationally representative sample of children aged 10-18 years was recruited through schools and questionnaires were completed anonymously in class. The school and student response rate was 63% (n=215) and 83% (n=10,335), respectively. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland, Galway and consent from schools, parents and children was obtained.

Boys who reported that they were currently dieting or doing something else to lose weight and those who expressed a desire to lose weight were classified as having a body weight 'loss' concern. Those boys who reported a desire to gain weight were classified with a body weight 'gain' concern.

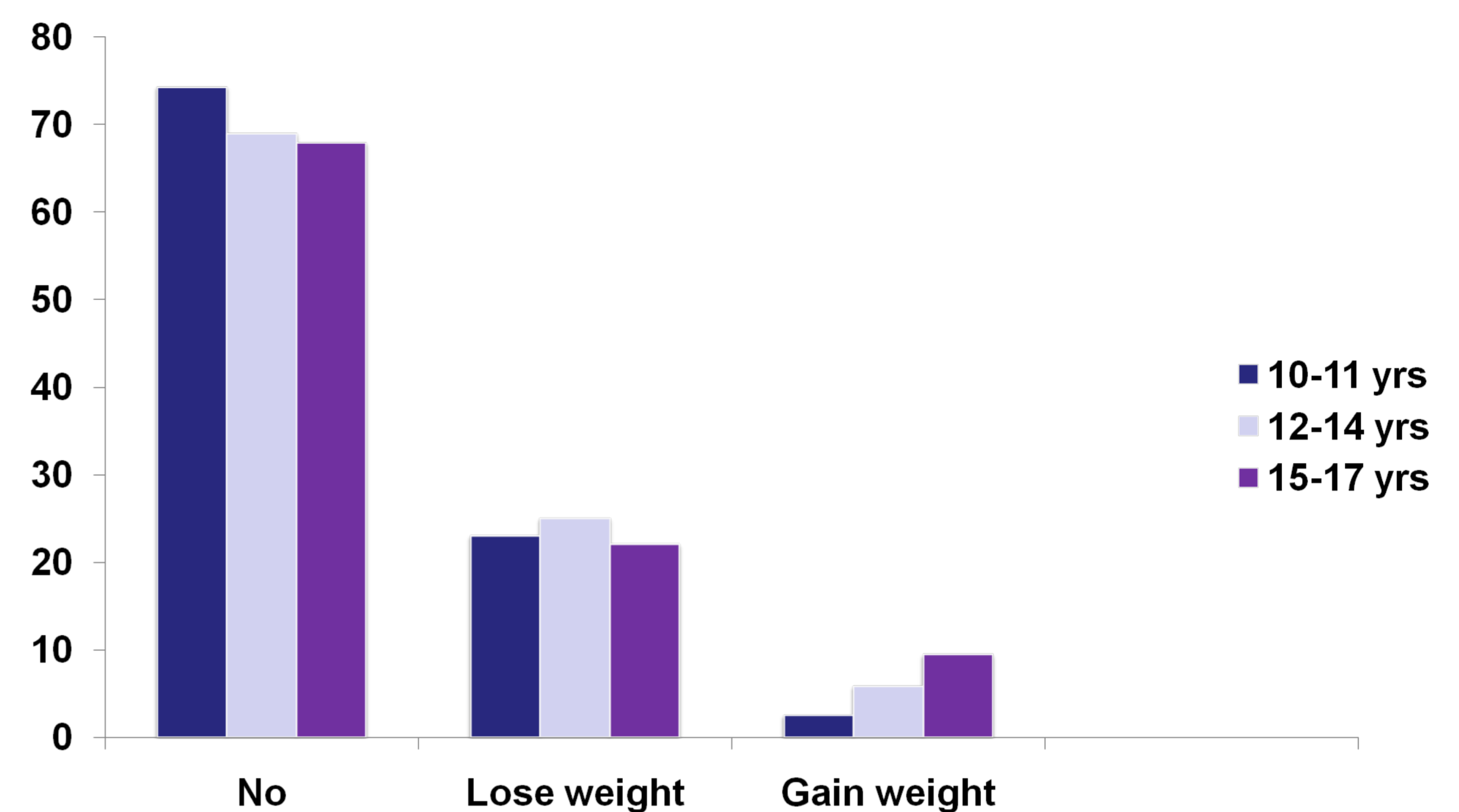
The family environmental variables and assigned cut-offs included:

- Breakfast with mother or father (daily versus less than daily)
- Evening meal with mother or father (daily versus less than daily)
- Ease of communication with father (very easy & easy versus difficult & very difficult)
- Ease of communication with mother (very easy & easy versus difficult & very difficult)
- Father living in the main home (versus not living with the child)
- Mother working outside the home (versus not working)

Associations between family factors and weight concerns were expressed in odds ratios from logistic regression analysis in PASW 18. All analyses were conducted separately for those who reported a weight 'gain' and weight 'loss'. The reference group were those children who reported their weight was fine. Data are presented for 5,185 boys.

RESULTS

Figure 1: Reported prevalence (%) of body weight concerns among boys in Ireland, by age.



A quarter of boys were dieting or expressed a desire to lose weight. A desire to gain weight increased with age with 9% of 15-17 year olds expressing a desire to gain weight.

Table 1: Independent predictors of body weight concerns among boys in Ireland aged 10-17 yrs.

	Desire to lose weight	n	Desire to gain weight	n
Breakfast with mother/father every day	.73***	4748	.57***	3904
Evening meal with mother/father every day	.93	4745	.71**	3899
Open communication with father	.66***	4343	.50***	3600
Open communication with mother	.67***	4414	.55***	3656
Father present in the home	1.19	4498	1.12	3687
Mother working	.98	4537	1.09	3723

***p<0.001; **p<.01; *p<.05. Analyses were controlled for age.

Boys were less likely to report a weight concern, in particular a desire to gain weight, if they reported family meals on a daily basis and open communication with either parent, compared to those who did not report these family activities or relationships. Having a father present in the home or a mother working outside the home was not associated with reported weight concerns in boys.

CONCLUSION

Weight concerns among boys in Ireland are prevalent. Communicating these findings to parents and practitioners alike is important. Further exploration of both the risk and protective factors for weight concerns among boys will broaden the current evidence base and help to inform practice.

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