

## **HBSC Ireland: age related patterns in alcohol consumption among Irish children**

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## **Short Report**

### **HBSC Ireland: age related patterns in alcohol consumption among Irish children**

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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](http://www.hbsc.org).

The most recent HBSC Ireland dataset comprises 10,344 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](http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc).

#### **Focus**

This short report presents a brief analysis of alcohol use among Irish schoolchildren by age and gender. This short report includes data taken from the following HBSC Ireland questions:

- ‘At present how often do you drink anything alcoholic, such as beer, wine, spirits, alcopops or cider?’ with response options for each - every day; every week; every month; rarely; never.
- ‘Have you ever had so much alcohol that you were really drunk?’ with response options – no, never

- ‘At what age did you first get drunk?’ with response options - never; 11 years old or less; 12 years old; 13 years old; 14 years old; 15 years old; 16 years or older.
- ‘At what age did you first drink alcohol (more than just a small amount)?’ with 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:

Table 1 presents an overview of the size of the sample when broken down by age and gender. Tables 2-5 present percentages by age and gender for alcohol consumption; ever, weekly, ever been drunk and been drunk twice or more often. The final two tables present retrospective data from those aged 16-18 years, by gender, on how old they were when they first had an alcoholic drink and they first got drunk, if ever.

Table 1: Sample sizes by age and gender

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys <i>n</i></b>	<b>Girls <i>n</i></b>	<b>All <i>n</i></b>
11 years old	226	377	<b>604</b>
12 years old	608	743	<b>1351</b>
13 years old	754	765	<b>1519</b>
14 years old	986	791	<b>1777</b>
15 years old	911	760	<b>1672</b>
16 years old	897	783	<b>1681</b>
17 years old	643	605	<b>1250</b>
18 years old	223	164	<b>387</b>

Table 2: Percentages reporting that have ever had an alcoholic drink, by age and gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
11 years old	20	9	<b>13</b>
12 years old	23	12	<b>17</b>
13 years old	37	26	<b>31</b>
14 years old	52	46	<b>49</b>
15 years old	67	61	<b>64</b>
16 years old	78	80	<b>75</b>
17 years old	85	82	<b>84</b>
18 years old	89	85	<b>87</b>

Table 3: Percentages reporting that they drink alcohol weekly, by age and gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
11yearsold	1	0	<b>0</b>
12yearsold	2	1	<b>2</b>
13 years old	3	1	<b>2</b>
14 years old	9	7	<b>8</b>
15 years old	14	14	<b>14</b>
16 years old	22	20	<b>21</b>
17 years old	37	31	<b>34</b>
18 years old	43	36	<b>40</b>

Table 4: Percentages reporting that they have ever been drunk by age and gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
11yearsold	5	2	<b>2</b>
12yearsold	7	3	<b>5</b>
13yearsold	12	7	<b>10</b>
14 years old	23	12	<b>23</b>
15 years old	40	38	<b>39</b>
16 years old	56	53	<b>55</b>
17 years old	72	69	<b>70</b>
18 years old	78	77	<b>78</b>

Table 5: Percentages reporting that they have been drunk twice or more often by age and gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
11yearsold	1	0	<b>0</b>
12yearsold	2	1	<b>2</b>
13yearsold	6	3	<b>4</b>
14 years old	14	13	<b>13</b>
15 years old	27	22	<b>27</b>
16 years old	41	37	<b>39</b>
17 years old	54	54	<b>54</b>
18 years old	60	58	<b>59</b>

Table 6: Percentages of 16-18 year olds reporting when they had their first alcoholic drink (more than a small amount) by gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
Never	18	18	<b>18</b>
11 years old or less	9	6	<b>8</b>
12yearsold	11	8	<b>9</b>
13 years old	14	15	<b>14</b>
14 years old	16	20	<b>18</b>
15 years old	20	21	<b>20</b>
16 years or older	13	12	<b>12</b>

Table 7: Percentages of 16-18 year olds reporting when first got drunk by gender.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>All %</b>
Never	31	35	<b>33</b>
11 years old or less	3	1	<b>2</b>
12yearsold	4	3	<b>3</b>
13yearsold	8	9	<b>9</b>
14 years old	15	13	<b>14</b>
15 years old	20	20	<b>20</b>
16 years or older	19	19	<b>19</b>

### **Key Findings**

- Although girls are initiated into drinking and drunkenness slightly later than boys, by the age of 14/15 the percentages who have ever drunk alcohol or have ever been drunk are roughly similar for boys and girls.
- Otherwise there are remarkably few substantial differences between boys and girls.
- While a relatively small proportion have drunk alcohol and report drinking weekly during primary school, the percentages increase substantially year on year during the junior cycle phase (ages 13-16).
- Weekly drinking and reported drunkenness continues to increase into the senior cycle phase (ages 16-18).

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