



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

1. What is the study's background?

This study was funded by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (now the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) under the National Children's Research Programme. The study was undertaken by Dr. Áine de Róiste and Joan Dinneen, both of the Cork Institute of Technology.* The report was independently peer-reviewed and published in 2005.

2. What is the study's purpose?

This study was commissioned by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (formerly the National Children's Office) with the overall objective of informing policy in the area of young people's recreation and leisure. The specific objectives of the study were 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 regards to recreation and leisure?

This briefing note summarises the method of research, key findings and conclusions of the study. The full report is available on www.dcyia.ie

3. How was the study undertaken?

The methods employed were designed to achieve the above objectives. The study was based on:

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

Past research theory and pilot focus groups were used in designing the survey questionnaire. It was translated into Irish for use in Gaeltacht schools. 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).** The authors travelled to 90% of the school settings to administer the questionnaires; a trained research assistant administered the other 10%. Respondents were made aware of the rationale for the 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.

* The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

** Crawford, D., Jackson, E. and Godbey, G. (1991) 'A hierarchical model of leisure constraints', *Leisure Sciences*, Vol. 13, pp. 309-20.

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.

4. What are the key findings?

4.1 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.

Only 2% report never playing *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. The opposite is true of *reading*: over 70% of girls and young women read every day or most days, compared to only 50% of boys and young men.

Other general free time activities include:

- » Over 90% enjoy *hanging around* outside with their friends.
- » About one-quarter attend *night clubs or discos* every week, while 1 in 5 never attend.
- » About one-quarter attend the *cinema* every week, while less than 5% never attend.
- » Over half of girls and young women *look at shops* every week, compared to less than one-third of boys and young men.

4.2 Hobbies

Outside of their general free time activities (see above), nearly two-thirds of young people report one or more hobbies (see Table 1). The most popular hobbies are playing a musical instrument, looking after pets, and art. Dance is very popular with girls and young women, and playing pool or snooker is a popular hobby for boys and young men. Girls and young women report more hobbies than boys and young men, and the higher a person's socio-economic background the more hobbies they are likely to have. Participation in hobbies was found to diminish across the adolescent years.

Table 1: Most popular hobbies, by gender

	Total (n = 1,475)	Boys (n = 660)	Girls (n = 815)
1	Play musical instrument 30.7% (n = 454)	Pets 28.7% (n = 190)	Dance 34.9% (n = 285)
2	Pets 21.5% (n = 318)	Pets 19.2% (n = 127)	Pets 32.3% (n = 264)
3	Art 21.4% (n = 317)	Pool/snooker 16.5% (n = 109)	Art 26.6% (n = 217)
4	Dance 20.3% (n = 300)	Technology 15% (n = 99)	Pets 23.8% (n = 191)
5	Cooking 10.4% (n = 148)	Art 14% (n = 97)	Cooking 16% (n = 131)

4.3 Community/Charity groups

Nearly one-third of young people are members of one or more social groups. The most popular groups are youth clubs/groups, choirs/folk groups and groups that engage in voluntary work. Girls and young women report greater participation in these groups and those living in rural locations are more likely to be members of groups than urban dwellers. Participation in these groups was found to diminish across the adolescent years.

4.4 Sports

Almost 9 out of 10 young people play at least one sport, either competitively or recreationally (see Table 2). Participation in sport was found to decline 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. 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 at school.

Table 2: Most popular sports, by gender

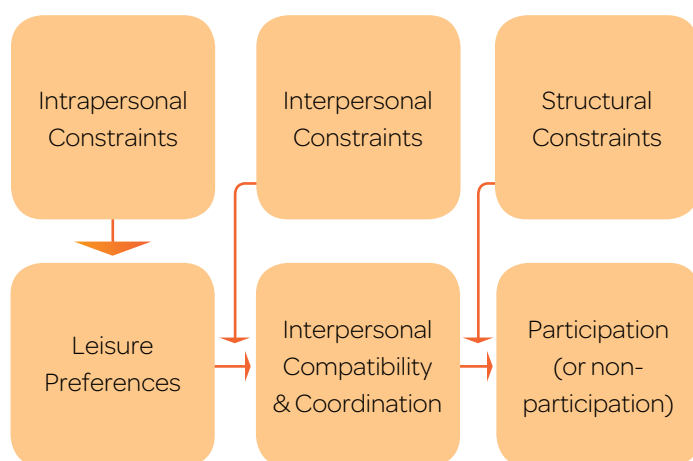
	Boys (aged 12-18)	Girls (aged 12-18)
1	Soccer 70%	Basketball 38%
2	Gaelic football 56%	Gaelic football 36%
3	Hurling 30%	Swimming 33%
4	Basketball 15%	Soccer 27%
5	Swimming 14%	Camogie 19%

4.5 Barriers and supports

For the purposes of this study, barriers and supports were sub-divided into intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural categories (see Figure 1):

- » intrapersonal barriers and supports include personal characteristics, beliefs and attitudes;
- » interpersonal barriers and supports are based on the young person's relationships with family, peers, youth leaders and others;
- » structural barriers and supports include practical issues, such as cost, time, transport, weather and safety issues.

Figure 1: A hierarchical model of leisure constraints



Source: Crawford *et al* (1991)

The majority of young people in Ireland have high levels of intrinsic motivation for engagement in leisure and do not encounter *intrapersonal barriers*. However, a small number (6%) have low levels of engagement and enjoyment in their leisure time; low self-esteem and poor body image are linked to low participation rates in leisure activities.

The majority of young people in Ireland have a high level of *interpersonal support* with regard to leisure. Parental support for young people's leisure time choices is high (86%). Over 90% of young people reported that they enjoy what they do in their free time and over 93% reported enjoying hanging out with their friends. A striking finding from the focus groups with young people who were not attending school was the frequency with which they spoke of being barred from leisure facilities. Further research in this area is warranted.

As regards *structural barriers and supports*, the majority of young people at the time of this study did not report financial barriers to their participation in leisure activities. Older adolescents from lower socio-economic groups were the most likely to experience *financial barriers*. *Time* as a barrier to participation increases dramatically with age, from 31% for 12-year-olds to 61% for 17-year-olds and 71% for 18-year-olds. Almost half of girls and young women (43%) reported that most of their free time is spent doing *homework and studying*, while less than one-third of boys and young men (29%) reported this. Older adolescents and those in rural areas are more likely to experience difficulties with *transport*. This increase in transport difficulties with age is likely to reflect the broadening horizons of the late adolescent's recreational sphere. One in 7 young people do not *feel safe* going to and from leisure activities in the evening; this sub-group is most likely to be girls living in towns or cities. Notwithstanding the high involvement rates reported on hobbies, community/charity groups and sports (see above), the majority of young people believe that there is very *little leisure provision* for adolescents in their locality. Those living in rural areas are strongest in this belief.

Other areas covered in this research included reasons for dropping-out of leisure and barriers to joining activities, as well as findings related to young people with additional needs.

5. What are the conclusions?

Given the nature of the study, there were multiple findings within each area of leisure explored. The following is a short list of broad conclusions:

1. **The majority of young people in Ireland have high levels of intrinsic motivation for engagement in leisure.**
2. **There is a small, but striking proportion of young people (6%) 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 are likely to have particular needs with regards to leisure provision.
3. **There is a marked decline in engagement in sports, hobbies and community/charity groups across the adolescent years.** This finding is consistent with previous research in the area.



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Check out www.dcy.ie for full report of study

6. What are the recommendations?

Since this study was commissioned specifically to inform national policy in the area of young people's recreation and leisure, the authors were instructed not to make recommendations. The published policy, *Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007), is available at the DCYA website (www.dcy.ie).

7. What are the benefits of the study?

This study provides a picture of the leisure practices and preferences of young people in Ireland in the mid-2000s. It also gives an insight into the barriers and supports that they feel they encounter in accessing leisure.