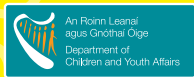




HOW
WE
SEE IT

Report of a Survey on
**YOUNG PEOPLE'S
BODY IMAGE**



2 :: Dáil na nÓg Body Image Survey

The *How we see it: Survey on Young People's Body Image* was conducted by young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council.

The importance of body image in influencing mental health among teenagers was one of the top recommendations from Dáil na nÓg 2010. The young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council decided to develop a survey to ask young people about the things that affect their body image.

Dáil na nÓg is the annual national parliament for young people aged 12-18 years. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs funds Dáil na nÓg, which is hosted annually by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Delegates are elected to Dáil na nÓg by each of the 34 Comhairlí na nÓg based around the country. These are local youth councils, which give children and young people a say on decisions in their local areas.





One young person from each Comhairle na nÓg is elected to the Dáil na nÓg Council, which follows up on the recommendations from Dáil na nÓg. The Council has a term of office of two years and meets with Ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas Committees and other decision-makers.

Members of the Dáil na nÓg Council developed the Body Image Survey with the help of a team of researchers from the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork (UCC). The team from UCC trained the young members of the Council in research methods.

The Body Image Survey was conducted by Dáil na nÓg Council members at all 34 Comhairle na nÓg Annual General Meetings in 2011.

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Survey findings

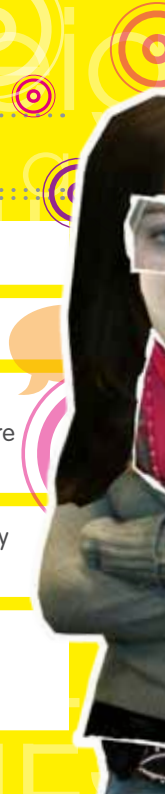
2,156 young people, aged 10-21 years, completed the Body Image Survey.

77% of young people in the survey say that body image is important to them.

The survey found that positive body image declines during the teenage years. In this survey, 12-year-olds are the most satisfied with their body image and 15-year-olds are the least satisfied.

Although 60% were satisfied with their body image, 70% of girls and 46% of boys say they feel pressurised to look good for other people.

When asked about what influences their body image, comparison with others is the most negative influence on girls' body image and bullying is the most negative influence on boys' body image.





'You're more likely to listen to friends than parents'

Dáil na nÓg Delegate, 2010

Dáil na nÓg Body Image Survey :: 5

More than 50% say that their body image interferes with taking part in things like swimming, dating and putting photographs on Facebook.

85% of the girls in the survey put time and effort into their appearance compared with 54% of boys.

97% of the young people surveyed take part in some form of exercise. Twice as many girls (52%) as boys (29%) exercised to control their weight.

Recommendations on how to support positive body image

The recommendations from the young people surveyed are:

- :: a positive body image awareness campaign aimed at teenagers;
- :: including body image in the school curriculum, with more exciting and varied sports, regular talks on personal development and healthy food in canteens and vending machines.

Influences on young people's body image

The survey asked *How do things such as eating habits, activity levels, family, celebrities, media, bullying, etc. influence your body image?*

:: The positive things were activity (74%), sports (69%), confidence and friends (64% each), and family (62%).

:: The strongest negative impacts were comparing yourself with others (53%), bullying (46%), weight (42%), media (39%) and celebrities (38%).

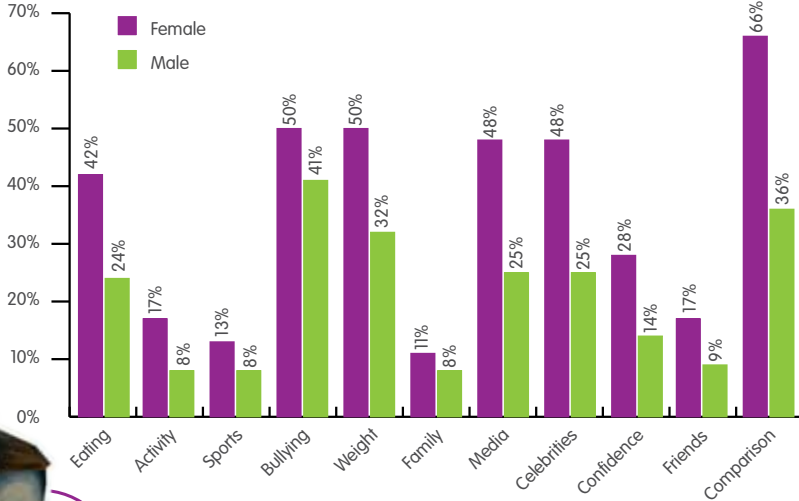
:: The most negative influence on girls' body image was comparing themselves with others.

:: The most negative influence on boys' body image was bullying.

'I feel people stare at me. I feel there's something wrong with me'

14-year-old girl

Negative effects on body image, by gender



Putting effort into appearance

'There is competition to look well between friends – with boys too, weight-lifting and drinking protein drinks.'

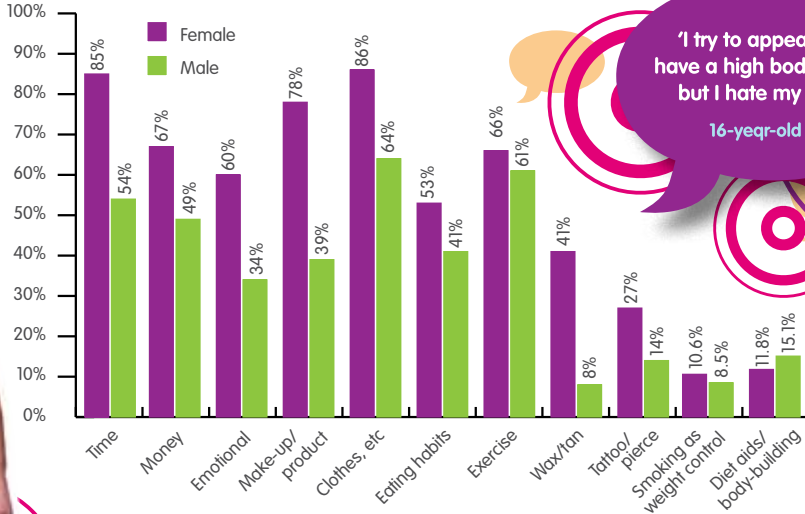
Dáil na nÓg Delegate, 2010

The survey asked *How much effort do you put into your appearance?*, with things like time, money, eating habits, exercise, dieting and body-building aids.

- Most participants said that they put a good deal of effort into things like clothes (77%), time (70%), exercise (64%) and money (59%).
- 85% of girls put time into their appearance compared with 54% of boys.
- 60% of girls said that they put emotional effort into their appearance (such as planning, worrying, thinking about) as opposed to 34% of boys.
- 11% of girls and 8% of boys in the survey smoke as weight control.
- 53% of girls compared with 41% of boys put effort into their eating habits.



Amount of effort put into appearance, by gender



'I try to appear like I have a high body image, but I hate my body.'

16-year-old girl



Reasons for exercising

The survey gave a list of 8 choices as reasons for exercising (*see page 11*).

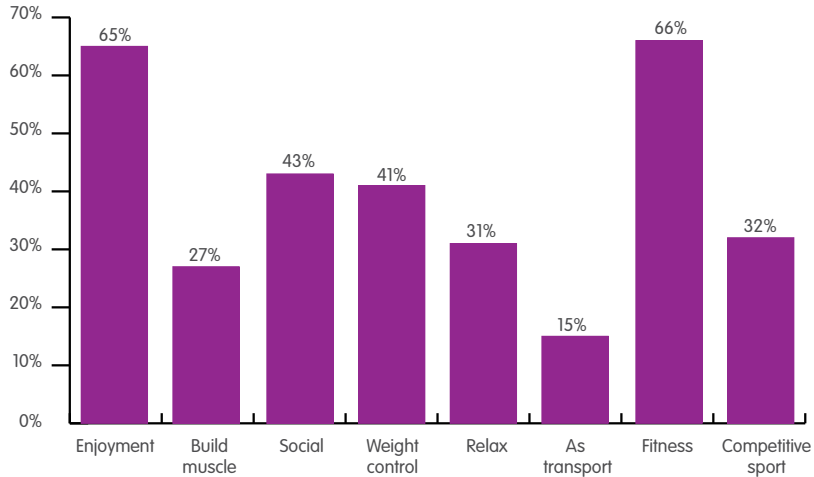
- 66% of young people said that they exercised to keep fit and 65% for enjoyment.
- 72% of boys compared with 64% of girls exercised for enjoyment.
- 50% of boys compared with 12% of girls used exercise to build muscle.
- Twice as many girls (52%) as boys (29%) exercised to control their weight.



'A school initiative where they promote healthy = happy and sports that kids do for enjoyment rather than weight loss. If they enjoy the sports, then they will do them more and be more healthy.'

14-year-old boy

Reasons for exercising



Body image and participation in activities

The survey asked *Does your body image make it harder to take part in a range of activities?* such as swimming, sports and dating.

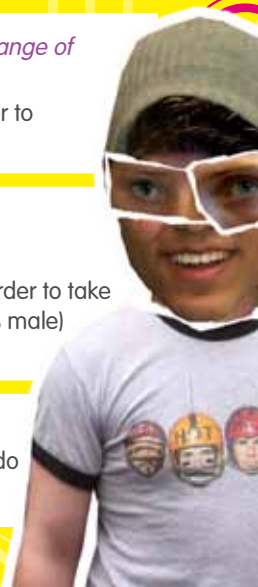
- ❖ 50% of participants said 'No', their body image does not make it harder to participate in these activities.

However, there were big differences between girls and boys:

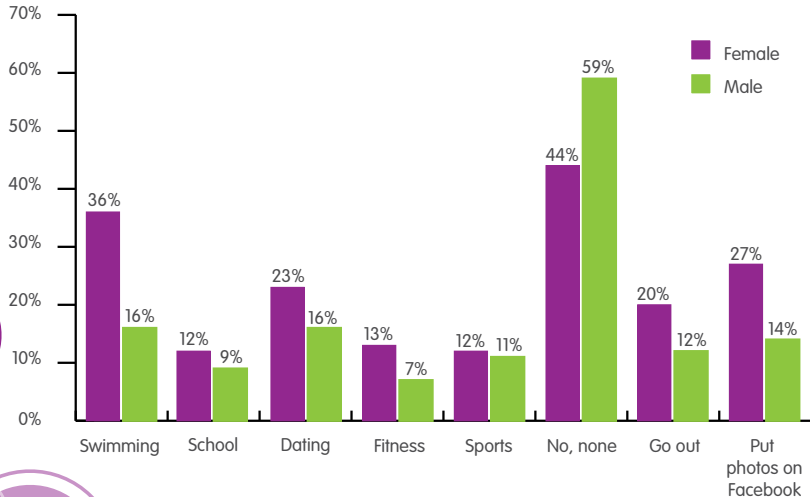
- ❖ Girls find it harder to take part in all activities (*see page 13*).
- ❖ Both girls (36%) and boys (16%) said that their body image makes it harder to take part in swimming, putting photographs on Facebook (27% female; 14% male) and dating (23% female; 16% male).

There were also differences with age:

- ❖ 67% of 12-year-olds said their body image has no effect on what they do compared with 44% of 18-year-olds.



Effect of body image on taking part in activities, by gender



Useful Organisations

Aware

Freephone 1890 303 302; E-mail: info@aware.ie; Web: www.aware.ie

BeLong To is an organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) young people, aged 14-23. Address: Parliament House, 13 Parliament Street, Dublin 2. Tel: (01) 670 6223; Web: www.belongto.org
Office hours: Monday-Friday, 10am-6pm.

Bodywhys: The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland

Freephone 1890 200 444; E-mail: info@bodywhys.ie; Web: www.bodywhys.ie

Childline Ireland

Freephone 1800 666 666; Web: www.childline.ie

Drugs/HIV Helpline

Offers support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to drug and alcohol use and/or HIV and sexual health.
Freephone 1800 459 459; E-mail: drugshiv@hse.ie; Web: www.drugs.ie

Gay Switchboard Dublin (GSD)

Helpline: (01) 872 1055; E-mail: director@gayswitchboard.ie;
Web: www.gayswitchboard.ie

HSE National Helpline

Freephone 1850 241 850

Let someone know

Web: www.letsomeoneknow.ie

Mental Health Ireland

Lists a number of resources that young people can access for information and support if they are experiencing problems. Web: www.mentalhealthireland.ie/links-mainmenu-23/38-children-and-young-people.html

Pieta House: The Centre for the Prevention of Self-Harm or Suicide

Tel: (01) 601 0000; E-mail: mary@pieta.ie; Web: www.pieta.ie

Samaritans

24-hour Helpline: 1850 60 90 90; E-mail: jo@samaritans.org

Teenline Ireland

'If you need someone to talk to, we're here to listen. All calls are confidential. And you don't even have to give us your name. It is safe and secure. We're here to help.'
Freephone 1800 833 634; E-mail: info@teenline.ie; Web: www.teenline.ie
Open to talk 7 nights a week, 7pm-10pm.