

Social and Lifestyle Predictors of Age of Sexual Initiation Among Adolescents in Ireland



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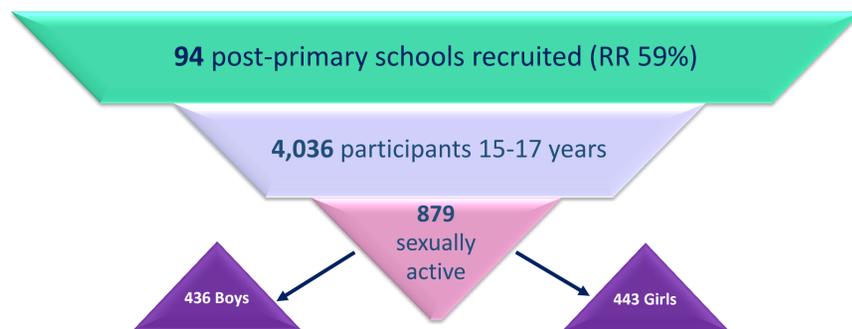


Background

Adolescence is an influential stage of life when young people are developing physically, emotionally and socially as well as sexually. The risk behaviours that adolescents engage in can impact present or future quality of life. Due to a number of developmental and behavioural factors adolescents who initiate early sexual intercourse may be at an increased risk of adverse sexual health outcomes at the time of first sexual intercourse and also later in life. Previous research has shown that 21.2% of Irish adolescents have had sex before the legal age of 17. Of the adolescents (15-18 years) who reported being sexually active, 22.8% of boys and 13.4% of girls reported sexual initiation before age 14 [1] however, little is known about the specific correlates of early sexual initiation.

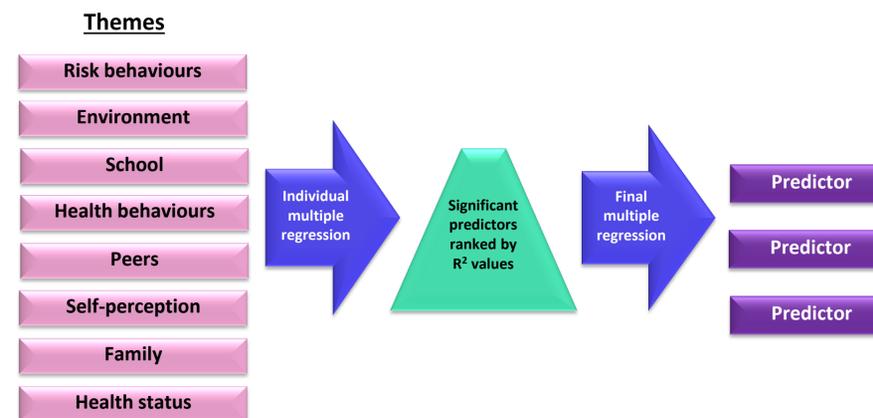
Methods

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a World Health Organization (WHO) cross-national research project that collects data from students every four years across 44 countries [2]. Participating children were asked to answer questions on socio-demographic factors, lifestyle factors, as well as health behaviours and outcomes. Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee NUI Galway, Ireland. Sexual behaviour items were asked only of students aged 15 years and older.



Individual socio-demographic and lifestyle measures were identified from the HBSC 2014 survey data relating to the eight themes.

Individual thematic factor analyses were used as a guide for the creation of scales in the multiple imputation (MI) data set. Reliability analysis was carried out on each scale with all scales resulting in acceptable Cronbach's alpha values of greater than 0.6.



MI was utilised and initial multiple linear regression analyses were carried out separately for each of the themes. Scales and variables that emerged as significant predictors of age of sexual initiation (ASI) were isolated and ranked based on their predictive power R^2 . These rankings formed the basis of a hierarchical multiple linear regression. Hierarchical multiple regressions were then conducted with ASI as the dependent variable. All regressions were carried out separately for boys and girls.

Results

The social and lifestyle factors measured were a stronger predictor of age of sexual initiation among girls than boys.

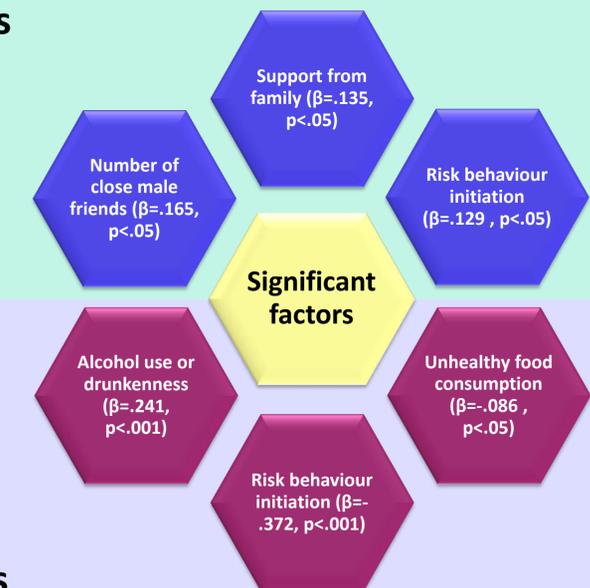
References

- [1] Young, H., Burke, L., & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2018). Sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraception among adolescents in Ireland: findings from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland study. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1), 362.
[2] Currie, C., Inchley, J., Molcho, M., Lenzi, M., Veselska, Z., & Wild, F. (2014). *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study Protocol: Background, Methodology and Mandatory items for the 2013/14 Survey*: Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit (CAHRU).

Step	Themes	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Adj.R ²	F
1	Social class	0.146	0.022	0.022	0.019	9.52**
2	Peers	0.255	0.065	0.044	0.059	10.05***
3	Family	0.288	0.083	0.018	0.074	9.74***
4	Risk behaviours	0.320	0.103	0.02	0.092	9.84***
5	School	0.325	0.106	0.003	0.093	8.46***
6	Life perception	0.328	0.107	0.002	0.093	7.35***
7	Environment	0.330	0.109	0.002	0.093	6.53***

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Boys



Girls

Step	Themes	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Adj.R ²	F
1	Social class	0.052	0.003	0.003	0.001	1.23
2	Risk behaviours	0.445	0.198	0.195	0.192	36.08***
3	School	0.456	0.208	0.010	0.200	28.69***
4	Health behaviours	0.469	0.219	0.012	0.211	24.61***
5	Health status	0.473	0.224	0.004	0.213	20.94***
6	Peers	0.477	0.227	0.004	0.213	15.97***
7	Family	0.477	0.228	0.000	0.211	14.17***
8	Environment	0.477	0.228	0.000	0.210	12.75***
9	Life perception	0.482	0.232	0.004	0.213	11.85***

* p<.05, **p<.01, p<.001

Conclusion

The study provides an insight into the wider social and lifestyle factors influencing Irish adolescent sexual initiation and will provide a foundation for the development of health promotion strategies and policies aimed at reducing sexual health outcomes such as Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) acquisition, teenage pregnancy as well as negative health, well-being, educational and economic outcomes.