

# Family structure among Irish schoolchildren

## HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1,2</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Dr Candace Currie of the University of Edinburgh. In 2002 HBSC Ireland surveyed 8,424 Irish children from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

Further information is available at:  
<http://www.hbsc.org>  
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>  
<http://www.hbsc.org/countries/ireland.html>



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### Summary

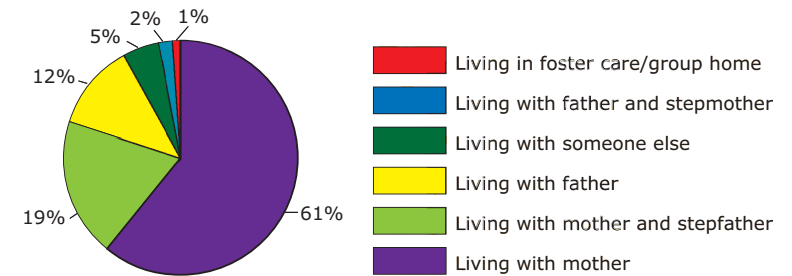
HBSC Ireland has found that 85% of children are living with both parents, a percentage that has remained stable since 1998. No differences were found between boys and girls, age groups or social classes in terms of living with both parents. Irish children who are living with both parents report better health, less frequent emotional and physical symptoms and are more likely to report that they feel very happy about their lives than those living in different circumstances. They are also less likely to have been drunk or to smoke regularly. This factsheet addresses the household composition and does not consider the quality of relationships within the family.

### Why this topic?

The family is an important setting in which health-related behaviours and attitudes are shaped<sup>3</sup>. Changes in traditional family structures throughout the 20th century mean that there is more than just one alternative for household composition<sup>4</sup>. Whereas living in a single-parent family has been related to an increased risk of health problems<sup>5,6</sup>, living with both parents may be a protective factor.

### Trends 1998 – 2002

The percentage of children living with both parents remains relatively stable. In 1998, 88% percent of all children reported living with both their mother and their father, and 86% reported doing so in 2002: these percentages remain stable across all age-groups and genders. Of those not living with both parents, over 80% live with just their mother or with their mother and stepfather.

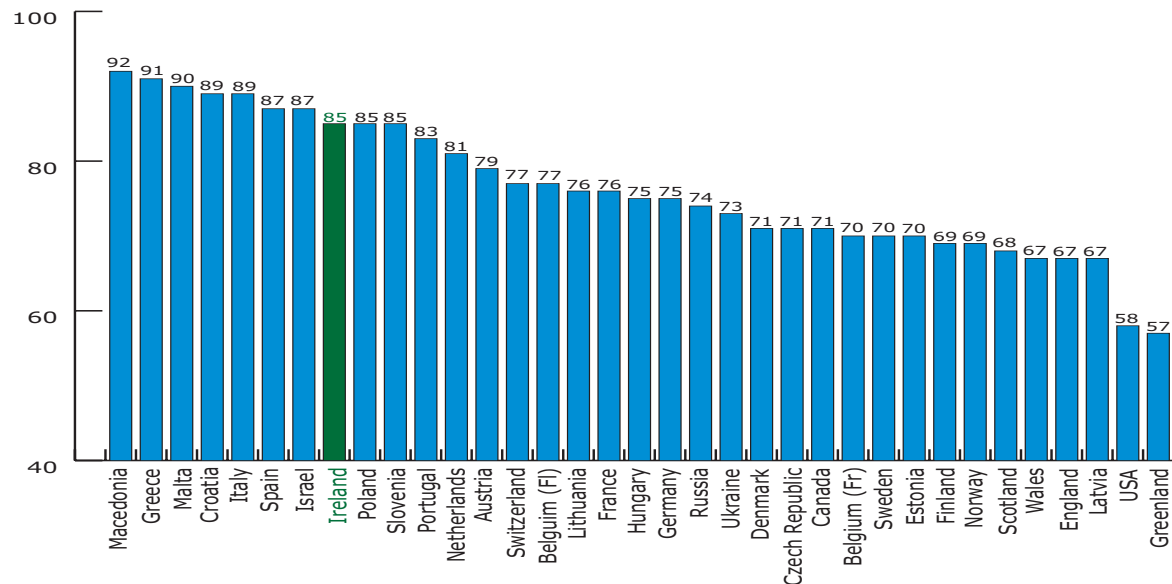


*Children not living with both parents*

### Family patterns in context

- Children living with both parents are more likely to report excellent health than children not living with both parents (29% vs. 22%).
- Children living with both parents are more likely to report that they feel very happy about their life than children not living with both parents (45% vs. 37%).
- Children living with both parents are less likely to report frequent emotional symptoms than children not living with both parents (13% vs. 20%).
- Children living with both parents are less likely to report frequent physical symptoms than children not living with both parents (24% vs. 30%).
- Children living with both parents are less likely to report that they have been drunk than children not living with both parents (30% vs. 41%).
- Children living with both parents are less likely to be current smokers than children not living with both parents (17% vs. 28%).
- Social class, bullying behaviour, injuries and physical activity are not related to living with both parents.

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Percentage of 15 year olds living with both parents, by country

### International

With 85% reporting that they live with both of their parents, 15 years old Irish children (boys and girls together) are ranked 8<sup>th</sup> among 35 countries in Europe and North America. The Irish figures are similar across age groups (in most countries the proportion living with both parents is considerably lower among older children). Ireland is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among both 11 and 13 year old children.

### Implications

These findings illustrate the relationship between living with both parents and the health and wellbeing of Irish children. They suggest that in the context of changing family structures, family support is an important area of investment in the health and wellbeing of children. These data only refer to family structure and do not consider the quality of family relationship. Nevertheless all those working

with or on behalf of children should be aware of the lower rates of wellbeing reported by children who are not living with both parents and use their expertise and skills to respond appropriately.

### References

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