

Short Report HBSC Ireland 2010
Sexual behaviour of 15-17 year olds in the Mid-west region and in care

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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 World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Office for Europe and runs on a four-year cycle. In 2010 Ireland participated for the fourth time in the HBSC study (www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc). The overall aims of the HBSC study are to gain new insight into, and increase our understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context. HBSC collects data on key indicators of health, health attitudes and health behaviours, as well as the context of health for young people. The study is a school-based survey with information collected from students through self-completion questionnaires in classrooms. HBSC Ireland 2010 was funded by the Department of Health. Further information on the HBSC Ireland can be found at www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc or www.hbsc.org, the International HBSC website.

The most recent HBSC Ireland study conducted in 2010 included 16,060 schoolchildren from 3rd class in primary school to 5th year in post-primary school. Collectively, 256 primary and post-primary schools across Ireland participated in this study. The methods employed comply with the International HBSC protocol and are detailed in the national report from the 2010 survey (see http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/documents/nat_rep_hbsc_2010.pdf).

Focus of this report:

This short report presents a brief analysis of sexual behaviour among Irish school-children aged 15-17 years across the Mid-west region of Ireland. This includes counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary. Overall twelve post-primary schools in the Mid-west region took part in this study. A final sample of 412 school-children aged 15-17 years from the Mid-west was analysed.

The HBSC Ireland questionnaire measures sexual activity with the following questions;

- ‘Have you ever had sexual intercourse? (*Sometimes called “making love”, “having sex” or “going all the way”*) with response options – yes; no.
- ‘How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?’ with response options – I never had sexual intercourse; 11 years old or less; 12 years old; 13 years old; 14 years old; 15 years old; 16 years old; 17 years old or older.

This short report also presents a brief analysis of sexual behaviour among school-children aged 15-17 years living in care in Ireland. A sample of 46 school-children living in care was analysed in this study. The HBSC Ireland questionnaire identifies children who live in care with the following question;

- ‘Please answer the question for the home where you spend most of the time and tick the people who live there’, with response options – mother; father; stepmother; stepfather; grandmother; grandfather; I live in a foster home or children’s home; someone or somewhere else.

Findings:

Mid-west region

Overall, 29.2% of 15-17 year olds in the Mid-west region reported they have ever had sexual intercourse. Of those who were sexually active, 41.3% reported having sexual intercourse for the first time before the age of 15 years. The majority of sexually active girls, at 32%, stated they first had sexual intercourse at the age of 16 years. Among sexually active boys the most common age of first intercourse was 15 years at 37.3%. Table 1 presents the percentages of school-children in the Mid-west aged 15-17 years that reported they ever had sexual intercourse, by gender. Table 2 presents the age of first intercourse of those 15-17 year olds from the Mid-west region who previously reported ever having sexual intercourse, by gender.

Table 1: Percentages of 15-17 year olds in the Mid-west region reporting they ever had sexual intercourse, by gender ($n=412$).

| | Boys | Girls | All |
|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Yes | 30.5 | 28.1 | 29.2 |
| No | 69.5 | 71.9 | 70.8 |

Table 2: Percentages of sexually active 15-17 year olds in the Mid-west region reporting their age at first sexual intercourse, by gender. ($n=112$).

| | Boys | Girls | All |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 11 years | 5.1 | 6.0 | 5.5 |
| 12 years | 6.8 | 2.0 | 4.6 |
| 13 years | 10.2 | 6.0 | 8.3 |
| 14 years | 18.6 | 28.0 | 22.9 |
| 15 years | 37.3 | 26.0 | 32.1 |
| 16 years | 16.9 | 32.0 | 23.9 |
| 17 years or older | 5.1 | - | 2.8 |

68.6% of boys and 71.3% of girls in the sample reported that they had never had sexual intercourse and are not included in this table.

Children in care

Overall, 59% of 15-17 year olds in care in Ireland reported they have ever had sexual intercourse. Of those who were sexually active, 46.8% reported having sexual intercourse for the first time before the age of 15 years. Among sexually active girls the most common age of first intercourse was 15 years at 32.1%. The majority of sexually active boys, at 37.3%, reported they first had sexual intercourse at the age of 15 years. Table 3 presents the percentages of school-children aged 15-17 years in care that reported they ever had sexual intercourse, by gender. Table 4 presents the age at first intercourse of those 15-17 year olds in care who previously reported ever having sexual intercourse, by gender.

Table 3: Percentages of 15-17 year olds in care reporting if they ever had sexual intercourse, by gender. ($n=46$).

| | Boys | Girls | All |
|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Yes | 65.0 | 52.6 | 59.0 |
| No | 35.0 | 47.4 | 41.0 |

Table 4: Percentages of sexually active 15-17 year olds in care reporting their age at first sexual intercourse by gender. (*n*=23).

| | Boys | Girls | All |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 11 years | 61.5 | 22.2 | 45.5 |
| 12 years | 7.7 | 11.1 | 9.1 |
| 13 years | - | 11.1 | 4.5 |
| 14 years | 7.7 | 11.1 | 9.1 |
| 15 years | 15.4 | 22.2 | 18.2 |
| 16 years | - | 22.2 | 9.1 |
| 17 years or older | 7.7 | - | 4.5 |

27.8% of boys and 50% of girls in the sample reported that they had never had sexual intercourse and are not included in this table.

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