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Population Health

title	Urban and Rural Patterns in Adolescent Alcohol Consumption in Ireland
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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). HBSC Ireland collects data on key indicators of health, health attitudes and health behaviours, as well as the contexts of health for young people. Further information on the HBSC study can be found at www.hbsc.org.

Excessive alcohol consumption remains a substantial public health concern in Ireland. In the 2006 Irish HBSC survey, about half of students aged 15-17 reported that they were current drinkers and just over a third that they had been 'really drunk' in the last 30 days, with no gender or social class gradient. A brief analysis of the alcohol use among Irish school students aged 15-17 years across urban and rural settings is presented here.

METHODOLOGY

The HBSC study is a school-based survey with data collected from students through self-completion questionnaires in classrooms. Schools are stratified by region and randomly sampled; classrooms are subsequently randomly sampled. 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. The data presented here are based on the following items from the HBSC questionnaire:

- 'At what age did you first drink alcohol?'
- 'At what age did you first get drunk?'
- 'On how many occasions have you done the following things in the last 30 days:
 - 'Drank alcohol?'
 - 'Been drunk?'

Geographical location was based on adolescent self-report of whether they lived in a city, a town, a village or in the countryside. All analysis were conducted using package SPSS (12.0).

RESULTS

Overall, 75% of Irish students aged 15-17 years report ever having drunk alcohol, and 56% report ever having been really drunk. No significant gender differences were identified and the data for boys and girls are presented together here. Students who live in the countryside report being older when they have their first alcohol drink

compared to those living in the city, town or village. Those who live in the countryside are more likely to report never having had an alcoholic drink and first getting drunk at a later age compared to those living in other locations. In addition, the proportion of students who report having drunk alcohol in the last 30 days is lowest among those who live in the country. The frequency of having been drunk in the last 30 days is highest among those living in cities.

Table 1 - Students Aged 15-17 Reporting Levels of Alcohol Consumption, by Geographical Location

Alcohol consumption	City	Town	Village	Country
% first alcoholic drink at or before age 13	32	35	36	32
% first drunkenness at or before age 13	17	17	15	13
% any alcohol in the last 30 days	60	60	66	54
% alcohol 3+ times in the last 30 days	36	30	38	28
% been drunk in the last 30 days	44	49	42	32
% been drunk 3+ times in the last 30 days	20	17	18	12
<i>n</i>	<i>622</i>	<i>947</i>	<i>813</i>	<i>1451</i>

CONCLUSIONS

Although there are no gender or social class gradients in alcohol consumption among 15-17 year old students, there are significant differences in the urban and rural patterns. These differences should be considered when health promotion and public health initiatives are being developed.

FUNDING

HBSC Ireland is funded by the Department of Health and Children (the Health Promotion Policy Unit and the Office of the Minister for Children).

REFERENCES

Available on request.

PUBLISHED

This abstract is unpublished, however the substance of this abstract formed a short report, which was completed on behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland by Aoife Gavin, Angela De Róiste and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn in 2008.