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STATISTICAL SPOTLIGHT

#16

# The Health and Wellbeing of Parents in Ireland

DATA +  
ANALYTICS



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Department of Children, Disability and Equality  
Block 1, Miesian Plaza, 50-58 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2  
D02 XW14  
Tel: +353 (0)1 647 3000  
Email: [dataandanalytics@dcde.gov.ie](mailto:dataandanalytics@dcde.gov.ie)  
Web: [www.gov.ie/dcde](http://www.gov.ie/dcde)

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## 1. Introduction

Becoming a parent is hugely rewarding but also something that requires significant lifestyle changes that can impact health in various ways. This Statistical Spotlight, drawing on data from Healthy Ireland<sup>1</sup>, focuses on the health behaviours and the health and wellbeing of parents compared to non-parents.

First 5, the whole-of-government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families<sup>2</sup>, includes a number of policy objectives specifically relating to parents, including:

- Access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring
- A new model of parenting support
- Reforms of the early learning and care (ELC) system
- A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty

Goal B of First 5 (Optimum physical and mental health) refers to parents directly and includes objectives and strategic actions to help reach these objectives. For example:

- **Objective 4:** *Parents, families and communities will be supported to engage in and promote positive health behaviours among babies and young children, starting from the pre-conception period.*
  - **Strategic Actions:** 4.1 Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.
- **Objective 6:** *Babies, young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.*

Additionally, under Step 2 of the First 5 strategy, a commitment was made for “a new model of parenting support”:

“First 5 will streamline and improve existing parenting supports provided across a range of Government Departments and State Agencies. Accessible, high-quality information and guidance will be made available for parents to promote healthy behaviours, facilitate positive play-based early learning and create the conditions to form and maintain strong parent-child relationships. A

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/healthy-ireland/surveys/>

<sup>2</sup> [First 5, a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, gov.ie](#)



continuum of parenting services – ranging from universal to targeted – including high-quality parenting programmes, will also be made available. A new Parenting Unit will be established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to lead this important work.”

Strategic Action 2.2 of First 5 includes actions to “develop a national model of parenting services... based on a thorough audit and review of existing provision, and informed by research on parenting support needs.” This action led to the development of “Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services”.<sup>3</sup> The Vision of this national model is for all parents to be confident and capable in their parenting roles, helping to achieve the best outcomes for children and families. The Goals of “Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services” include: (1) greater awareness of parenting support services; (2) greater access to parenting support services; (3) more inclusive parenting support services; and (4) needs-led and evidence-informed parenting support services.

In 2022, there were 1,528,553 parents in Ireland as per the Census of Population. Of these, 1,059,828 were aged between 31 and 54 years old, and 940,038 of these parents had at least one child under 18 years old. See *Table 1*.

**Table 1.** Number of parents in Ireland, by age of parents and age of children, 2022

		Total Parents	Total Parents with Children 17 and under	Total Parents with Children 18 and over
Both Sexes	All Ages	1,528,553	1,063,813	464,740
	31-54 years	1,059,828	940,038	119,790
Male	All Ages	686,150	483,953	202,197
	31-54 years	467,145	424,290	42,855
Female	All Ages	842,403	579,860	262,543
	31-54 years	592,683	515,748	76,935

Source: [Census of Population 2022](#)

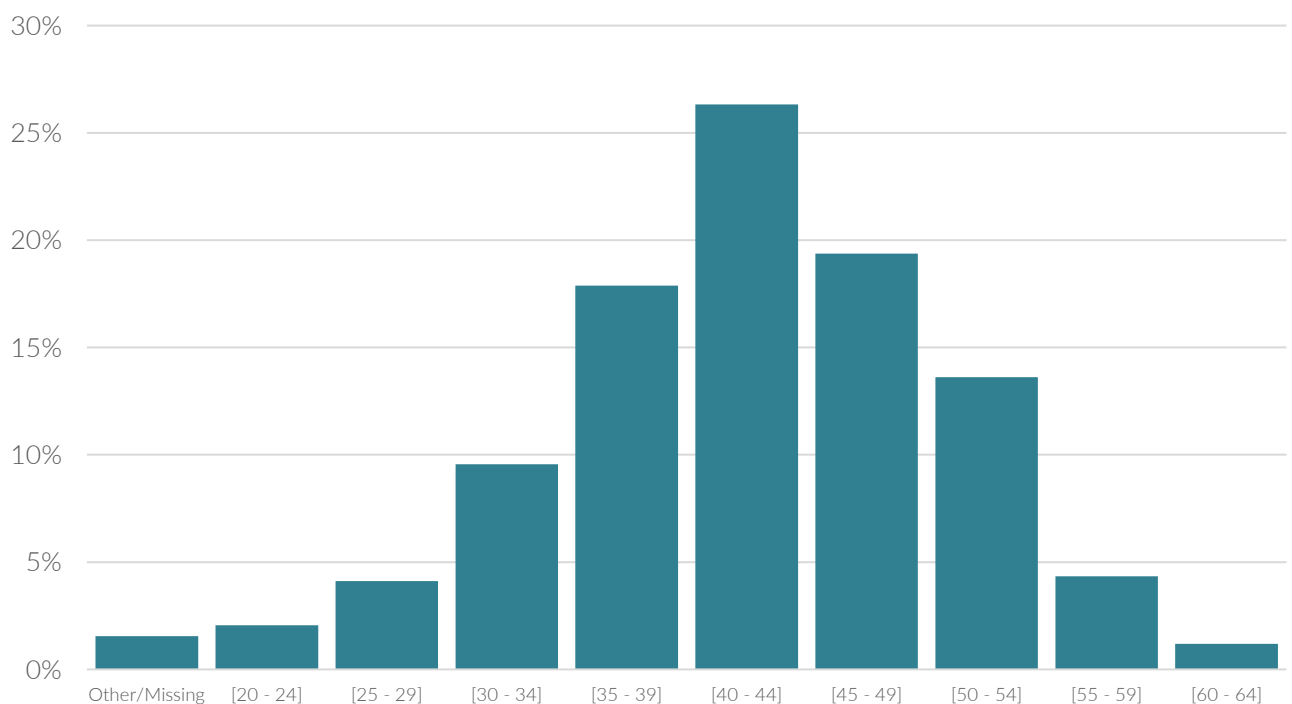
<sup>3</sup> [Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services](#)

This Statistical Spotlight presents data on parents<sup>4</sup> aged between 31 and 54 with at least one child under 18, as this is the age group containing most parents in the Healthy Ireland data. The analysis compares health and wellbeing behaviours of parents versus non-parents and examines the behaviours and outcomes of mothers versus fathers. Finally, tables and figures in this Spotlight also show behaviours and outcomes of parents based on the number of children they have.

This Spotlight draws on analysis from the 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 Healthy Ireland surveys<sup>5</sup>. All data that follow were sourced from these surveys.

The following chart (*Figure 1*) indicates the age distribution of parents in the population examined in the Healthy Ireland Survey 2024. As mentioned, parents are clustered around the ages of 31 to 54, and as such, tables and graphs included in the report only examine this subgroup of the population aged 31-54 years old.

**Figure 1.** Age distribution of parental cohort, by age group, 2024



<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this Statistical Spotlight, a parent is defined as a parent or guardian of a child or children under the age of 18. The following question was asked in the Healthy Ireland Survey to respondents to ascertain if they were parents or not: "Do you have any children aged under 18 for whom you are a parent or guardian?"

<sup>5</sup> Data distinguishing parents from non-parents were not available from the microdata from the 2020 Healthy Ireland survey as data on parental status were not collected in 2020 and hence these data are not included in the analysis.



## 2. Health Behaviours

### 2.1 Overview

In 2024, just under a fifth of the population aged 31 to 54 smoked tobacco products, and almost 8 out of 10 consumed alcohol in the past year. Just over 1 in 10 of the total population reported taking drugs in the past year. A higher percentage of non-parents than parents smoked, whereas the frequency of alcohol consumption was very similar across parents and non-parents. In terms of drug use, a higher proportion of non-parents used drugs in the past year compared to parents. See *Table 2*. More detail on these trends and information on previous years is provided throughout this section.

**Table 2.** Rates of smoking prevalence, alcohol consumption in the past year and drug use in the past year, by parental status, 2023/2024

	Total	Non-Parents	Parents
Smoking Prevalence (2024)	19.4%	24.0%	16.4%
Alcohol Consumption in past year (2024)	76.0%	75.8%	76.1%
Drug Use in past year (2023)	10.8%	15.4%	7.7%

Note: This table and all tables and figures that follow refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only. Drug use data was not available in 2024; therefore, 2023 data for drug use are presented here.

### 2.2 Smoking

Around a quarter of non-parents reported that they smoked<sup>6</sup> in the years examined, with a peak of 26% in 2021. Conversely, less than a fifth of parents were reported to smoke in each of the years. Looking at parents in more detail, fathers had higher rates of smoking than mothers. See *Table 3*.

The percentage of mothers that smoke has remained relatively consistent over time at around 15% with a peak of 16.8% in 2021. A similar but higher trend of approximately 20% can be seen in the percentage of fathers that smoke (with a peak of 23.3% in 2022). See *Table 3*.

<sup>6</sup> Persons were asked in the survey if they had smoked tobacco products in the past week or the past month, choosing from four responses: yes, daily; yes, occasionally; no; don't know. "Yes, daily" and "yes, occasionally" were used for "yes".



**Table 3.** Rates of smoking prevalence, by parental status and role, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	All Persons	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
2019	18.9%	22.6%	16.8%	15.0%	19.1%
2021	21.8%	26.0%	18.4%	16.8%	20.3%
2022	21.0%	23.3%	19.2%	15.6%	23.3%
2023	20.2%	24.7%	17.0%	14.5%	20.0%
2024	19.4%	24.0%	16.4%	14.0%	19.2%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

For all years, the percentage of parents that smoked who had one child was slightly higher than among their peers with two or more children. There was little difference in the percentages of those parents that smoke who had two children compared to those who had three or more children for most years. See *Table 4*.

**Table 4.** Rates of smoking prevalence in the past 12 months by parents, by number of children, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	Parent	One Child	Two Children	Three or more children
2019	16.8%	21.1%	14.8%	13.9%
2021	18.4%	23.5%	16.8%	15.8%
2022	19.2%	21.4%	18.3%	17.4%
2023	17.0%	19.1%	17.5%	13.2%
2024	16.4%	19.5%	15.2%	11.9%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

### 2.3 Alcohol Consumption

In 2024, slightly more non-parents (38.0%) than parents (37.4%) surveyed reported that they drink at least once a week. The percentage of parents who reported drinking at least once a week in 2024 has fallen by 5 and a half percentage points compared to 2021. See *Table 5*.



**Table 5.** Percentage of persons who reported drinking alcohol at least once per week, by parental status, 2021-2024

Year	All Persons	Non-Parent	Parent
2021	42.7%	42.4%	42.9%
2022	37.9%	39.8%	36.6%
2023	39.5%	38.9%	39.9%
2024	37.7%	38.0%	37.4%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

In 2024, slightly more parents (76.1%) than non-parents (75.8%) surveyed drank alcohol in the previous 12 months. A higher proportion of fathers (79.9%) drank alcohol in the previous 12 months than mothers (73.0%). See *Table 6*.

**Table 6.** Drinking frequency in the past 12 months, by parental status and role, 2024

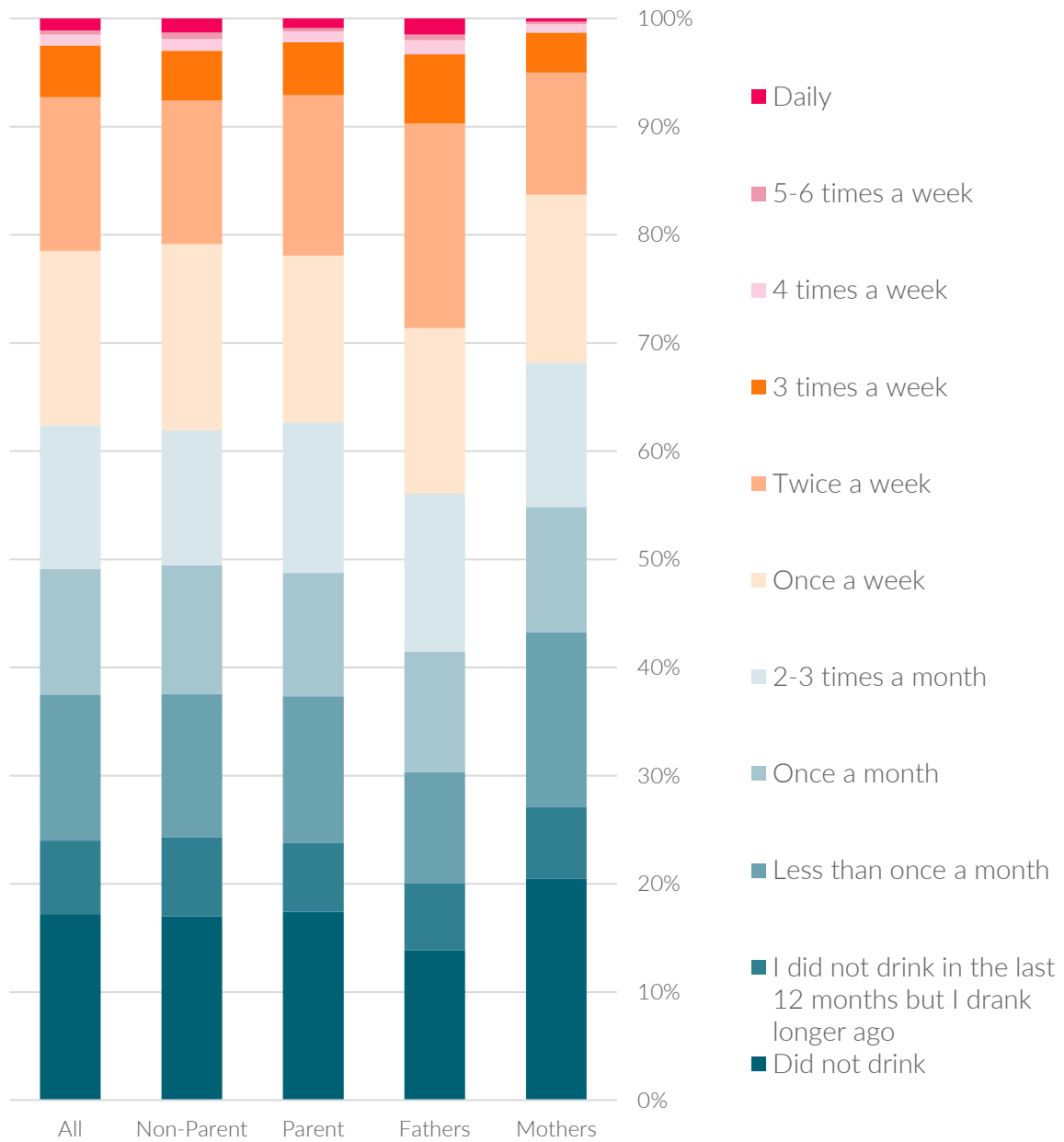
Drinking Frequency	All Persons	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
Drank alcohol in past 12 months	76.0%	75.8%	76.1%	73.0%	79.9%
Did not drink alcohol in the last 12 months but drank longer ago	6.8%	7.3%	6.4%	6.6%	6.2%
Did not drink alcohol	17.2%	17.0%	17.4%	20.5%	13.8%

Note: 'Did not drink alcohol' includes those who answered that they have never drank alcohol and those that answered that they have only had a few sips of alcohol in their lifetime. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

A higher proportion of fathers than mothers consumed alcohol in the past year, for all frequencies more frequent than once a week. A similar percentage of mothers and fathers drank once a week, at 15.6% and 15.3%, respectively. See *Figure 2*.



Figure 2. Frequency of alcohol consumption in the past 12 months, by parental status and role, 2024

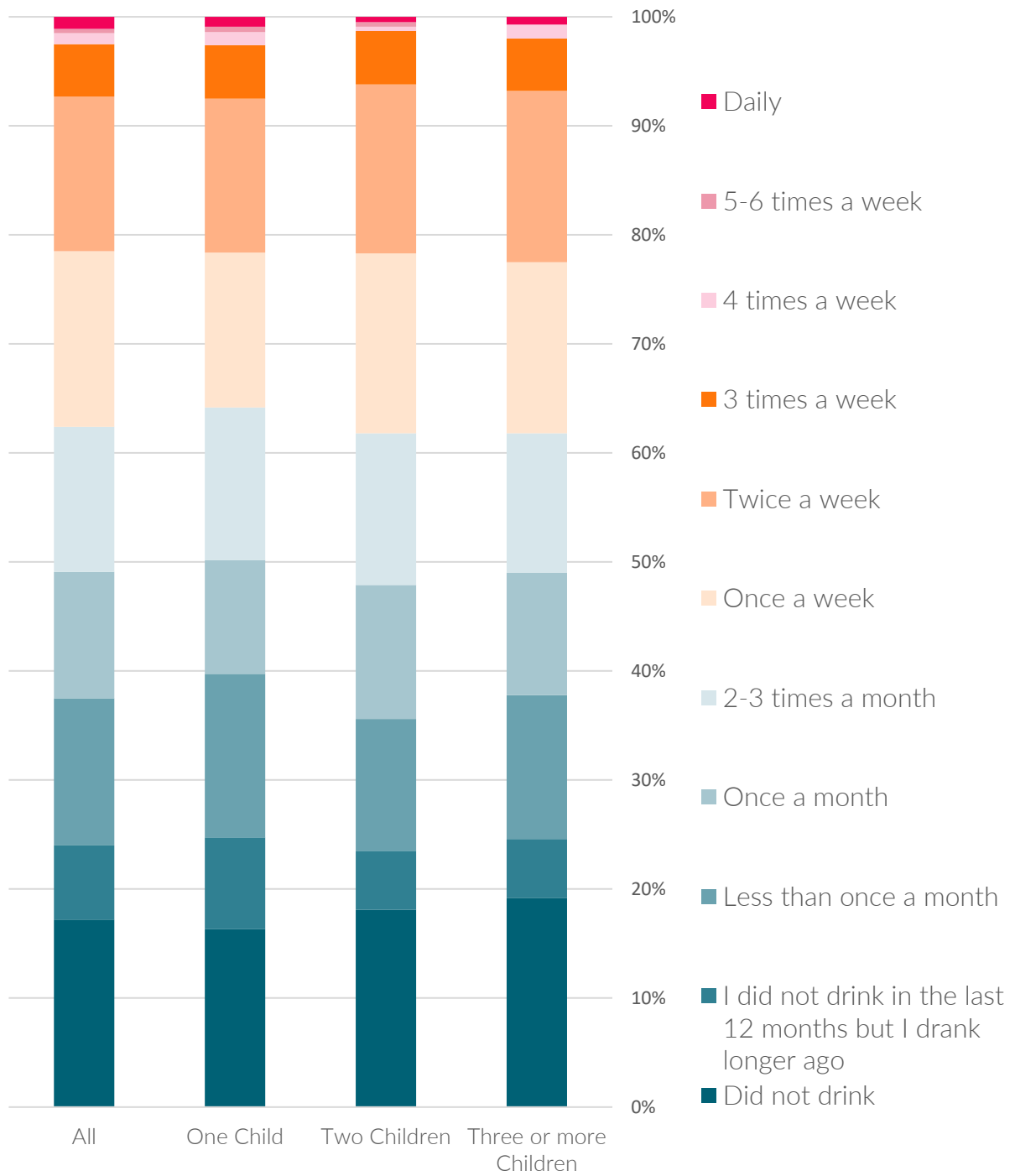


Note: 'Did not drink alcohol' includes those who answered that they have never drunk alcohol and those that answered that they have only had a few sips of alcohol in their lifetime. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

The percentage of parents that drank alcohol once per week remains largely the same, regardless of the number of children the parents have. Similarly, the percentage of parents who drink daily (1%) also remained largely the same regardless of the number of children parents have. See Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Frequency of parents' alcohol consumption in the past 12 months, by number of children, 2024



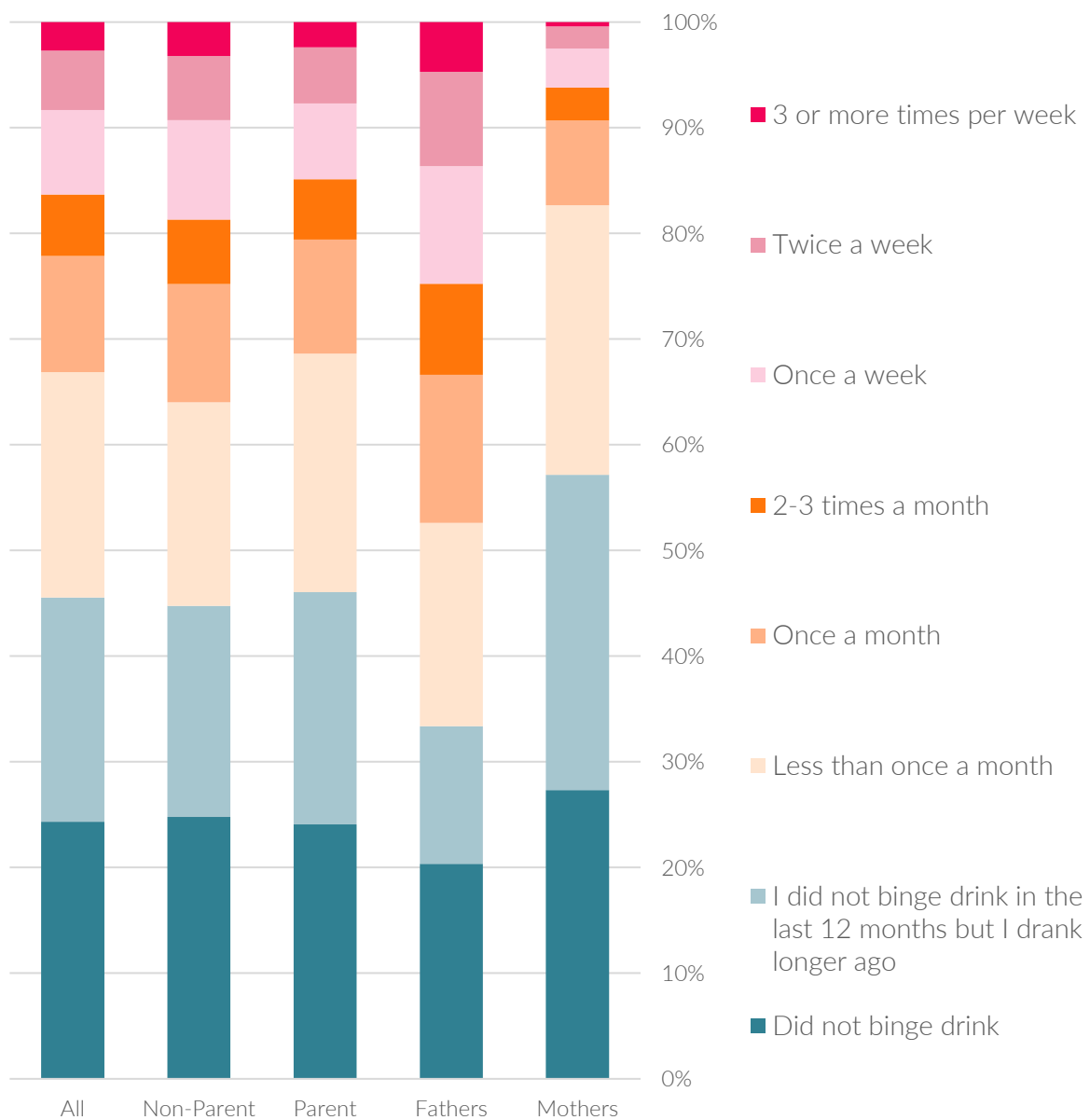
Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



## 2.4 Binge Drinking

In 2024, around a third of the population of Ireland partook in binge drinking<sup>7</sup> (in the past month). Non-parents (36.0%) had higher reported monthly binge drinking than parents (31.4%). See *Figure 4* and detailed figures in *Appendix 2*. Overall, in 2024, almost half of fathers partook in binge drinking monthly compared to less than a fifth of mothers (47.3% versus 17.3%).

**Figure 4.** How often persons binge drank, by parental status and role, 2024



Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

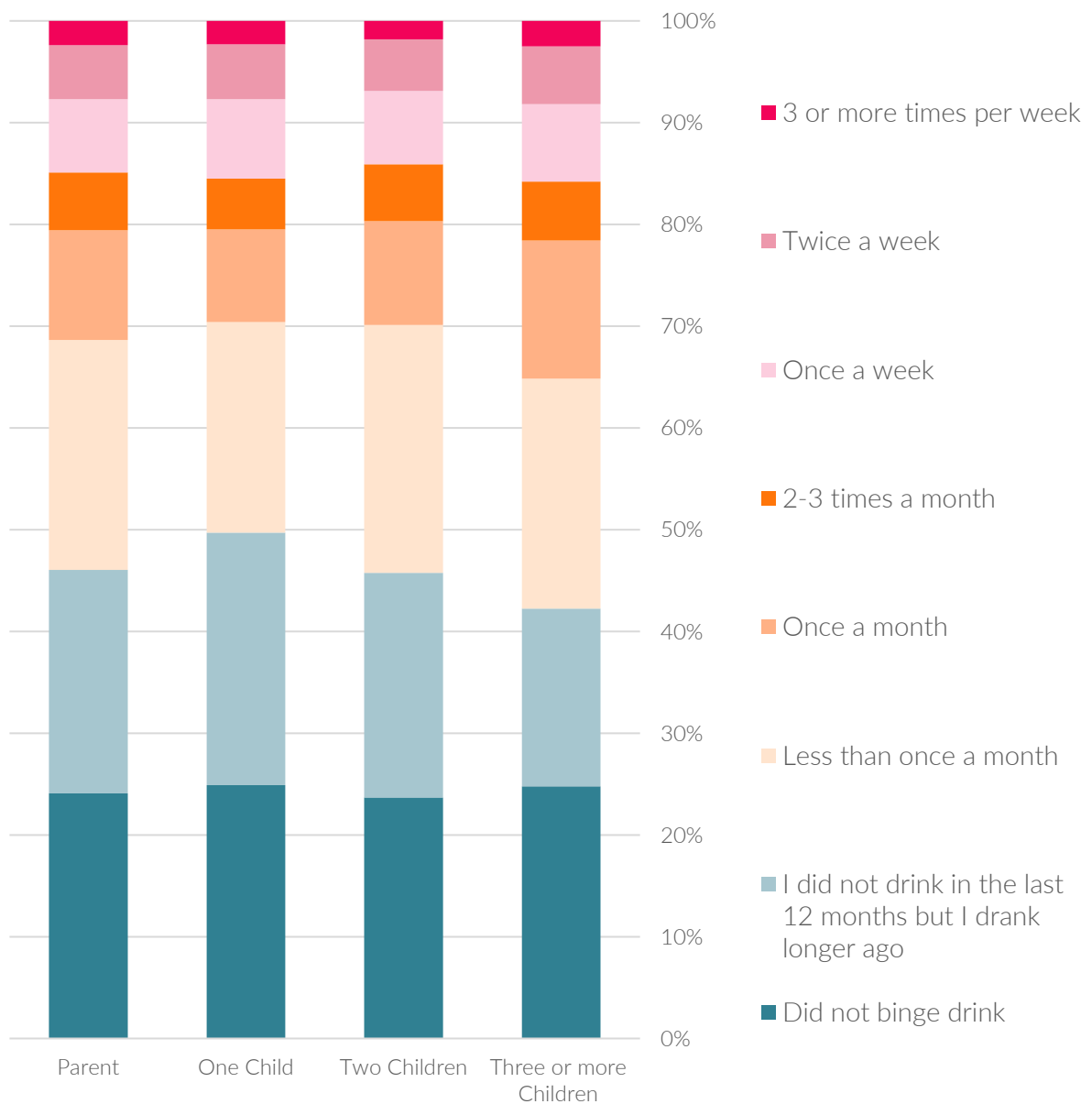
<sup>7</sup> Binge drinking is defined as consuming six or more standard drinks on one drinking occasion.



In 2024, a little under a third of parents partook in binge drinking once per month or more often. This figure remains around the same with parents of one or two children, however, is slightly higher (35.2%) in those parents who have three or more children.

A small percentage of parents partook in binge drinking three or more times per week (2.4%). See *Figure 5* and detailed figures in *Appendix 3*.

**Figure 5.** How often parents binge drank, by number of children, 2024



Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



## 2.5 Drug Use

Drug use was added as a module in 2023 to the Healthy Ireland Survey. As in all sections, data in the following section relate to persons aged 31 to 54 only, and in this case to the year 2023 only. The percentage of those who have taken drugs in the past year<sup>8</sup> is higher among non-parents at 15.4% than parents at 7.7%. Looking at more recent drug use, 8% of non-parents reported consuming drugs in the last 30 days, compared to 4.3% of parents. See *Table 7*.

**Table 7.** Time since persons last consumed drugs, by parental status and role, 2023

Time since drugs last consumed	All	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
In the last 30 days	5.8%	8.0%	4.3%	4.6%	3.9%
In the last year (and longer than 30 days)	5.0%	7.4%	3.4%	3.0%	4.0%
Longer ago	24.4%	23.6%	24.9%	22.5%	27.7%
Never	64.8%	61.0%	67.4%	69.9%	64.4%

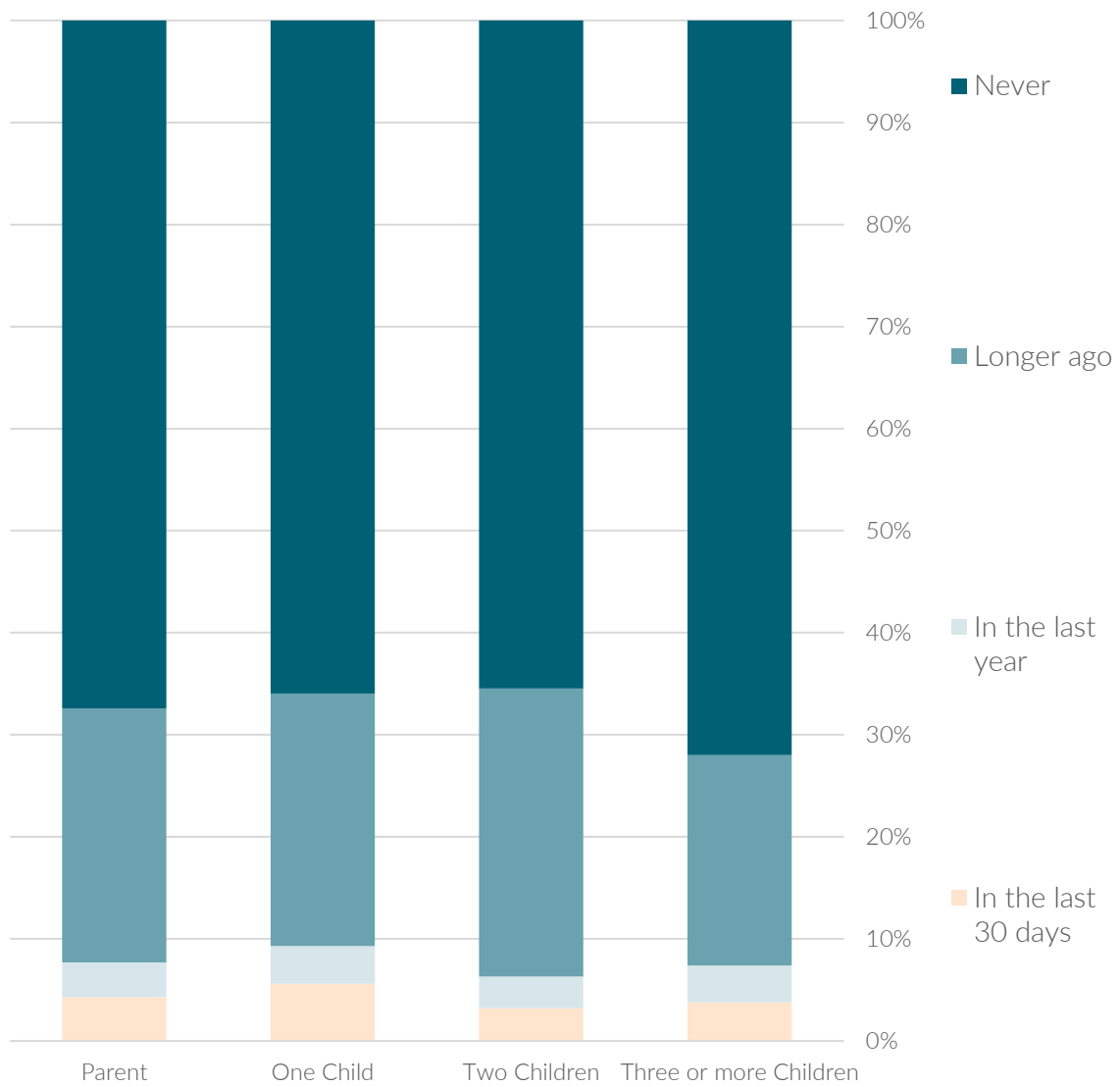
Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

Almost 6% of parents with one child reported that they consumed drugs in the past 30 days and a little over 9% of this cohort have consumed drugs in the last year. For those with two children the corresponding figure of drug use in the past year was lower at 6.3%. A total of 72% of parents with three children or more reported never having consumed drugs, several percentage points higher than those with one or two children. See *Figure 6*.

<sup>8</sup> Survey participants were asked if they have ever taken any of the following drugs: cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy or MDMA, amphetamines, LSD or ketamine.



Figure 6. Percentage of parents who last consumed drugs, by number of children, 2023



Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



### 3. Health Status and Limitations

This chapter focuses on the overall health and wellbeing of parents in Ireland, highlighting survey results from several questions asked in the Healthy Ireland Survey. Topics covered in this chapter include self-reported health, long-term illnesses and limitations on everyday life in the past 12 months.

#### 3.1 Overview

The headline statistics for this chapter are outlined in *Table 8* below. A higher proportion of parents reported their health as being good/very good than non-parents (85.0% and 80.8%, respectively). Parents also reported lower incidence of long-term illness (30.3% versus 36.9%).

**Table 8.** Health of parents and non-parents, 2024

Health and Wellbeing	All persons	Non-Parents	Parents
Self-reported health (Good/Very Good)	83.4%	80.8%	85.0%
Long-term illness	32.9%	36.9%	30.3%
No limitation in everyday activities <sup>9</sup>	78.3%	73.9%	81.2%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

#### 3.2 Self-reported Health

Participants in the Healthy Ireland Survey were asked to categorise their health status in the past 12 months from the following categories:

- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Bad
- Very Bad

In 2024, 85% of parents reported their health as good or very good<sup>10</sup>, compared to 80.8% of non-parents. See *Table 9*.

<sup>9</sup> Persons aren't limited at all in their daily activities.

<sup>10</sup> The "good" and "very good" categories were combined, as were "bad" and "very bad", for this analysis.



Mothers and fathers both reported their health as good or very good at similar levels in 2024 (84.8% and 85.3%, respectively). The percentage of mothers reporting their health as good or very good has varied somewhat in the years examined with the lowest level reported in 2024. Similarly, the percentage of fathers reporting their health as good or very good was highest in 2019 (92.8%) and has seen a small decrease in the years that followed, with the lowest percentage reported in 2024. The percentage of non-parents reporting their health as good or very good was consistently lower than the percentage of parents reporting their health as good or very good for all survey years. See *Table 9*.

**Table 9.** Percentage of persons who report their health as good or very good, by parental status and role, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	All	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
2019	88.9%	85.4%	90.9%	89.4%	92.8%
2021	87.3%	85.6%	88.7%	89.4%	87.8%
2022	85.5%	83.3%	87.1%	86.9%	87.5%
2023	83.6%	77.6%	87.9%	87.7%	88.1%
2024	83.4%	80.8%	85.0%	84.8%	85.3%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

The percentages of parents who reported their health as good or very good in 2024 was similar for all parents regardless of the number of children they have. Overall, in the years examined, those with two or more children tended to report slightly higher levels of being in good or very good health than those with one child. See *Table 10*.

**Table 10.** Percentage of parents who report their health as good or very good, by number of children, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	Parent	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
2019	90.9%	88.4%	92.2%	92.0%
2021	88.7%	84.9%	90.6%	91.0%
2022	87.1%	85.9%	89.4%	85.2%
2023	87.9%	83.1%	89.3%	92.2%
2024	85.0%	85.1%	86.4%	86.3%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



### 3.3 Long-term Illness

In 2024, a higher percentage of non-parents than parents reported living with a long-term illness. Since 2021, both parents and non-parents have seen an increase in those living with a long-term illness. The largest increase was for non-parents, with more than an 11-percentage point increase in 2024 compared to 2021. Of parents, the largest increase in those living with a long-term illness can be seen in mothers, with an increase of nearly 12 percentage points between 2021 and 2024.

For all years examined, slightly more mothers reported living with a long-term illness than fathers. In 2024, a third of mothers surveyed reported living with a long-term illness, whilst just over one quarter of fathers reported the same. Over a third of non-parents reported living with a long-term illness in the same period. See *Table 11*.

**Table 11.** Percentage of persons who report living with a long-term illness, by parental status and role, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	All	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
2019	25.2%	31.6%	21.5%	22.8%	19.9%
2021	22.2%	25.5%	19.6%	21.6%	17.1%
2022	26.0%	30.1%	23.0%	23.4%	22.5%
2023	28.9%	35.4%	24.3%	25.7%	22.6%
2024	32.9%	36.9%	30.3%	33.3%	26.9%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

The percentage of parents living with a long-term illness varied based on number of children parents had, with a higher percentage of parents with one child reporting living with a long-term illness compared to those with two children or three or more children.

**Table 12.** Percentage of parents who report living with a long-term illness, by number of children, 2019, 2021-2024

Year	Parent	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
2019	21.5%	23.6%	18.6%	23.7%
2021	19.6%	23.3%	18.0%	16.5%
2022	23.0%	22.9%	23.3%	20.8%
2023	24.3%	25.8%	24.0%	22.4%
2024	30.3%	34.0%	28.2%	28.4%

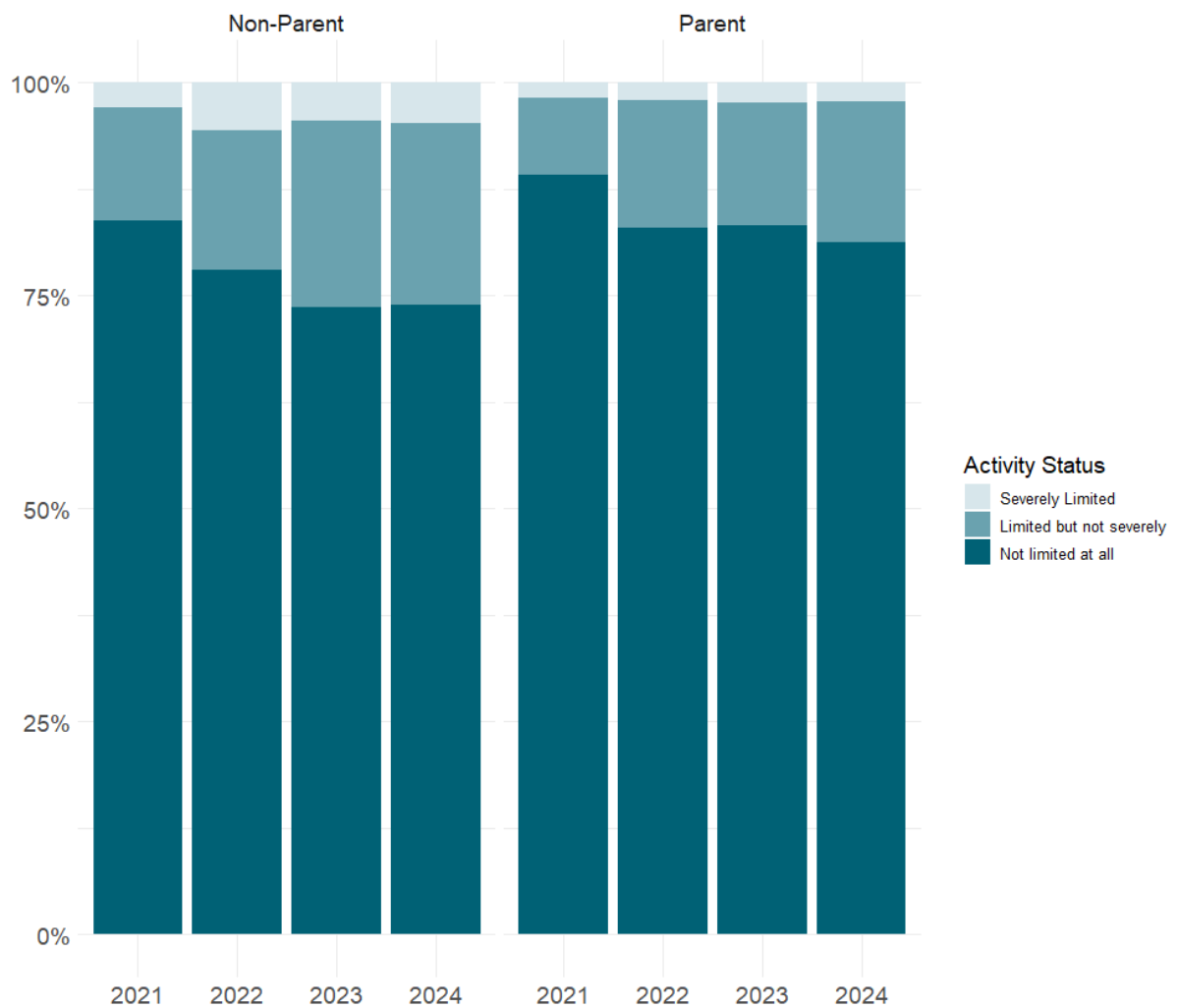
Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



### 3.4 Limitation in Everyday Activities

In 2024, 18.8% of parents and 26.1% of non-parents reported that they are limited in some way<sup>11</sup> in their daily activities. The percentage of parents limited in some way rose year on year since 2021. See *Figure 7* and detailed figures in *Appendix 5*.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of persons limited by everyday activities, by parental status, 2021-2024



Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

<sup>11</sup> Persons answered either 'severely limited' or 'limited but not severely' in relation to whether they are limited in everyday activities because of health problems.



When looking at the breakdown between mothers and fathers in 2024, fathers reported at a higher rate that they were not limited at all in their daily activities.

The number of non-parents who were severely limited in their daily activities was lowest in 2021 and has seen a rise in subsequent years. See *Table 13*.

**Table 13.** Percentage of persons limited in everyday activities, by parental status and role, 2021-2024

Year	Limited Activity	All	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
2021	Not Limited at all	89.1%	83.8%	89.1%	88.1%	90.3%
2021	Limited but not Severely	9.1%	13.3%	9.1%	10.4%	7.6%
2021	Severely Limited	1.8%	2.9%	1.8%	1.5%	2.1%
2022	Not Limited at all	82.9%	78.0%	82.9%	83.2%	82.7%
2022	Limited but not Severely	14.9%	16.4%	14.9%	15.1%	14.8%
2022	Severely Limited	2.1%	5.6%	2.1%	1.7%	2.5%
2023	Not Limited at all	83.2%	73.6%	83.2%	83.0%	83.4%
2023	Limited but not Severely	14.5%	21.9%	14.5%	14.2%	14.8%
2023	Severely Limited	2.4%	4.5%	2.4%	2.9%	1.8%
2024	Not Limited at all	81.2%	73.9%	81.2%	78.3%	84.6%
2024	Limited but not Severely	16.5%	21.4%	16.5%	19.7%	12.8%
2024	Severely Limited	2.3%	4.7%	2.3%	2.0%	2.6%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

The percentage of parents not limited at all in their daily activities was highest amongst all groups surveyed in 2021 and has seen a decline since.

**Table 14.** Percentage of parents limited in everyday activities, by number of children, 2021-2024

Year	Limited Activity	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
2021	Not limited at all	89.1%	88.3%	88.8%	91.6%
2021	Limited but not severely	9.1%	10.4%	9.4%	7.0%
2021	Severely Limited	1.8%	1.3%	1.9%	1.4%
2022	Not limited at all	82.9%	81.9%	83.9%	83.9%
2022	Limited but not severely	14.9%	16.9%	13.5%	13.6%
2022	Severely Limited	2.1%	1.1%	2.6%	2.5%
2023	Not limited at all	83.2%	82.9%	81.7%	85.7%
2023	Limited but not severely	14.5%	14.0%	15.9%	13.0%
2023	Severely Limited	2.4%	3.1%	2.4%	1.2%
2024	Not limited at all	81.2%	78.3%	83.6%	82.9%
2024	Limited but not severely	16.5%	19.1%	15.3%	14.7%
2024	Severely Limited	2.3%	2.5%	1.1%	2.4%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

## 4. Wellbeing and Social Connection

### 4.1 Overview

Parents reported higher wellbeing levels than non-parents (87.6% versus 83.6%), more social group/club participation (43% versus 38%) and less loneliness (10.2% versus 16.9%).

**Table 15.** Wellbeing of parents and non-parents, 2023/2024

Health and Wellbeing	All persons	Non-Parents	Parents
Wellbeing (Good/Very Good) (2024)	86.0%	83.6%	87.6%
Social group/club participation (2023) <sup>12</sup>	41%	38%	43%
Loneliness (lonely in past 4 weeks) <sup>13</sup> (2023)	13.0%	16.9%	10.2%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

<sup>12</sup> Social group/club participation and loneliness rows refer to 2023, not 2024, as the module wasn't repeated in 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Persons responded 'Some of the time' or 'Often/Always' to if they felt lonely in the past 4 weeks.



## 4.2 Wellbeing

In both 2021 and 2023, a higher proportion of parents considered their wellbeing good or very good (79.8% and 89.9%, for 2021 and 2023, respectively) compared to non-parents (70.6% and 81.4%). Both parents and non-parents reported significant increases in self-reported wellbeing between 2021 and 2023, with small changes from 2023 to 2024 for each subgroup. See *Table 16*.

Over 90% (90.3%) of mothers reported their wellbeing as good or very good in 2023, an increase compared to 2021 when 79.3% of mothers reported good or very good wellbeing. Similarly, fathers exhibited an increase over the period from 80.3% in 2021 to 89.5% in 2023, reporting good or very good wellbeing. See *Table 16*.

**Table 16.** Percentage of persons who report good or very good wellbeing, by parental status and role, 2021, 2023-2024

Year	All Persons	Non-Parents	Parents	Mothers	Fathers
2021	75.7%	70.6%	79.8%	79.3%	80.3%
2023	86.4%	81.4%	89.9%	90.3%	89.5%
2024	86.0%	83.6%	87.6%	88.7%	86.3%

Note: Question not asked in 2019 or 2022. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

There was little difference in reported wellbeing by number of children. See *Table 17*.

**Table 17.** Percentage of parents who report good or very good wellbeing, by number of children, 2021, 2023-2024

Year	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
2021	79.8%	79.5%	79.3%	81.3%
2023	89.9%	88.8%	91.1%	89.7%
2024	87.6%	87.5%	89.6%	87.2%

Note: Data not available for 2019 and 2022. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



### 4.3 Social Connectedness

The Healthy Ireland Survey also includes measures of social connectedness including persons' participation in social groups or clubs, as well as frequency of persons experiencing loneliness in the four weeks prior to the survey date. Data for these measures were only available for 2021 and 2023.

Social connectedness has shifted significantly from 2021 to 2023. This is in line with other jurisdictions and taking into account the COVID-19 easing of restrictions on persons movements.<sup>14</sup>

In 2021, approximately the same percentage of parents and non-parents participated in social groups and clubs. This had changed by 2023 when more parents (42.5%) than non-parents (37.7%) participated in social groups and clubs. The percentage of parents participating in social groups and clubs more than doubled from 2021 to 2023. When looking at the difference in participation rates between mothers and fathers, more fathers participated in groups and clubs for both years than mothers.

**Table 18.** Percentage of persons who reported participation in social groups and clubs, by parental status and role, 2021 and 2023

Year	All Persons	Non-Parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
2021	19.3%	19.5%	19.1%	16.9%	21.7%
2023	40.5%	37.7%	42.5%	37.3%	48.5%

Note: Question not asked in 2019, 2022 or 2024. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

In both 2021 and 2023, the highest level of social group and club participation was for parents with three or more children (23.2% and 49.8%, respectively), with the lowest participation rate seen in parents with just one child (15.7% and 38.1%).

<sup>14</sup> There was a marked shift in social connectedness from 2021 (which included many COVID-19 restrictions to social groups and gatherings) and 2023, when all COVID-19 restrictions would not have been in place.



**Table 19.** Percentage of parents who reported participation in social groups and clubs, by number of children, 2021 and 2023

Year	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
2021	19.1%	15.7%	19.6%	23.2%
2023	42.5%	38.1%	41.8%	49.8%

Note: Data not available for 2019 and 2022. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

In 2021, nearly 60% of all persons experienced loneliness to some degree in the previous four weeks. Of these, nearly 5% reported feeling lonely often/always. Parents were less likely than non-parents to feel lonely, and fathers less likely than mothers. See *Table 20*. By 2023, the overall percentages of those feeling lonely in the past four weeks had decreased but the pattern of non-parents feeling lonelier than parents, and mothers lonelier than fathers remained.

The majority of parents never felt loneliness in the four weeks prior to the survey in 2023. See *Table 21*. When comparing this with the same period in 2021, less than half of parents reported never feeling loneliness in the four weeks prior to the survey, regardless of number of children.

**Table 20.** Percentage of persons who reported frequency of feeling lonely in past four weeks, by parental status and role, 2021

Frequency	All Persons	Non-parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
Never	40.1%	37.4%	42.3%	37.7%	47.7%
Hardly Ever	22.1%	20.8%	23.2%	21.1%	25.6%
Occasionally	19.8%	21.0%	18.9%	23.3%	13.7%
Some of the time	13.2%	15.6%	11.3%	12.1%	10.3%
Often/Always	4.7%	5.2%	4.4%	5.8%	2.7%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

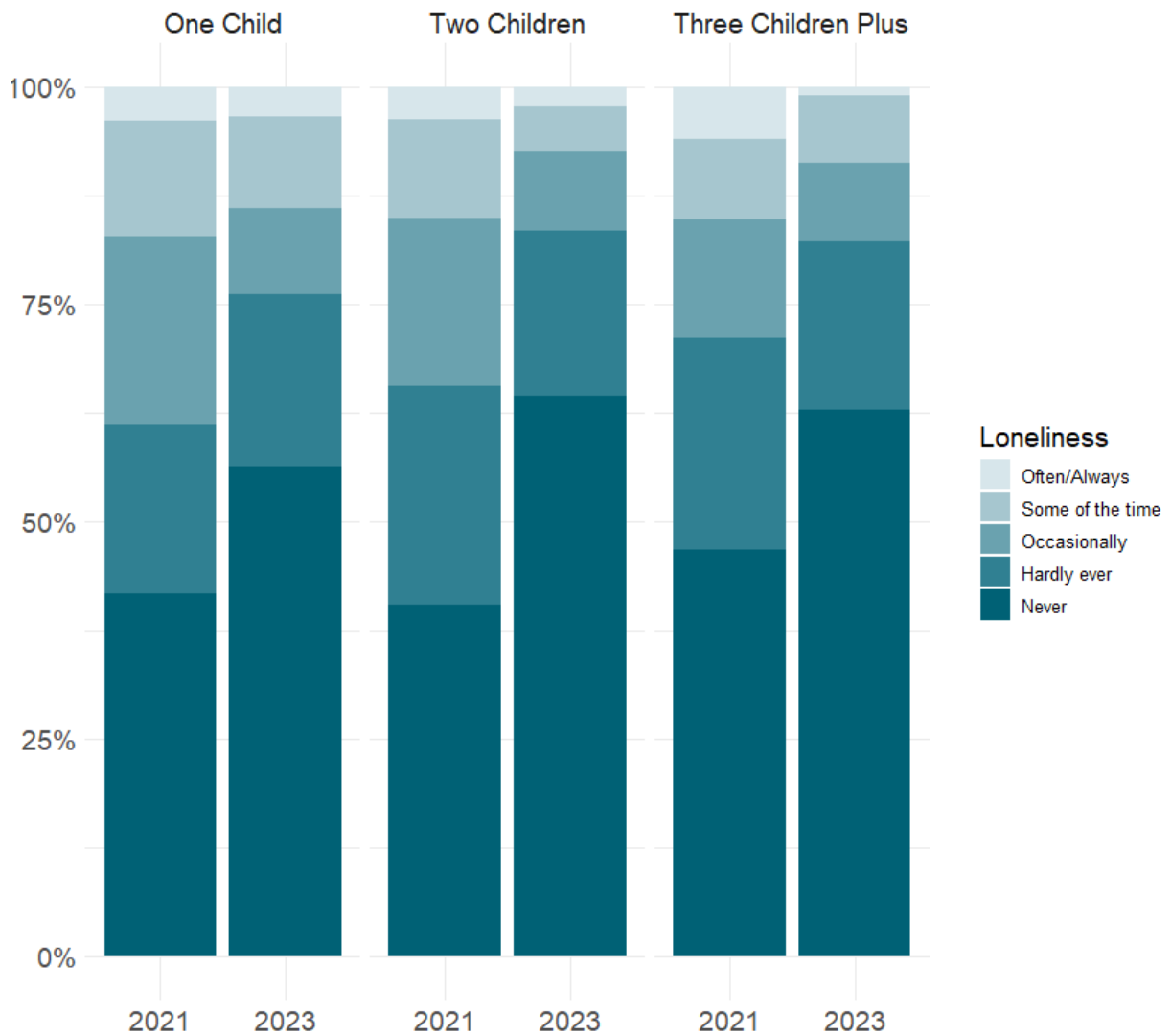
**Table 21.** Percentage of persons who reported frequency of feeling lonely in past four weeks, by parental status and role, 2023

Frequency	All Persons	Non-parent	Parent	Mothers	Fathers
Never	57.7%	52.8%	61.1%	56.6%	66.3%
Hardly Ever	19.0%	18.3%	19.4%	21.5%	16.9%
Occasionally	10.4%	12.0%	9.3%	10.5%	7.8%
Some of the time	9.2%	11.2%	7.8%	8.9%	6.5%
Often/Always	3.8%	5.7%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%

Note: Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



**Figure 8.** Proportion of parents who reported frequency of feeling lonely in past four weeks, by number of children, 2021 and 2023



Note: Data not available for 2019 and 2022. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.

In terms of loneliness felt by parents based on the number of children they have, just under 4% of parents with one child reported often feeling lonely in the four weeks prior to the 2023 survey, with just 1% of parents with three or more children reporting the same in the same period. See *Appendix 6*.



## 5. Conclusion

This Statistical Spotlight collates data from the Healthy Ireland Surveys from 2019 and 2021-2024, with a lens on the health and wellbeing of parents versus non-parents.

Parents are reporting encouraging trends in some health outcomes/behaviours relevant to the strategic action on promoting positive health behaviours among young children and their families in First 5. Parents are smoking less year-on-year since 2022 (19.2% in 2022 versus 16.4% in 2024). This was substantially lower than the percentage of non-parents who smoked (24.0%). Fewer parents reported drinking at least once per week (39.9% in 2023 versus 37.4% in 2024). In 2024, 23.8% parents did not drink in the previous year. This is slightly less than the percentage of non-parents who did not drink in the same period (24.3%). In both 2021 and 2023, a higher proportion of parents considered their wellbeing good or very good (79.8% and 89.9% for 2021 and 2023, respectively) compared to non-parents (70.6% and 81.4%).

There are also areas for improvement. Self-reported good/very good health decreased for both parents and non-parents between 2019 and 2024. Parents self-reporting that their health was good/very good fell near 6 percentage points since 2019 (90.9% to 85.0% in 2024). This is higher than the decrease for non-parents (85.4% to 80.8%). In 2024, the percentage of parents who reported not being limited at all in their daily activities has fallen by almost 8 percentage points since 2021 (89.1% to 81.2%) and has also fallen for non-parents over the same time period (83.8% to 73.9%).

In terms of loneliness, the majority of parents in the four weeks prior to being surveyed did not report loneliness (61.1%), compared to a slightly lower majority among non-parents (53%).



Looking at the difference between mothers' and fathers' health behaviours, more fathers than mothers smoked, with a difference of 5.2 percentage points in 2024 between fathers (19.2%) and mothers (14%). More fathers also drank alcohol in the past 12 months, with a difference of 6.9 percentage points in 2024 between fathers (79.9%) and mothers (73.0%). A higher proportion of fathers also binge drank more frequently than mothers. In 2023, a slightly higher proportion of mothers (4.6%) than fathers (3.9%) took drugs in the past 30 days, whereas a slightly higher percentage of fathers (7.9%) than mothers took drugs in the past year (7.6%). Mothers and fathers were as likely as each other to report their health as good or very good, with very little difference between the two (84.8% and 85.3%, respectively, in 2024).

## Background Notes

This is the 16th publication in the Statistical Spotlight series. A Statistical Spotlight is a short publication focused on a specific topic, gathering together available statistical data and highlighting trends or patterns in the data. These are intended to be short, statistics-based publications bringing together available information for interested users. The publications include some commentary detailing (where relevant) trends and comparisons as appropriate (e.g., comparisons between gender, region, age group, etc.).

The primary purpose is to gather together the most relevant data, highlight those most recent, and draw attention to the most evident features or trends. Therefore, although it could serve as the basis for further research, none of the information contained therein should in and of itself be used to ascribe cause and effect between any two variables.

The Healthy Ireland (HI) Survey was initiated in 2015 and forms a core element of the Healthy Ireland Framework and subsequent Healthy Ireland Strategic Plan, providing annual measurements of various issues relating to population health. The Healthy Ireland Survey 2024 Summary Report is the tenth annual publication, providing a



valuable data series to explore changes in health behaviours over time, particularly comparing health behaviours in 2024 to those prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

HI is an interviewer-administered survey of health and health behaviours of people living in Ireland, commissioned by the Department of Health and carried out by Ipsos B&A.

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John Mullane  
Sarah McCabe  
Lucy Bruton  
Isabel Baker  
Nicola Tickner

Data and Analytics Unit | March 2026



For queries, please contact  
the Data and Analytics team  
at  
[dataandanalytics@dcde.gov.ie](mailto:dataandanalytics@dcde.gov.ie)



## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Frequency of parents' alcohol consumption in the past 12 months, by number of children, 2024

Alcohol Consumption in the Past Year	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
Daily	0.9%	0.9%	0.5%	0.7%
5-6 times per week	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%
4 times per week	1.0%	1.2%	0.4%	1.3%
3 times per week	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.8%
Twice a week	14.8%	14.1%	15.5%	15.7%
Once a week	15.4%	14.2%	16.5%	15.7%
2-3 times per month	13.9%	14.0%	13.9%	12.8%
Once a month	11.4%	10.4%	12.3%	11.2%
Less than once a month	13.5%	15.0%	12.1%	13.2%
I did not drink in the last 12 months, but I drank longer ago	6.4%	8.4%	5.4%	5.4%
Did not drink alcohol	17.4%	16.3%	18.1%	19.2%

Note: 'Did not drink alcohol' includes those who answered that they have never drank alcohol and those that answered they have only had a few sips of alcohol in their lifetime.

### Appendix 2. How often persons binge drank, by parental status and role, 2024

Binge drank in the past year	All	Non-Parent	Parent	Fathers	Mothers
3 or more times per week	2.7%	3.2%	2.4%	4.7%	0.4%
Twice a week	5.6%	6.1%	5.3%	8.9%	2.1%
Once a week	8.0%	9.4%	7.2%	11.1%	3.7%
2-3 times a month	5.8%	6.1%	5.7%	8.6%	3.1%
Once a month	11.0%	11.2%	10.8%	14.0%	8.0%
Less than once a month	21.3%	19.3%	22.6%	19.2%	25.5%
I did not binge drink in the last 12 months, but I drank longer ago	21.2%	20.0%	22.0%	13.0%	29.8%
Did not drink alcohol	24.3%	24.8%	24.1%	20.3%	27.3%

Note: 'Did not drink alcohol' includes those who answered that they have never drank alcohol and those that answered they have only had a few sips of alcohol in their lifetime.



**Appendix 3. How often parents binge drank, by number of children, 2024**

Binge Drank in the Past Year	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
3 or more times per week	2.4%	2.3%	1.8%	2.5%
Twice a week	5.3%	5.4%	5.1%	5.7%
Once a week	7.2%	7.8%	7.2%	7.6%
2-3 times a month	5.7%	5.0%	5.6%	5.8%
Once a month	10.8%	9.1%	10.2%	13.6%
Less than once a month	22.6%	20.7%	24.4%	22.6%
I did not binge drink in the last 12 months, but I drank longer ago	22.0%	24.8%	22.1%	17.5%
Did not drink alcohol	24.1%	24.9%	23.7%	24.8%

Note: 'Did not drink alcohol' includes those who answered that they have never drank alcohol and those that answered they have only had a few sips of alcohol in their lifetime.

**Appendix 4. Percentage of parents who last consumed drugs, by number of children, 2023**

Time since drugs last consumed	All Parents	One Child	Two Children	Three or more Children
In the last 30 days	4.3%	5.6%	3.2%	3.8%
In the last year (and longer than 30 days)	3.4%	3.7%	3.1%	3.6%
Longer ago	24.9%	24.7%	28.2%	20.6%
Never	67.4%	65.9%	65.4%	72.0%

**Appendix 5. Percentage of persons limited by everyday activities, by parental status, 2021-2024**

Limited in everyday activities	Year	Non-Parent	Parent
Not limited at all	2021	83.8%	89.1%
Not limited at all	2022	78.0%	82.9%
Not limited at all	2023	73.6%	83.2%
Not limited at all	2024	73.9%	81.2%
Limited but not severely	2021	13.3%	9.1%
Limited but not severely	2022	16.4%	14.9%
Limited but not severely	2023	21.9%	14.5%
Limited but not severely	2024	21.4%	16.5%
Severely Limited	2021	2.9%	1.8%
Severely Limited	2022	5.6%	2.1%
Severely Limited	2023	4.5%	2.4%
Severely Limited	2024	4.7%	2.3%

Note: Data not available for 2019.



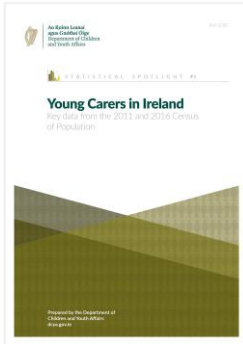
**Appendix 6.** Proportion of parents who reported frequency of feeling lonely in past four weeks, by number of children, 2021 and 2023

Lonely in past 4 weeks	Number of Children	2021	2023
Never	One Child	41.7%	56.2%
Never	Two Children	40.4%	64.3%
Never	Three or more Children	46.7%	62.8%
Hardly ever	One Child	19.4%	19.9%
Hardly ever	Two Children	25.2%	19.1%
Hardly ever	Three or more Children	24.3%	19.4%
Occasionally	One Child	21.6%	9.8%
Occasionally	Two Children	19.2%	9.1%
Occasionally	Three or more Children	13.7%	8.9%
Some of the time	One Child	13.4%	10.7%
Some of the time	Two Children	11.5%	5.1%
Some of the time	Three or more Children	9.2%	7.9%
Often/Always	One Child	3.9%	3.4%
Often/Always	Two Children	3.7%	2.3%
Often/Always	Three or more Children	6.0%	1.0%

Note: Data not available for 2019 and 2022. Figures refer to persons aged 31 to 54 only.



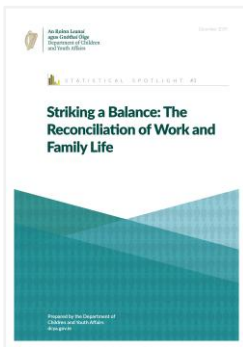
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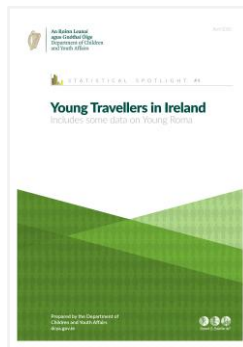
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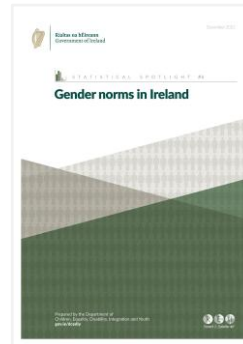
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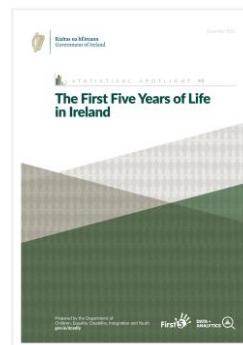
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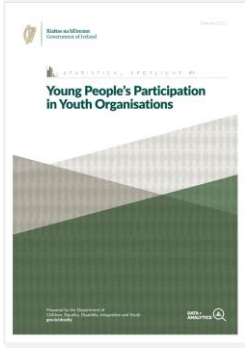
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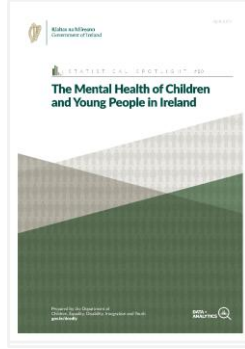


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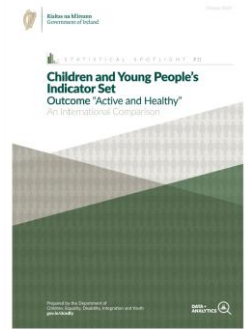
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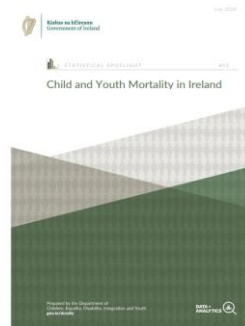
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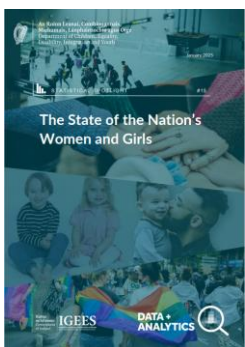
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