SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, INITIATION AND CONTRACEPTIVE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN IRELAND

Findings from the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland study

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The Health Behaviour in School aged-Children (HBSC) study

- World Health Organisation (WHO) cross-national research project

- Improve understanding of young people’s health and wellbeing, including sexual behaviours

- 200,000 school children aged 11, 13 and 15 years across 43 countries every 4 years
HBSC Ireland

• Carried out in Ireland since 1998
• Data collection in Ireland extended to include young people aged 9 to 18 years
• Sample is representative of geographical population distribution of children in Ireland based on census data
• In HBSC Ireland 2010:
  – 256 schools were recruited - response rate of 67%
  – 16,060 school children took part - response rate of 85%
Adolescent Sexual Health

• Adolescence is an influential stage of life

• Sexual behaviours such as inconsistent condom use, multiple partners and casual sex are recognised risk factors for unplanned pregnancy and STI transmission

• Early onset of first intercourse associated with poor sexual health outcomes

• Limited data on adolescent sexual health and behaviours available in Ireland
Aim

• Adolescents’ sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraceptive use at last intercourse in relation to socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics
Measures: Sexual Health Behaviour

• Mandatory sexual health questions introduced in 2002 (Ireland in 2010)

  – Have you ever had sexual intercourse? (Sometimes this is called “making love”, “having sex” or “going all the way”)

  – How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?

  – The last time you had sexual intercourse, what method(s) did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy?

  – The last time you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom?
# Measures: Socio-demographic & Lifestyle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Lifestyle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td><strong>Socio-cultural</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social class</td>
<td>Communication with friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family affluence</td>
<td>Sense of community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traveller status</td>
<td>Neighbourhood environment</td>
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<td>Household composition</td>
<td>Bullying others</td>
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<td>Disability or Chronic Illness</td>
<td>Music &amp; drama</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Being bullied</td>
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<td>Club/team activities</td>
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<td>Poor adult communication</td>
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<td>Local resources</td>
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<td>Health check-ups</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Negative lifestyle behaviours</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alcohol involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cannabis involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unhealthy food from parents</td>
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<td>Smoking involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unhealthy food consumption</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Symptoms</td>
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<td>Quality of life</td>
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<td>Medication for physical symptoms</td>
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<td>Medication for psychological symptoms</td>
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<td><strong>Positive lifestyle behaviours</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exercise</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Healthy food</td>
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<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Teeth/seatbelt</td>
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Methods

• 4,494 school children aged 15-18 years

• Sexual health behaviour

• Socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics

  – Chi-square tests - relationships between categorical variables

  – Logistic regression - examine the predictors of sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraceptive non-use
Data Management

- Data inconsistencies
  - Rigorous decision-making process
  - Issues associated with self-report data

- What to report?
  - Sample / Relevant Sample (e.g., all participants / all those who reported having sex)
  - Respondents (e.g., all those who responded to a question)
Experience of Sexual Intercourse

- **26.1%** of adolescents aged 15-18 years reported having engaged in sexual intercourse \((n=1065/4088)\)

- **28.8%** of boys \((n=619)\) and **22.8%** \((n=439)\) of girls reported they ever had sexual intercourse
Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

**Demographics**
- Not living with both parents
- Traveller status
- Older age

**Health**
- Taking medication for physical symptoms

**Socio-cultural**
- Good communication with friends
- Poor neighbourhood environment
- Poor participation in music & drama
- Participation in club/team activities

**Negative lifestyle behaviours**
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement
- Smoking involvement

**Boys**
Predictors of Engagement in Sexual Intercourse

**Demographics**
- Social class (middle)
- Older age

**Socio-cultural**
- Good communication with friends
- Poor neighbourhood environment
- Being bullied and bullying others
- Poor participation in music & drama

**Girls**

**Positive lifestyle behaviours**
- Inactive modes of travel

**Negative lifestyle behaviours**
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement
- Smoking involvement
- Unhealthy food consumption
Age of Sexual Initiation Before 14 Years

- 3.2% boys ($n=141$) and 1.3% girls ($n=59$) of the whole sample ($n=4494$) were sexually active before age 14 years.

- Of those young people who reported being sexually active, 22.8% of boys ($n=141/619$) and 13.4% of girls ($n=59/439$) reported being sexually active before age 14 years.
Predictors of Sexual Initiation Before 14 Years

Demographics
- Rural area

Health
- Less symptoms
- Medication for psychological symptoms

Socio-cultural
- Poor communication with friends
- Bullying others
- Lack of health check-ups

Negative lifestyle behaviours
- Alcohol involvement
- Cannabis involvement
Contraceptive Methods Used At Last Intercourse

- Contraceptive methods of those who reported engaging in sexual intercourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contraceptive type</th>
<th>Boys (%)</th>
<th>Girls (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraceptive pill</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual (Condom &amp; contraceptive pill)</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
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- **10.5%** of boys and **6.8%** of girls reported using no reliable method of contraception at last intercourse
Predictors of Non-Condorn Use At Last Sexual Intercourse

Positive lifestyle factors
- High frequency of physical activity
- Poor tooth brushing/wearing seatbelt

Health
- Medication for physical symptoms

All
Predictors of Non-Dual Contraceptive Use At Last Sexual Intercourse

Demographics
Younger age
Boys

Negative lifestyle behaviours
Alcohol involvement

All
Summary

• Prevalence of sexual intercourse, initiation and contraceptive use among boys and girls aged 15-18 years

• Socio-demographic and lifestyle predictors of sexual intercourse, initiation and contraceptive use

• Profile of young people who are sexually active and also those at risk (of early initiation and non-contraceptive use)

• Gender and adolescent specific
Final Thoughts…

• Socio-demographic variables associated with sexual behaviours.

• Adolescents are a distinct group with unique influences on their sexual health and behaviour.

• Develop and implement specifically targeted policy and interventions which take a holistic approach in addressing the needs of those most at risk.

• More research required to further the understanding of the sexual health and practices of adolescents’ across Ireland.
Acknowledgements

• *We would like to thank the school Principals, teachers and students for giving their time to take part in this survey*

• *This work was funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences collaborative grant with the Crisis Pregnancy Programme of the HSE. With special thanks to Maeve O’Brien Orla McGowan*

• *The Department of Health (HBSC Study)*

• *HBSC Ireland Team*