

Young People's Views about Opportunities, Barriers and Supports to Recreation and Leisure EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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A research report by Cork Institute of Technology
on behalf of the National Children's Office
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1. INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned in the context of policy development in the field of young people's recreation and leisure. It set out to determine:

- What do young Irish people do in their free time?
- What are the barriers and supports they experience?
- What are their aspirations with regard to recreation and leisure?

Leisure time activities comprise between 40-50% of an adolescent's life (Caldwell *et al*, 1992). Adolescence is a formative, transitional period from childhood to adulthood. It is a time of identity development and major adjustment for young people to changes within themselves and their social lives. International research has shown that leisure involvement enhances self-concept, identity and social and emotional development, including the development of initiative and resilience to cope with the demands and stresses of life (Driver, 1992; Dworkin *et al*, 2003). Leisure involvement fosters a sense of belonging in a community or locality, and may also address specific developmental needs of adolescence (*ibid*).

Leisure activities are also a context through which young people can forge new friendships and meet and learn about peers who are different to them in ethnicity, race and social class. In terms of international policy, Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) declares: '*State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*'

A variety of studies have also reported the psychological and physical health benefits of regular physical activity and physically active young people are more likely to carry the habit of regular physical activity into adulthood (Department of Health and Children, 1999; National Heart Alliance, 2001; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

2. METHODOLOGY

A survey was undertaken with over 2,260 young people, aged 12-18 years, via a random sample of 51 schools across the Irish Republic. Most counties had two schools in the sample, with additional schools from the more populated counties. A further 100 young people participated in focus groups and interviews, designed to gain insight into the additional needs of young people with disabilities and those at a socio-economic disadvantage.

A questionnaire was specifically developed for the study. It was designed to elicit information on the three research questions set out in the Introduction, namely:

- What do young Irish people do in their free time?
- What are the barriers and supports they experience?
- What are their aspirations with regard to recreation and leisure?

Past research, theory and pilot focus groups were used in designing the questionnaire. It was translated into Irish for use in Gaeltacht schools.

The survey was undertaken over a period of 6 weeks – from November to mid-December 2004. The focus groups and interviews were conducted from February to April 2005.

The authors travelled to 90% of the school settings to administer the questionnaire; a trained research assistant administered the other 10%. Respondents were made aware of the rationale for this research in the context of policy development. From their experience of both data collection and input, the researchers believe that the respondents positively engaged in the study. This can be seen in the high completion rate of the full questionnaire and the low number of spoilt questions. The focus groups and interviews had similarly high levels of engagement.

3. CURRENT LEISURE PRACTICES OF YOUNG IRISH PEOPLE

What do young Irish people do in their free time? Leisure time activities comprise between 40-50% of an adolescent's life (Caldwell *et al*, 1992). For the purposes of this research, leisure time activities have been divided into four broad areas: general free-time activities; hobbies; community/charity groups; and sports.

The vast majority of young Irish people enjoy their free time. Most are engaged in a broad range of activities – 88% report some involvement in sport, nearly two-thirds (65%) report one or more hobbies, and nearly one-third (32%) participate in one or more community clubs or groups (e.g. youth clubs/groups). Most report strong support from family and friends for their leisure preferences.

There is a small (6%), but striking, proportion of young people who appear to have very low levels of both engagement and enjoyment in their leisure time. This sub-group of the population warrants further research since these young people may have particular needs with respect to leisure provision.

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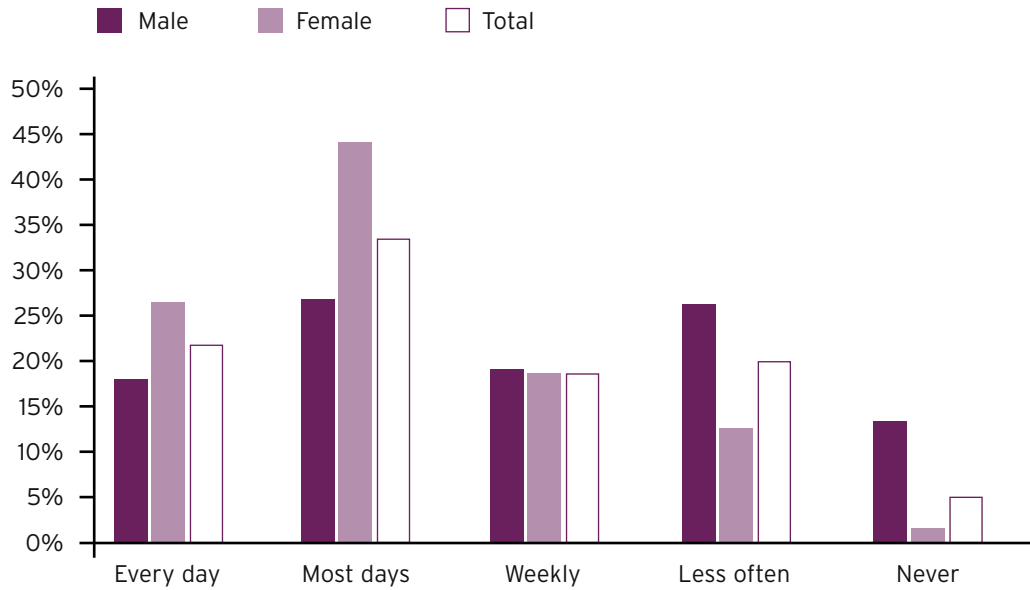
GENERAL FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

Watching television and listening to music are, predictably, very common leisure time activities: 94% of young people watch television and 89% listen to music every day or most days. Television viewing is popular for both sexes and shows no significant rise or fall across the age span of 12-18 years. Listening to music is more popular with girls and young women, and increases in popularity from 12 to 18 years.

Computer games are a popular leisure time activity for young Irish people. Only 2% never play computer games, while over one-third play every day or most days. There is a marked gender difference with regard to computer games: over 60% of boys and young men play every day or most days, compared to only 13% of girls and young women. Little difference was found in game playing between young people in the different parental occupation socio-economic status (SES) groups.

Over half of young Irish people read in their free time every day or most days. A striking gender difference is present, with girls and young women reading significantly more than boys and young men (*see Figure 1*). There is also a link between parental occupation and reading frequency: those in the higher SES groups report greater reading frequency. The findings with regard to gender, SES and reading are consistent with other research. For the purposes of this study, reading was defined as including reading books, magazines and newspapers.

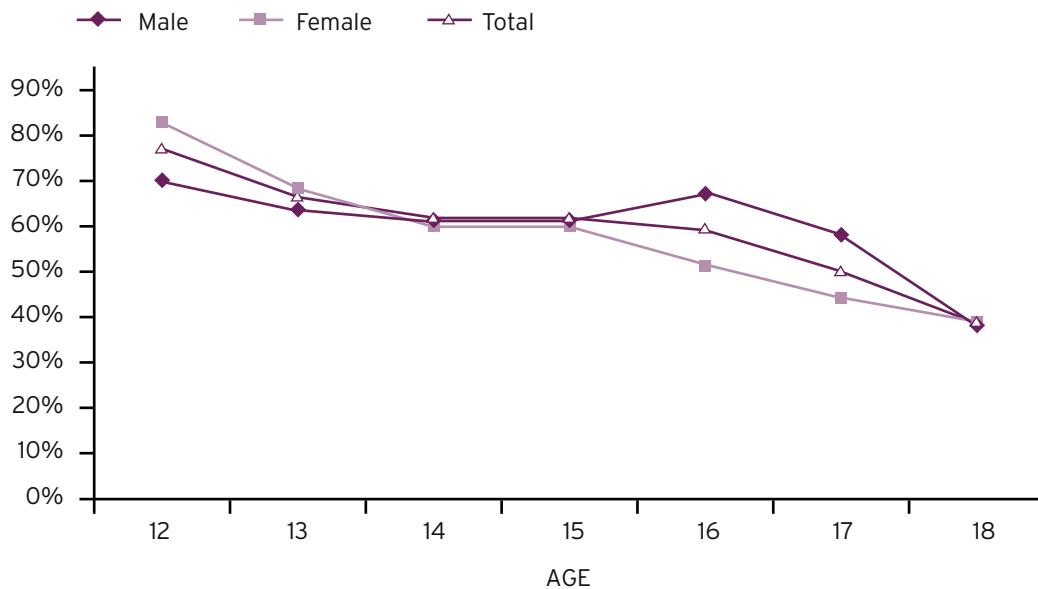
Figure 1: Reading frequency – by gender



'Hanging around outside' is an important leisure time activity for adolescents. Over 90% of adolescents in all age groups enjoy hanging around with their friends (see Figure 2). There is agreement in the research of both the normative nature and relative importance to the young person of hanging around with peers. The frequency with which young people hang around outside decreases with age, especially among girls and young women. In contrast to other groups, young people whose parents are in the higher SES group (professional/managerial) report less frequent hanging around outside.



Figure 2: 'Hanging around outside' – by age and gender



Attending the cinema and discos are popular leisure time activities for adolescents. About one-quarter of young people attend discos on a weekly basis, while one in five never attend. From the focus groups, it was apparent that a lot of young people feel there are not enough discos for older adolescents (15-18 year-olds). Attendance at the cinema is similar, with about one-quarter attending weekly; however, less than 5% of young people report that they never attend the cinema.

For girls and young women, looking at shops is a very common activity, particularly for those in urban areas.

Over one-third of young people work part-time weekly or more often (including baby-sitting). There is a rise in the number working part-time from 12-18 years. Boys and young men work part-time more frequently than girls and young women, and slightly more young people in the lower SES groups work part-time. Also, young people in rural areas work part-time more often than those in urban areas.

A huge majority of young Irish people (95%) own a mobile phone. Girls and young women use their phones more frequently than boys and young men. There is a rise in mobile phone ownership from 12-18 years – 87% of 12 year-olds own a mobile phone, rising to 100% of 18 year-olds.

HOBBIES

Outside of the general free-time activities mentioned above (such as watching television, reading and listening to music), nearly two-thirds of young people report one or more hobbies. The most popular hobbies are playing a musical instrument, looking after pets and art (see Table 1). Dance is very popular with girls and young women, and playing pool or snooker is a popular hobby for boys and young men. In agreement with past research, girls and young women report more hobbies than boys and young men. Young people who are low in leisure motivation are less likely than others to have a hobby. This is understandable in that low levels of leisure motivation have been reported to be associated with feelings of apathy and a lack of initiative and effort.

The higher a person's socio-economic background, the more hobbies they are likely to have. As has been found in past research studies, participation in hobbies diminishes across the adolescent years. This drop-off pattern was even more striking in community/charity groups and sports participation.

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Table 1: Most popular hobbies – by gender

	TOTAL	n=1,475	MALE	n=660	FEMALE	n=815
1st	Play music	30.7%	Play music	28.7%	Dance	34.9%
		n=454		n=190		n=285
2nd	Pets	21.5%	Pets	19.2%	Play music	32.3%
		n=318		n=127		n=264
3rd	Art	21.4%	Pool/Snooker	16.5%	Art	26.9%
		n=317		n=109		n=220
4th	Dance	20.3%	Technology	15%	Pets	23.8%
		n=300		n=99		n=191
5th	Cooking	10.4%	Art	14%	Cooking	16%
		n=148		n=97		n=131

Columns do not add up to 100% as respondents could choose more than one hobby.

The average frequency that hobbies are engaged in varies depending on the hobby. Playing a musical instrument and looking after pets are undertaken, on average, on a daily basis, while dance, art and pool or snooker are undertaken, on average, 'most days'.

This research recommends the greater promotion of dance because it is a very popular 'like to join' activity for girls and young women. As a leisure activity, dance is inexpensive with regard to equipment and facilities, and incorporates physical activity, artistic expression and cultural features. In addition, it may be done individually or with a group.

COMMUNITY/CHARITY GROUPS

Nearly one-third of young people are members of one or more groups. The most popular groups are youth clubs/groups, choirs/folk groups and groups that engage in voluntary work (see Table 2). Girls and young women report greater participation in community/charity groups than boys and young men. Young people who are low in leisure motivation are less likely than others to report involvement in a community/charity group. Rural dwellers are more likely to be members of groups than urban dwellers. Those in the older years of adolescence are less likely to be members of community/charity groups. The average frequency of participation in community/charity groups is weekly.

Table 2: Most popular community/charity groups – by gender

	TOTAL	n=728	MALE	n=291	FEMALE	n=437
1st	Youth clubs/groups		Youth clubs/groups		Youth clubs/groups	
	58.7%	n=428	68%	n=198	52.6%	n=230
2nd	Choir/folk groups		Scouts/Guides		Choir/folk groups	
	25.9%	n=189	11.3%	n=33	37.5%	n=164
3rd	Voluntary work		Voluntary work		Voluntary work	
	11.2%	n=82	9.2%	n=28	12.3%	n=54
4th	Scouts/Guides		Choir/folk groups		Scouts/Guides	
	10.3%	n=75	8.5%	n=25	9.6%	n=42

Columns do not add up to 100% as respondents could choose more than one group.

Focus groups identified a number of issues relating to youth clubs and groups. These included the importance of 'being able to relax and hang-out with friends (and away from family) in a safe place'; 'having a choice over what to do'; there not being 'too many rules'; and 'liking the leaders and the others there'. Many of the males mentioned that they would 'like the club to have pool/snooker tables' and a small number mentioned the cost of joining a youth club as a concern. A minority also expressed apathy about youth clubs, indicating that 'they all get boring after a while'; this may reflect low leisure motivation or depression.

SPORTS

Almost nine out of ten young people play at least one sport, either competitively or recreationally. Soccer, Gaelic football and hurling are by far the most popular sports for boys and young men. For girls and young women, the most popular sports are basketball, Gaelic football and swimming (see Table 3). Participation in sport declines with age: 96% of 12 year-olds are involved in at least one sport, compared to 77% of 18 year-olds. This decline is particularly marked for girls and young women, with a decrease from 98% of 12 year-olds to 68% of 18 year-olds reporting involvement in sport. Frequency of participation in sport also decreases between the ages of 12 and 18. Individual sports, such as swimming, tennis and cycling, are significantly more popular with girls and young women.

An interesting theme from the school-based focus groups was the belief that there should be exposure to a greater range of sports. One group mentioned the 'dominance of the GAA games' and another suggested 'having tasters of different ... unusual sports, like water sports and American football'. One young male was of the opinion that people end up playing what the others in their area play: 'I play soccer and so do all the lads in my area; my cousin plays nothing but hurling because that's what they all play near him.'

Overall, the numbers participating in individual sports are significantly lower than for team sports, with the ratio of team to individual sports, cited in this research, almost exactly 2:1 (3,268 team sports; 1,603 individual sports). This is in line with other research on sports (Connor, 2003; Aaron *et al*, 2002; Sport England, 2003) and in contrast with the sporting patterns of Irish adults, where individual sports dominate (Fahey *et al*, 2004).

Notwithstanding its popularity among Irish adults, walking for leisure is not popular with adolescents, particularly boys and young men. Indeed, comparison of the sports preferences of adults and teenagers show very different patterns of involvement (see Table 4).

Table 3: Sport – by gender

SPORT	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Soccer	711	262	973
Gaelic football	577	351	928
Basketball	158	371	529
Hurling/Camogie	303	180	483
Swimming	143	314	457
Cycling	117	115	232
Athletics (incl. running)	78	97	175
Tennis	59	116	175
Rugby	140	22	162
Horse riding	28	124	152
Hockey	29	114	143
Golf and Pitch and Putt	106	22	128
Badminton	31	79	110
Martial Arts (incl. kickboxing)	27	40	67
Volleyball	11	39	50
Boxing	38	7	45
Water sports (incl. rowing and surfing)	21	10	31
Skateboarding and rollerblading	23	8	31

The drop-off in sports participation evident in this study, together with the huge decline in sports and physical activity participation from adolescence to adulthood found by other studies in Ireland, suggests that adherence to physical activity cannot be easily predicted and is a complex, multivariant issue that warrants further research.

The public health implications of the decline in adolescent involvement in physical activity will be enormous. An individual's risk for all-cause mortality, and in particular for premature death and/or morbidity from non-communicable diseases, is significantly increased by having a sedentary lifestyle. Thus there is a need for targeted physical activity promotion during adolescence, especially during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood. Given the decline in participation in team sports during this transitional period, we would support the recommendations of Aaron *et al* (2002) that more emphasis be placed on providing opportunities for adolescents to develop the skills necessary to participate in individual sports. Other research shows that individual sports are more likely to be maintained into adulthood.

Table 4: Comparison of adolescent and adult most popular sports (excluding walking)

	ADULT MALE	12-18 MALE	ADULT FEMALE	12-18 FEMALE
1st	Golf 17%	Soccer 70%	Swimming 17%	Basketball 38%
2nd	Soccer 13%	Gaelic football 56%	Aerobics/keep fit 10%	Gaelic football 36%
3rd	Swimming 12%	Hurling 30%	Cycling 3%	Swimming 33%
4th	Gaelic football 8%	Basketball 15%	Golf 3%	Soccer 27%
5th	Billiards/snooker 6%	Swimming 14%	Tennis 3%	Camogie 19%

Source: Adult data from Fahey *et al*.

Columns do not add up to 100% as respondents could choose more than one activity.

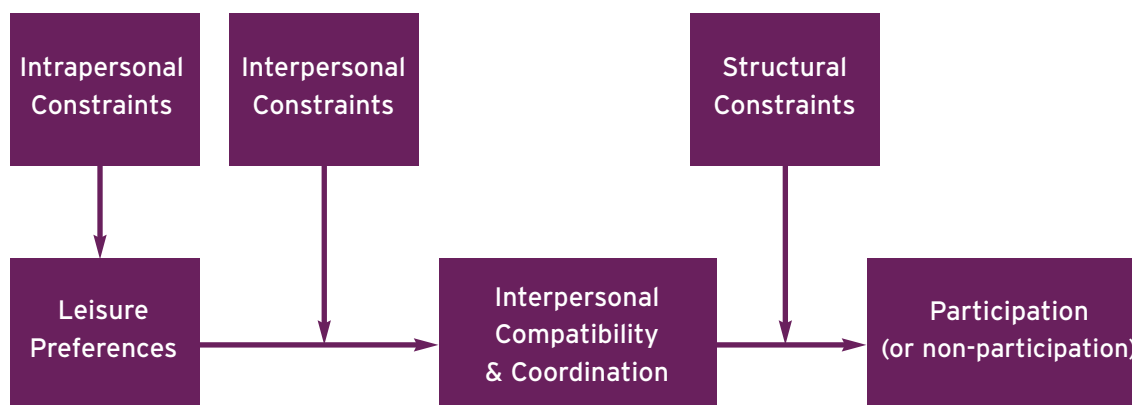
4. BARRIERS AND

SUPPORTS TO LEISURE

In order to best understand the barriers and supports young people experience with regard to leisure, this study uses the hierarchical model of leisure constraints developed by Crawford *et al* (1991). This model proposes that the barriers a person encounters and their ability, or inability, to overcome these affects participation, or non-participation, in leisure activities. Furthermore, the model proposes that barriers are encountered hierarchically (see Figure 3). Leisure preferences are formed, it is proposed, when *intrapersonal barriers* are absent or have, with supports, been overcome. Next, the person may encounter *interpersonal barriers*, particularly where a partner or group is required for the activity, as is the case, for example, in tennis, choir or scouts. Finally, participation will occur if there are no insurmountable *structural barriers*, such as a lack of money, time or transport.

From a public policy perspective, it is the latter – structural barriers and supports – that are of most interest. While the interplay between intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers is unlikely to be totally linear, the model does provide a useful framework for the examination of barriers and supports to leisure participation.

Figure 3: A hierarchical model of leisure constraints



Source: Crawford *et al* (1991)

INTRAPERSONAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS

This first level of barriers and supports to leisure participation involves personal characteristics, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Examples in this category include self-esteem, motivation and beliefs. This research shows that the majority of young Irish people have high levels of intrinsic motivation to do what they do in their free time. Most do not encounter intrapersonal barriers. Only 13% of young people do not enjoy joining new clubs and groups. Interestingly, over three-quarters of Irish adolescents enjoy competition, particularly boys and young men. Just over one-quarter of young people describe themselves as shy. (Interestingly, shyness is twice as common in the 6% of the adolescent population who are low in leisure motivation.) The vast majority of Irish adolescents do what they do in their free time out of choice and for enjoyment rather than because of external pressures.

Low self-esteem and a poor body image have been linked to low participation rates in leisure activities and to increased incidence of depression (Raymore *et al*, 1994). A significant finding from this study is that only just over half of girls and young women and three-quarters of boys and young men are happy with the way they look (see *Table 5*). This finding is similar to that of other Irish and international studies.

Table 5: 'I'm happy with the way I look' – by age and gender

	12 YEAR-OLD BOYS	12 YEAR-OLD GIRLS	17 YEAR-OLD YOUNG MEN	17 YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMEN
Strongly agree	28.9%	22.1%	27.9%	10.7%
Agree	49.5%	40.0%	57.1%	44.0%
Don't know	14.4%	18.9%	7.9%	15.3%
Disagree	4.1%	8.4%	4.3%	18.0%
Strongly disagree	3.1%	10.5%	2.9%	12.0%

INTERPERSONAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS

Interpersonal barriers and supports to leisure participation are those that arise from social interactions. Examples include parental and familial support or lack of support, peer support or negative peer influence, and relationships with coaches and leaders.

A very positive finding is that the vast majority of young Irish people have a high level of interpersonal support with regard to leisure. Parental support, in terms of parental permission, for the young people's leisure time choices is high (86%). Over 90% of young people report that they enjoy what they do in their free time. Over 87% report that they do what they do in their free time because they want to and over 93% of young people enjoy hanging out with their friends. There are small percentages of young people who report not enjoying hanging out with peers and low parental support for their leisure time choices. Boys in the 12-15 year-old age group are least likely to enjoy mixed sex leisure activities.

Just less than 50% of young people prefer leader-led leisure activities. A further 32% of respondents chose the 'don't know' response to the statement 'I like activities where there is a leader/instructor'. The high 'don't know' response to this statement is interesting and warrants further investigation.

From the focus groups undertaken, a striking finding was the frequency with which young people who were not attending school (and instead undertaking Youthreach training) spoke of being 'barred' from leisure facilities. The issue was not explored in depth and again further research in this area is warranted.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS

Structural barriers to leisure participation include lack of money, time, facilities or transport, weather, lack of resources or provision, and any other physical or material constraints on leisure.

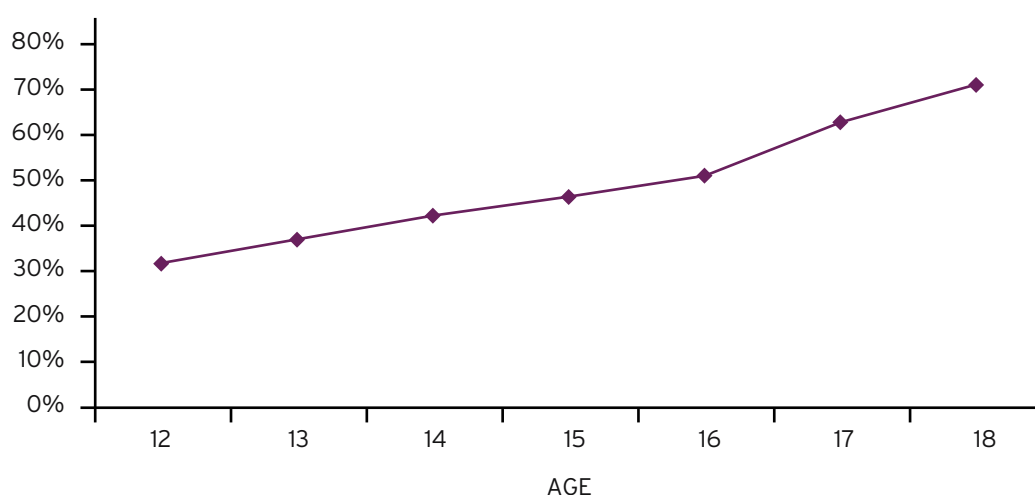
The majority of young Irish people do not experience financial barriers to leisure participation (see *Table 6*). Older adolescents from lower socio-economic groups are those most likely to experience financial barriers. This finding reflects the trend towards more commercial leisure as the individual progresses through adolescence (Hendry *et al*, 1993). Overall, one in seven young people do not have enough money to take part in the leisure activities that they would like to.

Table 6: Money as a barrier – by age and gender

	12 & 13 YEAR-OLD MALE (n=302)	12 & 13 YEAR-OLD FEMALE (n=311)	17 & 18 YEAR-OLD MALE (n=338)	17 & 18 YEAR-OLD FEMALE (n=325)
Strongly agree	5%	4%	5%	8%
Agree	6%	6%	9%	13%
Don't know	16%	13%	8%	14%
Disagree	40%	46%	48%	47%
Strongly disagree	33%	31%	30%	18%

Time as a barrier to participation in leisure activities increases dramatically with age, from 31% for 12 year-olds to 61% for 17 year-olds and 71% for 18 year-olds (see Figure 4). An interesting finding is that young people who work part-time do not report time as a barrier to leisure participation. This is in contrast to other Irish research (Morgan, 2000).

Figure 4: Time as a barrier – by age



Girls and young women spend significantly more time doing homework and studying than boys and young men. Approaching half of girls and young women (43%) agree that most of their free time is spent doing homework and studying, while less than one-third of boys and young men agree (29%). This gender difference is even starker when we focus on those in their Leaving Certificate year: 60% of young women agree that most of their free time is spent studying compared to only 28% of young men. This finding is interesting in the context of girls significantly out-performing boys in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations (State Examination Commission, 2003).

Older adolescents and those in rural areas are more likely to experience difficulties with transport. However, even among those who live in the countryside 57% do not report transport difficulties. The increase in transport difficulties with age is likely to reflect the broadening horizons of the late-adolescents' recreational sphere. Seventeen and 18 year-olds are likely to want to travel further from home for leisure activities and also they are likely to want to be out later at night.

One in seven young people do not feel safe going to and from activities in the evening. This sub-group is most likely to be female and urban dwellers. Those in the middle years of adolescence are more likely to feel unsafe than their younger or older peers.

Notwithstanding the high involvement rates reported above in the sections on sports, hobbies and community/charity groups, a majority of young people believe that there is very little leisure provision for adolescents in their locality (see Table 7). Rural dwellers are strongest in this belief, reflecting a lack of facilities and provision for rural adolescent leisure. No provision of, or facility for, the activity is the most common reason cited for not joining an activity that they would like to join.

Table 7: 'Very little leisure provision in my area' – by home place

	CITY	TOWN	VILLAGE	COUNTRYSIDE
Strongly agree	25.0%	35.2%	36.8%	42.7%
Agree	20.5%	18.6%	20.7%	25.4%
Don't know	10.7%	9.1%	10.5%	6.4%
Disagree	25.0%	22.3%	20.1%	17.2%
Strongly disagree	18.8%	14.8%	12.0%	8.3%

While Ireland does not experience climatic extremes, such as heavy winter snowfalls or searing summer heat, the weather is often cited as a barrier to leisure participation. Young people in this study were asked to respond to the statement 'Because of the weather I don't like outdoor activities'. Over two-thirds (68%) disagreed with the statement, suggesting that weather is not a barrier for the majority of young people. Despite a significant difference between western and eastern counties with regard to the number of wet days in the year, we found only a slight increase in the numbers reporting weather as a barrier between western and eastern coastal counties. Overall, for one in five young people, the weather is a barrier to their participation in outdoor activities.

Interpersonal and structural barriers have a major impact on the leisure opportunities of young people with a physical disability, sensory impairment and special needs. These young people often attend boarding school or travel a distance to school. This results in them having widely dispersed friendship groups and mitigates against them meeting up informally with friends to hang out, go to the cinema or play recreational sports. Transport, cost, equipment, access, provision and programming all pose difficulties that result in very low access to mainstream leisure provision for these minority groups. Dedicated provision varies hugely across the State: it would appear that Dublin has the best range of leisure provision for young people with disabilities and impairments.

DROP-OUT OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES

That young people drop out of activities as they progress through adolescence is completely natural and predictable. This study investigates the 'what' and 'why' of adolescent drop-out in Ireland.

Three-quarters of young people report that they have dropped out of an activity. The most common activities that girls and young women drop out of are dance (predominately Irish dance), basketball, drama and music. Drop-out among boys and young men is most common in soccer, martial arts and swimming.

By far the most common reason cited for drop-out is that the individual lost interest in the activity. This is not a surprising finding and previous research has shown that young people are likely to drop particular leisure activities as particular developmental needs are fulfilled (Kleiber *et al*, 1986; Kelly, 1987).

Other reasons for drop-out are, in order of importance, time, not liking the leader, skill level, peer drop-out, rules, age and cost. Not having a good enough skill level is cited as a reason

for drop-out by over one-fifth of the sample. Not surprisingly, this reason is highest in sports where skill level is closely associated with both success and enjoyment.

The profile of reasons for drop-out differs from activity to activity. Table 8 shows the reasons cited for drop-out across a range of popular activities. The percentages represent the number of people within each activity who gave that reason for drop-out.

Table 8: Reasons for drop-out – by activity

	DANCE	Gaelic FOOTBALL	SOCCER	YOUTH CLUB	MUSIC	SCOUTS/ GUIDES	SWIMMING	MARTIAL ARTS
Lost interest	57%	44%	50%	60%	65%	68%	36%	65%
Times didn't suit	33%	27%	36%	25%	38%	26%	43%	34%
Didn't like the leader	31%	29%	29%	17%	32%	39%	16%	28%
Skill level not good enough	14%	32%	27%	7%	24%	6%	17%	12%
Friends dropped out	18%	8%	9%	34%	8%	29%	16%	16%
No way to get there	9%	13%	11%	14%	3%	5%	24%	8%
Didn't like the rules	10%	8%	9%	16%	10%	17%	6%	15%
Felt I was too old	13%	2%	6%	2%	14%	29%	10%	6%
Felt I was too young	2%	4%	5%	4%	3%	3%	3%	5%
Cost too much	11%	2%	6%	9%	9%	7%	10%	9%
Bullying	0%	5%	5%	4%	1%	2%	0%	3%
Health/injury	2%	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%

Columns do not add up to 100% as respondents could choose more than one reason for drop-out.

BARRIERS TO JOINING NEW ACTIVITIES

To further the investigation of the barriers and supports that young people encounter with regard to leisure time, information was gathered on activities that they aspire to join and the barriers preventing them from doing so. Three-quarters of young people expressed a desire to join a new leisure activity. Seventy-five different activities were cited. The majority (65%) of the activities listed were sports. There are significant differences in the activities cited by urban and rural dwellers.

The most commonly cited barrier to joining a new activity is that the location of the activity does not suit the young person (see Table 9). Location is most likely to be a barrier for swimming and least likely to be an issue for those who would like to join Gaelic football. This reflects the ubiquitous coverage of GAA facilities and the poor provision of swimming pools, particularly public ones.

The second most common barrier is not knowing anyone else involved. Overall, nearly one-third of respondents identified this interpersonal barrier to participation. It is most likely to influence dance and swimming, and least likely to be an issue for soccer and Gaelic football. Other barriers include transport, not knowing how to join, time, cost, parental disapproval and age. Table 9 shows the reasons cited for not joining a range of popular activities. As with drop-out, the profile of reasons differs by activity.

Table 9: Barriers to joining – by activity

	SOCCER	DANCE	RUGBY	BOXING	SWIMMING	GAELIC FOOTBALL	DRAMA	YOUTH CLUB
Not located nearby	36%	43%	50%	43%	52%	21%	42%	30%
Didn't know anyone else	22%	40%	26%	30%	36%	24%	34%	27%
No transport	36%	30%	36%	26%	40%	18%	25%	27%
Didn't know how to join	10%	33%	22%	27%	19%	18%	27%	33%
Times didn't suit	26%	23%	25%	21%	32%	42%	26%	27%
Already too busy	19%	19%	29%	21%	20%	15%	11%	12%
Skill level not good enough	23%	14%	13%	8%	18%	28%	17%	7%
Cost too much	8%	23%	3%	6%	8%	4%	26%	5%
Parents didn't approve	5%	3%	13%	25%	0%	7%	6%	8%
Not offered for my sex	9%	2%	10%	10%	1%	6%	2%	0%

Columns do not add up to 100% as respondents could choose more than one barrier.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

In order to give voice to young people with additional needs, the three research questions that form the basis of this study (*see Introduction*) were explored in focus groups and interviews. The minority groups represented include young people with sensory impairments (visual and auditory), intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, members of the Traveller Community and those attending Youthreach training centres.

Not surprisingly, young people in these groups experience additional barriers, including:

- at the intrapersonal level, young people who leave school early appear to lack self-confidence with regard to leisure;
- at the interpersonal level, members of the Traveller Community and early school-leavers reported their experiences of being barred from leisure facilities as an issue;
- young people with sensory impairments (deafness and blindness) often have dispersed friendship groups due to the fact that they attend school in Dublin; this impacts negatively on their leisure opportunities in their home place;
- young people with physical and learning disabilities reported parental over-protectiveness as a barrier to leisure participation;
- with regard to structural barriers, it would appear that young people with additional needs experience more structural barriers to leisure than others, with transport, access, programming, finance and lack of facilities all featuring prominently.

For all of the minority groups investigated, there were examples of high quality, dedicated leisure provision through schools and other services. While positive about their experiences of dedicated leisure provision, integration with 'mainstream' youth leisure was an issue for all of the minority groups.

The authors wish to highlight that the sub-samples of young people from minority groups should not be taken as representative in the way that the main sample is. The research undertaken in these sub-studies was designed to broaden the sample so that minority groups were assured a voice. The findings from these smaller studies may serve as signposts for future research.

6. CONCLUSIONS

LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

This study attempts to provide a picture of the current leisure practices and preferences of young Irish people. It also gives an insight into the barriers and supports that young people encounter in accessing leisure. The broad geographical and socio-economic spread of the sample, coupled with the high level of engagement by respondents, increases confidence that the results accurately reflect the current situation and are generalisable.

There are a number of free-time activities that are almost universal across the adolescent population. Almost all young people watch television, listen to music, own a mobile phone, go to the cinema and enjoy hanging out with their peers.

'Hanging around outside' is an important leisure time activity for adolescents. Over 90% of adolescents of all ages enjoy hanging around with their friends. There is agreement in the literature of the normative nature and relative importance to the young person of this activity.

Sport is also an important leisure time activity. A large majority of young people (88%) in the sample reported involvement in at least one sport. However, there is a very significant decline in sports, particularly team sports, with age. This decline is particularly marked for girls and young women. Given the decline in participation in team sports, it may be worth placing more emphasis on providing opportunities for young people to participate in individual sports as they grow older. An interesting issue emerging from the school-based focus groups is that there should be exposure to a greater range of sports.

Dance is a very popular 'like to join' activity among girls and young women. It incorporates physical activity, artistic expression and cultural features and thus may have a significant contribution to make particularly in view of the fall-off in physical activity by girls and young women. It can also be done individually or as a group.

Most young people have at least one hobby. Just under two-thirds (65%) of the sample reported one or more hobbies. The most popular hobbies are playing a musical instrument, looking after pets and art or drawing.

Far fewer young people are involved in clubs/groups than in sports and hobbies. Just under one-third (32%) of the sample participated in one or more clubs/groups. The most popular were youth clubs/groups, choir/folk groups, voluntary work and scouts/guides. The relatively low involvement by Irish adolescents in clubs and groups is somewhat worrying since membership of such community and charity groups has been linked to increased levels of 'social capital', self-esteem, citizenship and an increased likelihood of the person volunteering in later life.

While this research provides a large amount of data on the leisure patterns of Irish adolescents in late 2004, it should not be used as a substitute for analysis of local needs.

BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS

The main purpose of the study was to explore the opportunities, barriers and supports that young people experience with regard to leisure. The study examined intrapersonal barriers and supports, interpersonal barriers and supports, and structural barriers and supports. The latter are those most amenable to policy intervention.

Intrapersonal barriers and supports include personal characteristics, beliefs and attitudes. This research showed that the majority of young Irish people have high levels of intrinsic motivation. In other words, they are self-motivated. Most do not encounter intrapersonal barriers. There is a small group (6%) of young people who appear to have low levels of engagement and enjoyment in their leisure time.

Low self-esteem and a poor body image are linked to low participation rates in leisure activities. A finding from this study is that just over half of girls and young women and three-quarters of boys and young men are happy with the way they look. This finding is similar to that of other Irish and international studies.

Interpersonal barriers and supports are those that arise from social interactions. Examples include parental and family support or lack of support, peer support or negative peer influences, and relationships with coaches and leaders.

A very positive finding from this study is that the vast majority of young people have a high level of interpersonal support when it comes to their leisure time activities. Parental support is high and the vast majority of young people enjoy hanging out with their peers.

Just under 50% of young people reported preferring leader-led activities. When coupled with the relatively small number of young people who are members of clubs/groups, this points to a potential issue with young people's experience of leaders, which may warrant the development and enhancement of leadership/coach development programmes targeted at adolescents. In focus groups undertaken with young people who were not attending school, a striking feature was the frequency with which they spoke of being 'barred' from leisure activities.

Structural barriers are a broad category of physical or material constraints on leisure that can impact on a person's participation. Over a range of structural barriers identified in the study, the findings show that:

- Notwithstanding the high involvement rates in a range of activities, a majority of young people believe there is very *little leisure provision for adolescents in their locality*. Young people from rural areas are strongest in this belief, reflecting a lack of facilities and provision for young people in rural areas.
- While the majority of young people do not experience *financial barriers* to leisure participation, 15% of young people do not have enough money to join the leisure activities that they would like to join. Older adolescents from lower socio-economic groups are those most likely to experience financial barriers.
- Older adolescents and those in rural areas are more likely to experience *difficulties with transport*. The increase in transport difficulties with age is likely to reflect the broadening of recreational activities by older adolescents, who are likely to want to travel further from home.
- *Safety* is also an issue. One in seven young people do not feel safe going to and from leisure activities in the evening. This group is most likely to be female and urban dwellers.
- *Time constraints* increase substantially with age. Outside of the time spend in school, many young people spend large amounts of time studying and doing homework, with girls and young women spending significantly more time doing this than boys and young men.
- *Weather* was a barrier to recreation for one in five of the sample.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Transport, cost, equipment, access, provision and programming – all pose difficulties for young people with a physical disability, sensory impairment and special needs in accessing mainstream leisure provision. Dedicated provision varies hugely across the State. It would appear that Dublin has the best range of leisure provision for young people with disabilities.

In conclusion, the study shows that young people in Ireland are engaged in a wide range of leisure and recreation activities. These range from structured activities, such as sports, to more casual activities, such as hanging out with friends. In determining the barriers and supports to leisure, cognisance was given to factors internal to and external of the individual young person. Overall, the study paints a positive picture with regard to the level of intrinsic motivation for leisure and recreation among young people in Ireland. Significant gender, age, socio-economic and geographical differences do emerge when structural barriers and supports are investigated. These barriers are compounded for young people with additional needs.

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