

Short Report

HBSC Ireland: smoking behaviour 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 tobacco use among Irish schoolchildren. The HBSC Ireland questionnaire measures tobacco use with the following questions;

- “Have you ever smoked tobacco?” with the response options – Yes and No.
- “How frequently have you smoked cigarettes during the last 30 days?” with the response options – Not at all; less than 1 cigarette per week; less than 1 cigarette a day; 1-5 cigarettes per day; 6-10 cigarettes per day; 11-20 cigarettes per day; more than 20 cigarettes per day.
- “How often do you smoke tobacco at present?” with the response options – every day; at least once a week but not every day; less than once a week; I do

not smoke.

- “At what age did you first smoke cigarette (more than a puff)?” with the 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:

Overall, 15% of all Irish children report that they are current smokers (defined as smoking monthly or more frequently). This figure masks large age and gender differences with 2% of 10-11 year (3% of boys and 2% of girls); 11% of 12-14 year olds (10% of boys and 11% of girls); and 25% of 15-17 year olds (23% of boys and 28% of girls) olds reporting they are current smokers.

Table 1 presents the percentages of children reporting that they have ever smoked by region, age group and gender. Overall, the percentages of children in the Dublin/North East region reporting that they had smoked are higher compared to the three other regions (p<0 .05). This pattern is particularly evident among 15-17 year old girls in the Dublin/North East region, who smoke more than boys and more than girls in other regions

Table 1: Percentages of students who report that they have ever smoked by region, gender and age group

HSE Region / Gender	Total	10-11 year olds			12-14 year olds			15-17 year olds		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
West	36	9	5	7	30	26	28	53	45	46
South	37	11	10	10	34	26	31	53	42	45
Dublin/North East	39	15	9	12	29	31	30	47	60	47
Dublin/Mid Leinster	33	8	6	7	23	27	25	52	45	43

Table 2 presents the percentages of children reporting that they have ever smoked by region, age group and social class¹. No consistent social gradient was found in any of the age groups or across regions.

Table 2: Percentages of students who report that have ever smoked by region, age group and social class*

HSE Region / Social Class	10-11 year olds			12-14 year olds			15-17 year olds		
	SC1-2	SC3-4	SC 5-6	SC 1-2	SC 3-4	SC 5-6	SC 1-2	SC3-4	SC5-6
West	3	8	5	26	27	33	51	56	53
South	12	6	12	25	33	28	52	57	57
Dublin/North East	11	19	0	31	31	25	46	55	54
Dublin/Mid Leinster	8	6	9	23	26	27	52	53	52

Table 3 presents the percentages of children reporting that they are current smokers by region, age group and gender. Overall, the percentages of children in the Dublin/North East region reporting that they are current smokers are higher compared to the three other regions ($p < 0.05$). However, among the 15-17 year olds, the percentages of girls reporting they are current smokers are higher than the percentages of boys, this difference is most visible in the Dublin/North East region.

Table 3: Percentages of students who report that they are current smokers by region, gender and age group

HSE Region / Gender	Total	10-11 year olds			12-14 year olds			15-17 year olds		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
West	16	3	1	2	12	12	12	21	26	23
South	15	2	3	3	10	9	10	24	28	26
Dublin/North East	18	11	4	7	9	13	11	21	33	27
Dublin/Mid Leinster	14	2	1	2	9	9	9	24	26	25

¹ Social Class was determined by reported parental occupation. SC 1-2 includes occupations defined as professional or managerial; SC 3-4 includes occupations defined as skilled non-manual or skilled manual; and SC 5-6 includes occupations defined as partly skilled or unskilled.

Table 4 presents the percentages of children reporting that they are current smokers by region, age group and social class. These findings suggest that among 15-17 year olds, current smoking is more prevalent in social classes 3-6 compared to social classes 1-2 in most regions.

Table 4: Percentages of students who report that they are current smokers by region, age group and social class

HSE Region / Social Class	10-11 year olds			12-14 year olds			15-17 year olds		
	SC1-2	SC3-4	SC 5-6	SC 1-2	SC 3-4	SC 5-6	SC 1-2	SC3-4	SC5-6
West	0	3	2	10	12	16	19	25	26
South	0	2	1	9	10	9	21	28	24
Dublin/North East	5	12	0	11	10	11	20	26	27
Dublin/Mid Leinster	1	1	3	6	10	10	24	25	23

Table 5 presents the percentage of children reporting that they smoked at least six times or more in the last 30 days by region, age group and gender. Overall, the percentages of children in the Dublin/North East region reporting that they had smoked is higher compared to the three other regions ($p < 0.05$). Here again, among the 15-17 year olds, the percentage of girls reporting they smoked during the last 30 days are higher than the percentage of boys, this difference is mostly visible in the West region and the Dublin/North East region.

Table 5: Percentages of students who report that they smoked 6 or more cigarettes during the last 30 days by region, gender and age group

HSE Region / Gender	Total	10-11 year olds			12-14 year olds			15-17 year olds		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
West	11	3	0	1	7	9	8	14	21	18
South	11	1	0	1	6	5	6	18	23	20
Dublin/North East	14	7	2	4	6	8	7	17	27	22
Dublin/Mid Leinster	10	1	0	1	5	5	2	16	19	19

Table 6 presents the percentages of children reporting that they smoked at least once in the last 30 days by region, age group and social class. The findings presented suggest that smoking is more prevalent in social classes 3-6 compared to social classes 1-2 ($p < 0.05$)

Table 6: Percentages of students who report that they smoked 6 or more cigarettes during the last 30 days by region, age group and social class

HSE Region / Social Class	<i>10-11 year olds</i>			<i>12-14 year olds</i>			<i>15-17 year olds</i>		
	<i>SC1-2</i>	<i>SC3-4</i>	<i>SC 5-6</i>	<i>SC 1-2</i>	<i>SC 3-4</i>	<i>SC 5-6</i>	<i>SC 1-2</i>	<i>SC3-4</i>	<i>SC5-6</i>
West	0	1	2	6	7	9	13	19	19
South	0	1	0	4	6	5	14	24	18
Dublin/North East	0	5	0	7	6	8	15	20	23
Dublin/Mid Leinster	0	1	0	3	5	4	16	20	18

Table 7 presents the reported age of smoking initiation among 15-17 year olds, by region. About half of the children report that they have never smoked a cigarette (more than a puff). In all regions, one in ten children reported they have smoked their first cigarette at the age of 11 or younger. No clear regional differences are apparent.

Table 7: Age of first cigarette smoking by region (15-17 year olds only)

	<i>Never</i>	<i>11 or younger</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16 or older</i>
West	49	10	7	12	10	10	3
South	47	11	10	11	10	8	3
Dublin/North East	49	11	10	9	11	8	4
Dublin/Mid Leinster	50	11	8	11	11	7	4

Key findings:

1. No consistent differences were found in smoking behaviours across the four HSE regions.
2. Overall, involvement in smoking behaviour increases with age, with few gender differences.
3. No clear social gradient was found for smoking behaviours across the four regions.
4. In the eldest age group (age 15-17 years), more girls than boys in all regions report that they are current smokers.
5. More children in social classes 3-6 reported that they smoked six or more cigarettes in the past 30 days.
6. No gender differences were found in smoking six or more cigarettes in the last 30 days, with the exception of the oldest age group, in which more girls than boys reported they have smoked during the last 30 days.

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