1. PROJECT SUMMARY
Please summarise the findings of your research in such a way for it to be understood by an informed but non-specialist reader, for example, as if writing a newspaper article. The information contained in this summary may be used by the HRB to disseminate the outcomes of its funded research.

This project had three main objectives, all based around the quality and use of the Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey (HBSC). The Irish HBSC has collected nationally representative data on Irish school-children aged 10-17 at three time points, 1998, 2002 and 2006. HBSC investigates a range of health related issues with school students, including behaviours like smoking, dieting and watching television, but also on the contexts in which young people live their lives, their schools, families, communities and their friendships.

The research sought to provide answers to some of the key questions concerning the quality of the data collected and thus help in the appropriate interpretation of the findings from HBSC. It also set out to answer some specific questions about children’s lives that are appropriate to the current context of childhood in Ireland. Third it included a genuine attempt to make the research findings more accessible, for children and their parents, as well as for policy-makers and people working directly to improve children’s lives.

In relation to the data quality, we have found that it may not be that important exactly when surveys are administered, there were no differences found between the answers of children collected before and after the summer, we also found that collecting data from groups of
children at the same time did not seem to affect most of the things we were interested in finding out about. It seems that children do try to be honest in their responses to survey questions, and we found that when they tell us they do not know things (like their height and weight), then while some are embarrassed, most genuine do not know the answers to the questions we’re asking.

In relation to important questions about children’s lives we found that the relationships that children have with each other and with important adults such as teachers and parents are important for their health, but that electronic communication, such as texting and email may not have the same benefits that come with face to face communication. While relationships are important, so is social capital, or the perceptions of the local community where children live. We found that there are interesting and consistent differences, both positive and negative, between children living in urban and rural areas, and within rural areas, between those growing up on farms and those who are not. In relation to smoking, it appears that the rates of smoking are decreasing, and alongside this, the average age of having your first cigarette is going up. However, those who do start smoking when they are very young appear to have even more problems with their health than those who start later or not at all. Finally we investigated some issues about food; food poverty or hunger and dieting behaviour. It seems that there are many children, especially girls who are deliberately trying to lose weight even though they are not overweight or obese, but on the other hand there are many who are going to school or bed hungry because there is no food in the house. Both of these are related to a range of other health outcomes and constitute important groups of children in our society with food difficulties.

The HBSC dataset is now substantial and capable of answering a range of different sorts of questions about Irish children, and it is important that it’s potential to improve children’s lives is realised. For that to happen the information needs to get to those who will use it to make decisions and design interventions. The final part of this project was to design and bring on-line a dedicated website (http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc) that includes a series of fact-sheets about school-children in Ireland, and can be downloaded. Designed in collaboration with decision-makers, it is hoped that these will be used to help improve life for Irish children.
3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please describe the research carried out (maximum 5 pages, Tahoma 10pt font, and 1.5 spacing) using the following headings:

1. Introduction
   Please briefly describe the project background

   This project aimed to conduct methodological and policy related analyses on the Irish national dataset of the WHO collaborative study – the Health Behaviours in School-aged Children survey, in order to facilitate appropriate dissemination and use of the data collected.

2. Objectives
   Please list the original objectives and describe progress made against these - please also explain any deviations from the original objectives (or recommended alterations made by the awarding Panel)

   Progress against the objectives is set out in appendix 1 attached.

3. Scientific Methodology
   Please also include, where applicable, the number of animals used and species

   No animals were employed as part of this research. This project was based on the secondary analysis of an existing dataset. The dataset comprised self-reported survey data from school-children.

4. Findings
Please include one main graph, table or figure to describe your findings

A summary of findings is set out in appendix 1 attached.

5. Conclusions
Please describe the conclusions and implications of your research findings

These findings have a) given us some more confidence in the quality of the dataset, and alerted us to specific issues that may be more problematic, b) indicated that HBSC has valuable and interpretable things to say about a range of adolescent health issues, and c) impressed on us the value and benefits of wider dissemination.

6. Plans for future development
Please describe your plans to develop your research based on the findings of this project grant

We will continue to work on improving the quality of the dataset, and will embark soon on what we hope will be a new series of validity studies. We shall continue to produce fact-sheets on the 2006 dataset and will set up a HBSC question desk, for those members of the public, voluntary and community sector who wish to ask questions of the dataset. On a scientific level, new hypotheses about the determinants and mediators of adolescent health, well-being and risk behaviour have emerged and we will continue to work on these analyses with the new 2006 dataset.
This section should list details of outputs arising directly from the HRB-funded research project.

### A) Publications

**Research articles published in peer-reviewed journals (or in press):**


A further 3 articles are under review in peer-review journals.

**Other publications (including editorials, commentaries, books or book chapters, technical reports, non-reviewed publications)**


http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/factsheets.html

http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/factsheets.html

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HRB Improving Health Through Research and Information


HBSC Ireland Variable Reports from both the 1998 and 2002 Surveys are also now available at http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc

B) Presentations
Please include oral communications, poster presentations and keynote/plenary lectures

National Presentations (title of abstract published in conference proceedings)

- Oral:


- Poster:
communication in adolescence; associations with risk behaviours and well-being.
Poster presented at the *Annual Conference of the Psychological Society of Ireland*,
Galway, November 2006.

**International Presentations** (title of abstract published in conference proceedings)
- Oral:
  Examples of seasonal effects in Irish HBSC data. Paper presented at the Annual
  Scientific Meeting of the WHO-HBSC study, Budapest, June 2006.
  consumption and eating behaviour among Irish schoolchildren Paper presented at
  the UK Nutrition Society Summer Meeting: Interactions between Genetics, Diet,
  Health and Disease, Aberdeen, July 2006.
  Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the WHO-HBSC study, Budapest,
  June 2006.
  Scientific Meeting of the WHO-HBSC study, Budapest, June 2006.
  Nic Gabhainn S., Molcho M. & Kelly C. (2007), Face to Face and Electronic Communication in
  with peers in adolescence: associations with risk behaviours and well-being. Paper to
  be presented at the 19th IUHPE World Conference on Health Promotion and Health
difference in adolescent smoking: findings from 35 countries (Abstract). Paper
presented at the National Conference on Tobacco or Health, Chicago, IL, May 2005.

adolescents. Paper presented at the 19th IUHPE World Conference on Health
Promotion and Health Education, Vancouver, June 2007.

Adolescents (Abstract). Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the

Children. Paper presented at the 13th Congress of European Union for School and
University Health and Medicine, Dubrovnik, October 2005.

Paper presented at the 19th IUHPE World Conference on Health Promotion and Health

Molcho M, Nic Gabhainn S., Kelly C. (2007), Food poverty and risk for violent behaviours in
adolescence. Paper presented at the 19th IUHPE World Conference on Health
Promotion and Health Education, Vancouver, June 2007.

- Poster:

and after the smoking ban. Poster to be presented at the National Conference on


(F) Policy Impact

The following questions are designed to give the HRB an indication of the impact of your research findings on policies concerning public health initiatives and health service reform, as well as clinical practice and other important policy issues

Findings have been widely disseminated throughout various governmental and non-governmental bodies, particularly those interested in children’s lives and health. They have been cited in the state of the nation’s children (Department of Health and Children, 2007), and have been subject to considerable media attention – particularly the publication of the food poverty paper in Public Health Nutrition.

The PI has been appointed to the national children’s advisory committee, the advisory board of the national youth health programme and to the scientific and policy advisory committee of the national longitudinal study of childhood in Ireland – Growing up in Ireland as well as the advisory committee for the National Health and Lifestyle Survey (SLAN), largely as result of the increased awareness of HBSC in Ireland.

All data are lodged with the Norweigan Social Science Data Archive and are available following consultation with members of the International HBSC research
The dissemination activities were specifically designed to provide relevant and accessible information, based on scientifically sound research findings to practitioners and policy-makers. Thus far, there is some anecdotal evidence that this has been successful.

There are possibilities that some of these findings will contribute to a wider consideration of how the health service could be addressing the determinants of health, or be used as evidence to support such wider approaches – such as work with schools, parents and local communities.

The focus of this project was on rendering the data suitable for use - ensuring the data were interpretable, addressing key policy related questions and working on appropriate dissemination. This included liaising with research users as to the format(s) in which they would like access to the data, and what would be priorities for them in terms of the information to be disseminated. The research Fact-sheets were launched at the National Conference on Children’s Research, Sligo, October 2006 and full variable reports have been placed on the specifically developed HBSC Ireland website (www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc

(G) Other Outcomes
Please give details of any other outcomes that arose, unexpectedly or otherwise, from the research supported by this project grant

The publication of the paper on food poverty resulted in 7 national newspaper articles and 12 radio interviews with Dr Molcho, the first author, in April 2007.