

Young people's perspectives on the findings of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the WHO Europe. The overall aim is to increase our understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context (see www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc). There is increasing recognition that children can and should be more engaged in all stages of the research process (Alderson, 2001; Sinclair, 2004), not just in providing data to researchers. One of the key functions of the HBSC study is to inform policy and practice. Towards achieving this young people participated in a workshop before the launch of the HBSC 2010 National report.

AIM

The workshop aimed to access young people's opinions of the findings of the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey. There were three objectives; to enable the young people to identify the most interesting finding, the most surprising finding and what the youth health priorities should be as a result of these findings. It was also an objective of this study to continue our progress towards involving young people in the HBSC research process.

METHODS

Sample:

Twenty-five students (13-15 years) in a mixed-gender post-primary school in the West of Ireland participated in this workshop.

Outline of the Workshop:

The researcher explained the project and the purpose of the session to the participants and the workshop began. Each participant was given a copy of the HBSC 2010 National report to examine and were asked to provide feedback on the report design, layout and content with the group. Group discussion was facilitated and all comments were recorded. When the group discussion was finished each participant was asked to individually answer three questions on the questionnaire (Figure 1); what is the most interesting finding of the report?, what is the most surprising finding in the report?, and what do you think the youth health priorities should be as a result of these findings?

Figure 1: Questionnaire.



RESULTS

The participating young people were asked '**What is the most interesting finding in the report?**' and this resulted in 24 answers. Twenty of these answers were collapsed into five themes: substance use, eating habits, physical activity, bullying and other. Examples of what the young people said include:

- That children of the age of 9-10 and 11 years of age smoke cannabis (*Girl, 13*)
- Drug use by 10-11 year olds (*Boy, 14*)
- The amount of people that don't have breakfast (*Boy, 14*)
- That boys bully others more than girls (*Girl, 14*)

The participating young people were asked '**What is the most surprising finding in the report?**' and resulted in 25 answers. Twenty-two of these answers were collapsed into four themes: substance use, bullying, sex and other. Examples of what the young people said include:

- The boy/girl ratio on who has been a victim or a bully (*Boy, 14*)
- Percentage of children who have been 'really drunk' (*Girl, 14*)
- The amount of people who have had under age sex (*Boy, 14*)
- Teeth brushing should be higher (*Boy, 15*)

The participating young people were asked '**What do you think the youth health priorities should be as a result of these findings?**' and resulted in 25 answers. Twenty-two of these answers were collapsed into five themes: substance use, physical activity, eating habits, sexual health and other. Examples of what the young people said include:

- To encourage teens to engage in regular exercise and be more active (*Boy, 14*)
- To make sure teenagers actually eat, a lot of them don't (*Girl, 15*)
- More awareness for younger children about drugs and sex (*Boy, 14*)
- To stop young people from drinking and taking drugs (*Boy, 15*)

DISCUSSION

The participating young people clearly articulated the findings they were most surprised by and interested in. They also identified youth health priorities they deemed important for the future as a result of the findings of the 2010 HBSC survey. Central themes emerged from the young people's opinions. They were most interested in the findings relating to substance use, physical activity - in particular the low rates of exercise among youth, eating habits and bullying. The young people were most surprised by the findings relating to substance use - in particular being really drunk, adolescent sexual behaviour and bullying. The young people identified health priorities including physical activity, substance use, sexual health and eating habits.

This illustrates that children, when they are asked, have many opinions on matters that affect them and have ability to participate with interest and provide valuable insight into their lives. The data followed a logical pattern with the identification of clear themes across the three questions they were asked. The information and opinions the young people shared in this workshop are valuable and provide health promotion professionals with youth health priorities. The findings may be useful in identifying priorities for the development of curricular resources and other materials related to child and adolescent health promotion.

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