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Short Report:

HBSC Ireland: Health and wellbeing among young carers in 2014 and 2018

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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 2018, Ireland participated for the sixth 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 2018 was funded by the Department of Health. Further information on the HBSC Ireland can be found at www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc or at www.hbsc.org, the International HBSC website.

The most recent HBSC Ireland study was conducted in 2018 and included 15,557 school children from 3rd class in primary school to 5th year in post-primary school. Collectively, 255 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 2018 survey (see <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/hbscireland/2018study/>).



Focus of this report

This short report presents an analysis of the 2014 and 2018 HBSC survey data on young carers in Ireland. The question asked to identify those who are presented as young carers is:

- Do you provide regular unpaid personal help for a family member with long-term illness, health problem or disability? (Includes problems which are due to old age. Personal help includes help with basic tasks such as feeding or dressing) with the response options 'Yes' and 'No'.

A suite of questions were analysed to examine the health and well-being of those who identify as young carers. Analysis of the following questions are included in this short report:

Self-reported health

- *General health*: Would you say your health is...? Response options: 'Excellent'; 'Good'; 'Fair' and 'Poor'. Responses were dichotomised into 'excellent' and 'not excellent'.
- *Life satisfaction*: Young people were asked to rate their life satisfaction using a visual scale called the 'Cantril ladder'. The scale has 11 steps (0 to 10), the top of the ladder (10) indicates the best possible life and the bottom (0), the worst. Responses were dichotomised with ratings of 7 or higher categorised as high life satisfaction.
- *Happiness*: In general, how do you feel about your life at present, with the response options: 'I feel very happy'; 'I feel quite happy'; 'I don't feel very happy'; 'I'm not happy at all'. Responses were dichotomised into 'very happy' and 'not very happy'.

Risk Behaviours

- *Current smoking*: How often do you smoke are present? Response options: 'Every day'; 'At least once a week'; 'Less than once a week'; 'I do not smoke'. Responses were dichotomised into 'current smoker' and 'non-smoker'.
- *Alcohol use in the last 30 days*: On how many days (if any) have you drunk alcohol in the last 30 days, with the response options: 'Never'; '1-2 days'; '3-5 days'; '6-9 days'; '10-19 days'; '20-29 days'; '30 days (or more)'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no'.
- *Cannabis use in the last 30 days*: Have you ever taken cannabis (hashish, grass, pot) in the last 30 days? Response options: 'Never'; '1-2 days'; '3-5 days'; '6-9 days'; '10-19 days'; '20-29 days'; '30 days (or more)'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no'.

Bullying behaviours and Injuries

- *Been bullied:* How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months? Response options: 'I have not been bullied at school in the past couple of months'; 'It has only happened once or twice'; '2 or 3 times a month'; 'About once a week'; 'Several times a week'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no'.
- *Bully others:* How often have you taken part in bullying another person(s) at school in the past couple of months? Response options: 'I have not bullied another person(S) at school in the past couple of months'; 'It has only happened once or twice'; '2 or 3 times a months'; 'About once a week'; 'Several times a week'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no'.
- *Been injured in the last 12 months:* During the past 12 months, how many times were you injured and had to be treated by a doctor or nurse? Response options: 'I was not injured in the past 12 months'; '1 time'; '2 times'; '3 times'; '4 times or more'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no'.

Food Poverty

- *Going to school or bed hungry:* Some young people go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food at home. How often does this happen to you? Response options: 'Always'; 'Often'; 'Sometimes'; 'Never'. Responses were dichotomised into 'yes' and 'no', with 'Always', 'Often' and 'Sometimes' coded as 'yes.'

Mental Health

Young people aged 15 to 17 years old completed the Mental Health Inventory and the WHO-Five Well-Being Index (note: these questions were introduced to the HBSC Ireland survey in 2018, so no data are available from 2014).

- *Mental Health Inventory:* A five-item measure which combines answers to how frequently the following symptoms were experienced in the previous month: being a very nervous person; feeling so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up; feeling calm and peaceful; feeling downhearted and blue; being a happy person. Children rated all items on a 6-point scale, ranging from 'All of the time' to 'None of the time'. Scores were transformed to a scale between 0 and 100 (where a higher score means greater mental health problems and 100 means that these problems were present all of the time during the last month).

- *WHO-Five Well-Being Index*: A five-item measure which asks how frequently the following were experienced in the previous two weeks: feeling cheerful and in good spirits; feeling calm and relaxed; feeling active and vigorous; waking up feeling fresh and rested; and feeling that their daily life had been filled with things that interest them. Each item is rated on a 6-point scale from 'At no time' to 'All of the time'. Responses were combined and transformed to a scale between 0 and 100 (where 0 means a total lack of wellbeing, while 100 means that these dimensions were present all of the time during the last two weeks).

Findings

The findings are presented below in a series of tables. Overall, 11.5% of 10-17 year olds reported that they were a carer in 2014 and 13.3% of 10-17 year olds in 2018. Tables 1 to 6 describe the young carer sample by gender, age group, social class and geographic distribution for both 2014 and 2018. Tables 7 to 16 present data comparing carers to non-carers across a number of indicators from both the 2014 and 2018 survey data. Table 17 presents the data from the mental health items only for those aged 15 to 17 in the 2018 survey. Tests of statistical significance were conducted on the 2018 data presented to compare students by carer status. Chi Square tests were used to compare findings presented in Tables 7-16, and t-tests were used to compare findings presented in table 18. The findings related to these tests are presented under the relevant tables.

Tables

Demographic patterns

Table 1: Percentages of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year and gender

	2014		2018	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Yes	12.0	10.6	13.8	11.2
No	79.0	82.2	79.1	82.8
Missing	9.0	7.1	7.1	6.0

Table 2: Age groups of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year

	2014			2018		
	10 -11 years	12-14 years	15-17 years	10-11 years	12-14 years	15-17 years
Yes	9.5	12.1	10.9	12.0	12.6	12.4
No	80.5	79.1	83.2	80.9	79.9	82.9
Missing	10.1	8.8	5.9	7.1	7.5	4.7

Table 3: Social class groups of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year

	2014			2018		
	sc1-2	sc3-4	sc5-6	sc1-2	sc3-4	sc5-6
Yes	12.0	11.1	11.3	12.4	13.0	12.8
No	84.5	84.0	82.4	84.6	83.1	82.0
Missing	3.5	5.0	6.3	3.0	3.9	5.2

Table 4: Percentages of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year, gender and age group

	2014						2018					
	10-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		10-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Yes	10.4	8.8	12.7	11.6	11.8	10.3	13.4	10.4	14.1	11.2	13.4	11.5
No	79.6	81.1	77.1	80.6	81.2	84.5	78.7	83.1	78.1	81.6	81.0	84.5
Missing	10.1	10.0	10.1	7.8	7.1	5.2	7.8	6.5	7.8	7.2	5.6	4.0

Table 5: Percentage of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year, gender and social class group

	2014						2018					
	SC 1-2		SC 3-4		SC 5-6		SC 1-2		SC 3-4		SC 5-6	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Yes	10.4	8.8	12.7	11.6	11.8	10.3	13.4	11.5	13.7	12.3	17.2	9.2
No	79.6	81.1	77.1	80.6	81.2	84.5	83.5	85.5	82.5	83.7	77.0	86.2
Missing	10.1	10.0	10.1	7.8	7.1	5.2	3.1	3.0	3.8	4.0	5.8	4.7

Table 6: Geographical location of young carers (10-17 years), by survey year

	2014	2018
South	11.4	9.2
Midwest	11.0	11.2
West	10.4	11.4
Northwest	10.4	5.3
Midlands	11.7	8.2
Eastern	12.0	32.3
Northeast	10.6	15.5
Southeast	11.4	7.0

General health and wellbeing

Table 7: General health of 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Excellent	33.0	33.3	28.8	29.2
Not excellent	66.0	66.0	70.2	70.3
Missing	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.5

No significant difference between carers and non-carers was observed in 2018

Table 8: Life satisfaction of 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
High (7+)	72.4	73.7	68.2	72.0
Low (1-6)	25.0	23.7	27.9	25.6
Missing	2.7	2.6	4.0	2.4

Young carers were significantly less likely to report high life satisfaction than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.05$)

Table 9: Happiness among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Very happy	44.8	46.6	40.6	42.9
Not very happy	54.5	52.6	58.9	56.2
Missing	0.7	0.8	0.5	1.0

No significant difference between carers and non-carers was observed in 2018

Substance use

Table 10: Current smoking among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	8.5	7.1	6.3	4.9
No	91.0	92.1	93.1	94.6
Missing	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.5

Young carers were significantly more likely to report being current smokers than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.05$)

Table 11: Having had an alcoholic drink in the last 30 days among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	17.7	17.3	17.4	15.4
No	73.8	74.1	73.9	77.1
Missing	8.5	8.5	8.7	7.5

Young carers were significantly more likely to have had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.05$)

Table 12: Cannabis use in the last 30 days among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	4.0	3.6	4.8	3.3
No	88.9	89.0	88.6	90.5
Missing	7.1	7.3	6.6	6.2

Young carers were significantly more likely to use cannabis in the last 30 days than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.05$)

Hunger

Table 13: Ever going to bed or to school hungry among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	25.8	21.0	24.6	17.9
No	74.0	78.7	75.2	81.9
Missing	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2

Young carers were significantly more likely to have experienced hunger before bed or school than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.001$)

Bullying

Table 14: Having been bullied at school among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	30.0	24.1	37.5	28.3
No	68.3	73.9	61.4	70.5
Missing	1.8	2.0	1.1	1.2

Young carers were significantly more likely to have been bullied than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.001$)

Table 15: Having bullied others among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	14.3	11.9	15.9	12.4
No	83.3	85.9	82.9	86.2
Missing	2.4	2.2	1.2	1.4

Young carers were significantly more likely to have bullied others than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.001$)

Injury

Table 16: Medically attended injury in the last 12 months among 10-17 year olds, by carer status and survey year

	2014		2018	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
Yes	50.2	37.3	51.3	41.1
No	48.9	61.4	47.7	58.1
Missing	0.9	1.3	1.0	0.9

Young carers were significantly more likely to have had a medically attended injury than non-carers in 2018 ($p < 0.001$)

Mental health

Table 17: Mental health among 15 to 17 year olds in 2018, by carer status

	Mental Health Inventory		WHO-Five Well-Being Index	
	Carer	Non-carer	Carer	Non-carer
\bar{x}	36.06	34.60	49.14	50.56
s.d	20.32	20.13	22.07	22.32

Young carers reported significantly higher scores than non-carers on the Mental Health Inventory ($p < 0.001$), indicating poorer mental health among young carers. Young carers reported significantly lower scores than non-carers on the WHO-5 Index ($p < 0.05$), indicating poorer mental wellbeing among young carers.

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