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HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN: WHO COLLABORATIVE CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY (HBSC) FINDINGS FROM THE HBSC 2022 SURVEY IN SCOTLAND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HBSC Scotland 2022 National Report presents data on adolescent health and wellbeing from the World Health Organisation (WHO) collaborative cross-national Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in Scotland. Findings from the 2022 HBSC survey are presented and these are compared to equivalent data, where available, from eight previous survey rounds conducted every four years since 1990. A nationally representative sample of 4,388 pupils participated in the 2022 Scottish HBSC survey. The 2022 survey had a special focus on mental health and also enables comparison of adolescent health and wellbeing before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings are summarised below.

General health and sleep

Around a fifth (23%) of adolescents rated their health as 'excellent'. 15-year-old girls were the least likely to report 'excellent' health (13%). The proportion of boys reporting 'excellent' health increased between 2018 and 2022 (from 22% to 27%). Nearly half (49%) of young people experienced multiple health complaints every week and prevalence was higher among girls than boys at ages 13 and 15. Prevalence of multiple health complaints is at its highest since 1994 for boys and girls, with a sharp increase from 35% in 2018 (especially for girls, 41% to 61%). The most common health complaints were feeling nervous, sleep difficulties, and feeling irritable. Young people from higher affluence families were more likely to report excellent self-rated health and lower frequency of health complaints.

The average sleep duration on weekdays was 8.0 hours for 13-year-olds and 7.7 hours for 15-year-olds. Adolescents slept for longer at weekends: on average 9.3 hours for 13-year-olds and 9.1 hours for 15-year-olds. The proportion of young people reporting sleep difficulties more than once a week has continued to increase from 30% in 2018 to 37% in 2022. Pupils were asked about sleep quality, covering three different aspects: (i) bedtime behaviours (ii) sleep efficiency (iii) morning wakefulness. Morning wakefulness scores decreased with age and were lower for girls than boys. Girls also had lower scores for sleep efficiency at age 13 and 15. Young people from lower affluence families were more likely to report shorter sleep duration on weekends, more sleep difficulties and lower sleep quality.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The majority (80%) of young people reported high life satisfaction with younger adolescents more likely to report this than older adolescents. Just over a quarter (27%) of young people reported feeling very happy with their life with boys being more likely to report this than girls (34% versus 21%). For girls, this was the lowest prevalence of feeling very happy since 1994. Overall, 42% of young people reported feeling confident always or often and at every age group, boys were more likely to report this than girls. In 2022, the lowest levels of confidence in 28 years were observed for both boys and girls.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of young people reported feeling left out often or always compared with 11% in 2018 and this increase was seen among both boys and girls. In particular, the proportion of girls reporting feeling left out often or always has more than doubled since 2018, from 13% to 30%. Around a fifth (19%) of young people reported feeling lonely all or most of the time in the past year and feelings of loneliness were highest among 15-year-old girls (31%). Over a third (35%) of young people were classified as having either low mood or risk of depression. Around a third (32%) of young people reported anxiety with higher levels among girls than boys at ages 13 and 15. Nearly all the mental health indicators were significantly associated with family affluence, with poorer outcomes for young people from lower affluence families, except for anxiety and feeling left out which did not vary by family affluence.

Eating behaviours and oral health

Just over half (53%) of young people reported eating breakfast every day on weekdays (61% boys, 46% girls). In 2022, there was a decrease in daily breakfast consumption among boys and girls and particularly in the younger age groups. Overall, 44% of adolescents reported eating fruit every day. In contrast to previous years, fruit consumption did not vary by gender and an increase was seen among boys between 2018 and 2022 (30% to 43%). Levels of fruit consumption are the highest in 20 years. Four in ten (40%) young people ate vegetables every day and this did not vary significantly by age or gender. In 2022, daily vegetable consumption among boys had increased to its highest level since 2002. Daily consumption of sweets and chocolate, chips and sugary drinks have increased slightly since 2018. Nearly one in ten (9%) young people drank an energy drink every day, up from 5% in 2018. Over a third (36%) of young people reported having a meal every day with their family and a further 38% reported eating a meal most days with their family. Three quarters (74%) of adolescents reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day and at every age, this was more common among girls than boys. In general, healthier eating behaviours were more common among those from higher affluence families.

Physical activity and leisure time

Less than a quarter (23%) of adolescents achieved 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) a day. MVPA has increased since 2018, particularly for boys (from 19% to 28%). Participation in leisure time vigorous physical activity at least three times per week was higher among boys than girls (69% versus 54%), with the greatest gender difference at age 15. Almost three quarters of adolescents (71%) took part in at least one organised activity every week. At age 15, this was more common among boys than girls. Taking part in organised leisure activities was more common amongst 11-year-olds and decreased with age. Boys were more likely to participate in team sports and girls more likely to take part in individual sports and artistic activities. Daily screen time was high with young people spending, on average, 3.0 hours a day gaming, 2.8 hours on social media, 2.4 hours watching TV and 1.2 hours browsing the internet. These may occur simultaneously. Boys were more likely to spend time gaming and girls were more likely to spend time on social media. Young people from more affluent families reported higher levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and leisure time vigorous activity. Young people from low affluence families were less likely to participate in organised leisure activities and spent more time gaming and watching TV.

Electronic Media Use

The vast majority (85%) of adolescents reported that they kept their smartphone in their bedroom at night and 73% also reported having a television in their bedroom. One-third (35%) of adolescents reported that they had online contact with close friends almost all the time throughout the day, which is described as 'intense' contact. Almost one in seven (14%) adolescents reported problematic social media use. Girls were more likely to report problematic social media use than boys (20% versus 8% respectively). Between 2018 and 2022, there was an increase in problematic social media use among girls in all age groups, but not among boys. Just over half (54%) of 13- and 15-year-olds reported gaming at least 4 days per week, of whom three-quarters

reported gaming (almost) every day. Just under a third (30%) reported playing games for more than 4 hours per day but this was more common among boys (41% versus 14% girls). Of those who played video games, 13% reported problematic gaming. Boys were more likely than girls to report problematic gaming (18% versus 7%). Young people from low affluence families were more likely to have a TV in their bedroom and play computer games (weekly and daily). Intense online communication, problematic social media use and problematic gaming did not vary by family affluence.

Substance Use

Just under one in ten (9%) adolescents said they had ever smoked cigarettes and prevalence increased with age: 1% of 11-year-olds, 6% of 13-year-olds to 20% of 15-year-olds. Lifetime cigarette smoking is at its lowest level in 32 years. Vaping is now more common than smoking cigarettes, with almost one in five (18%) adolescents reporting having used an e-cigarette at least once in their lifetime. Rates were higher among older adolescents: 4% of 11-year-olds and 16% of 13-year-olds compared to 36% of 15-year-olds. There have been large increases in e-cigarette use since 2018 for girls; in 2022, 40% of 15-year-olds girls had used an e-cigarette in their lifetime compared with 20% in 2018. A quarter (25%) of 15-year-olds had used an e-cigarette in the last 30 days, with lower rates among 13-year-olds (10%) and 11-year-olds (3%). There have been increases in current e-cigarette use since 2018 for 13-year-old girls (2% to 13%) and larger increases for 15-year-olds (girls 6% to 30% and boys 8% to 20%).

Two-fifths (41%) of adolescents reported that they had drunk alcohol in their lifetime and just over one-fifth (22%) had drunk alcohol in the last 30 days. There have been decreases in lifetime drinking for boys (from 74% in 2014 to 64% in 2022) but current drinking has remained stable over the same period. Overall, 12% of young people reported being drunk two or more times in their life. Prevalence of drunkenness increased with age. Since 1998, levels of drunkenness have declined steadily and are now at their lowest in 32 years. Around a fifth (19%) of 15-year-olds had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime. One in ten (10%) 15-year-olds reported using cannabis in the last 30 days and levels were similar in boys and girls. Levels of cannabis use have remained fairly stable since 2010. Adolescent substance use was not strongly patterned by family affluence. Only current cigarette smoking was found to have a significant association, with higher prevalence among young people from low affluence families.

Sexual health

15-year-olds were asked about their sexual orientation: 71% described themselves as heterosexual, 5% as mostly heterosexual, 11% as bisexual, 3% as gay or lesbian, 2% as other, 6% as not sure yet and 3% said that they did not understand the question. The proportion of 15-year-olds who reported having had sexual intercourse was similar for boys and girls (22% and 21%, respectively). Of these, 11% reported having had sex at the age of 13 or younger, 42% at the age of 14 and 47% at age 15 or older. Of those who had had sex, around a third (31%) said they used a condom only, 26% had used birth control pills only, 9% used both a condom and birth control pill and 34% had used neither a condom nor birth control pill when they last had sex. Age at first intercourse did not vary by family affluence.

Bullying and fighting

Just under a fifth (18%) of young people reported being bullied at least 2-3 times a month in the past couple of months, an increase from 14% in 2018. Seven percent of young people reported being cyberbullied at least 2 to 3 times a month in the past couple of months and this was similar to previous survey years. Just over one-fifth (22%) of young people reported experiencing multiple forms of bullying in the last 2-3 months, this has increased from 15% in 2018. One in ten (10%) young people reported being in a physical fight 3 or more times in the past year and this was more prevalent among boys than girls. Since 2002, involvement in a physical fight has remained stable among girls but has decreased steadily among boys from 23% in 2002 to 13% in 2022. Experiences of bullying and fighting showed no differences by family affluence.

Relationships and support

Most young people (69%) lived with both their parents, whilst 20% live in a single parent family, 10% in a stepfamily and 2% in another home environment. Over half (56%) of young people reported high family support but perceived family support decreased with age. Young people were more likely to find it easy to talk about things that bothered them with their mothers (76%) than with their fathers (67%). Levels of ease of communication with parents have remained stable among boys but a lower proportion of girls reported finding it easy to talk to both their mother and father in 2022, when compared with 2018. Half of young people (50%) reported high levels of support from their friends. Since 2014, perceptions of peer support have remained

relatively stable among boys but, for girls, there has been a recent decrease in perceiving high peer support from 65% in 2014 to 54% in 2022. Most young people (61%) said they always had a trusted adult they could speak to but 9% of young people said they did not have a trusted adult in their lives. Young people from higher affluence families reported more positive perceptions across the relationship and support measures.

School Experience

Around one in six young people (16%) reported that they liked school a lot. Since 1990 girls have always been more positive about school than boys but in 2022, 13-year-old girls reported liking school less than boys. Between 1994 and 2018 there was little change in the proportion of young people who liked school a lot but there were decreases in 2022 compared with 2018 (particularly for girls, down from 27% to 15%). Fifteen-year-olds reported higher levels of schoolwork pressure than 11- and 13-year-olds, with the highest levels reported by 15-year-old girls (79%). The proportion of adolescents who felt some or a lot of pressure from schoolwork has been increasing since 2006 and has continued to increase in 2022 for girls, widening the gap between girls and boys. School-related stress scores increased with age and there were gender differences at both ages 13 and 15, with higher levels of school stress reported by girls.

Overall, 28% of pupils reported high teacher support but there was a marked decrease with age; 48% of 11-year-olds reported high teacher support compared with 16% of 13-year-olds and 19% of 15-year-olds. There were significant differences in perceived levels of teacher support by gender at age 15, with boys more likely to report high teacher support than girls. The proportion of adolescents who reported high teacher support increased from 2010 to 2018 but decreased in 2022 for both girls and boys in all age groups. The largest decreases were seen in 11-year-old girls and 13-year-old boys and girls. Around one in six adolescents (17%) reported high classmate support. Perceived classmate support varied by age, with younger adolescents more likely to report high levels of support than older adolescents (26% of 11-year-olds versus 11% of 15-year-olds). The proportion of adolescents who reported high classmate support has been decreasing slowly since 2010 for boys and girls. Young people from more affluent families were more likely to say they liked school a lot and to report high support from classmates, but there was no association between family affluence and schoolwork pressure, school-related stress or teacher support.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

In 2022, young people were asked about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions and to rate its impact on nine different aspects of life as well as their life overall. Across all age and gender groups, the three most positively affected aspects of life were family relations, friendships, and physical activity: 54% reported a positive impact on family relations, 50% on friendships and 43% on physical activity. The three most negatively affected aspects of life were mental health, school performance, and physical activity: 38% reported a negative impact on their mental health, 34% on their school performance and 29% on physical activity. At age 11, there were no gender differences in relation to the perceived impact of the pandemic on any areas of life. However, among the older adolescents, girls were generally more likely to report negative impacts than boys. Across all aspects of life, those from higher affluence families were more likely to report a positive impact and generally less likely to report a negative impact than those from lower affluence families.

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