

What children want to know about health, happiness and emotional wellbeing.

Natasha Clarke¹, Priscilla Doyle¹, Colette Kelly¹, Gail Cummins², Jane Sixsmith¹, Siobhan O'Higgins¹, Michal Molcho¹ & Saoirse Nic Gabhainn¹.

Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway¹.

Institute of Technology, Sligo².

INTRODUCTION

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the WHO Europe. The overall aim is to increase our understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context (see www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc). There is increasing recognition that children can and should be more engaged in all stages of the research process, not just in providing data to researchers.

AIM

The purpose of this study was to explore student's views of the questions contained in the HBSC survey. It is also an objective of this study to progress towards involving young people in the HBSC research process.

METHODS

A participatory research approach was adopted. This process aims to give more control to, and places greater emphasis on, the research participants.

Sample: Schools were selected from the Department of Education and Science website. Rural schools in Galway and urban schools in Dublin were randomly selected. These included primary and post-primary schools (DEIS and non-DEIS). Within the primary schools 5th and 6th classes participated, and in post-primary schools Transition Year (TY), 4th and 5th year groups participated. In total 9 schools participated with 10 workshops with 19 groups.

Outline of Participatory Workshops

Introduction: A brief overview of the HBSC study was provided to the students.

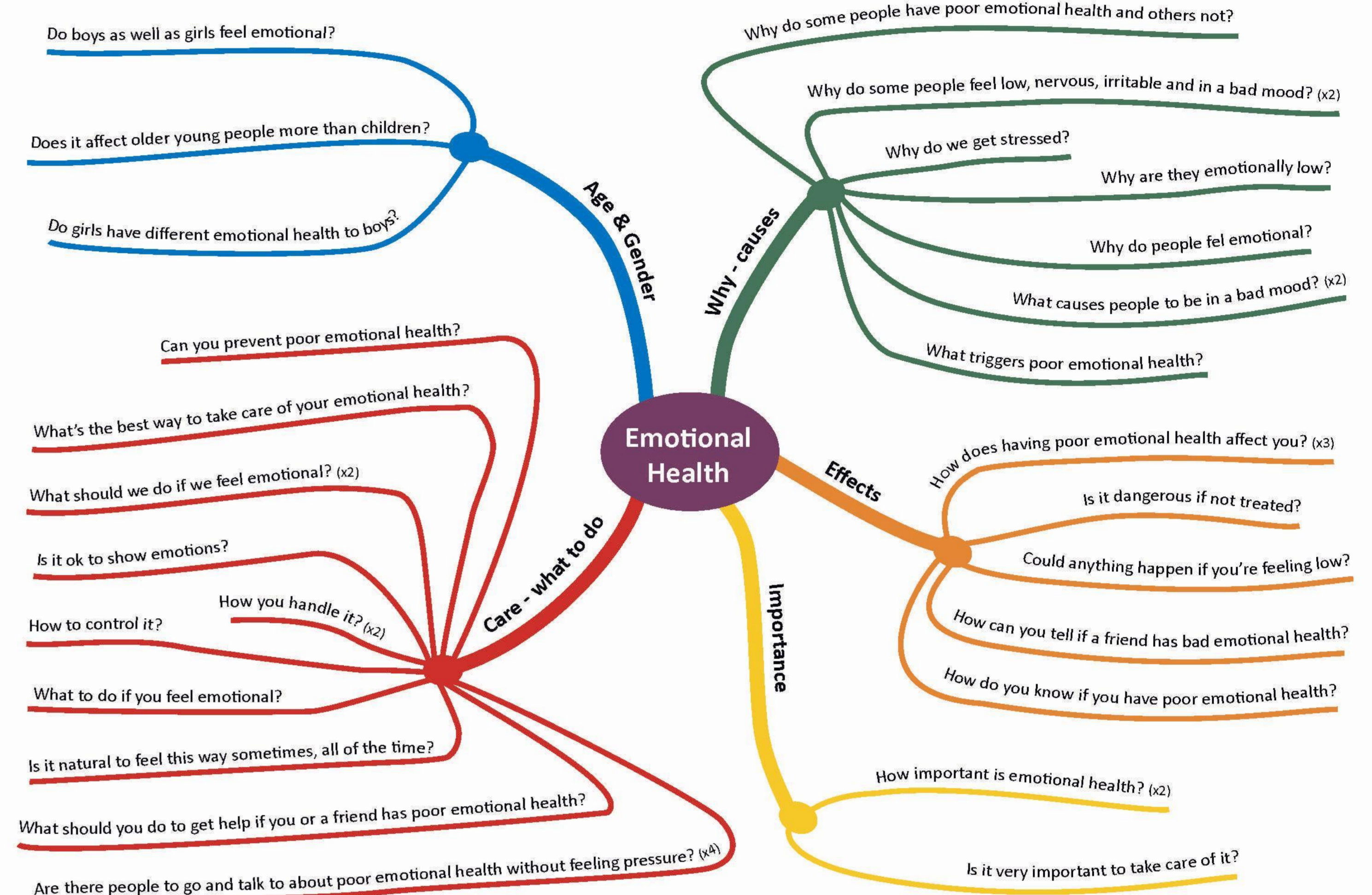
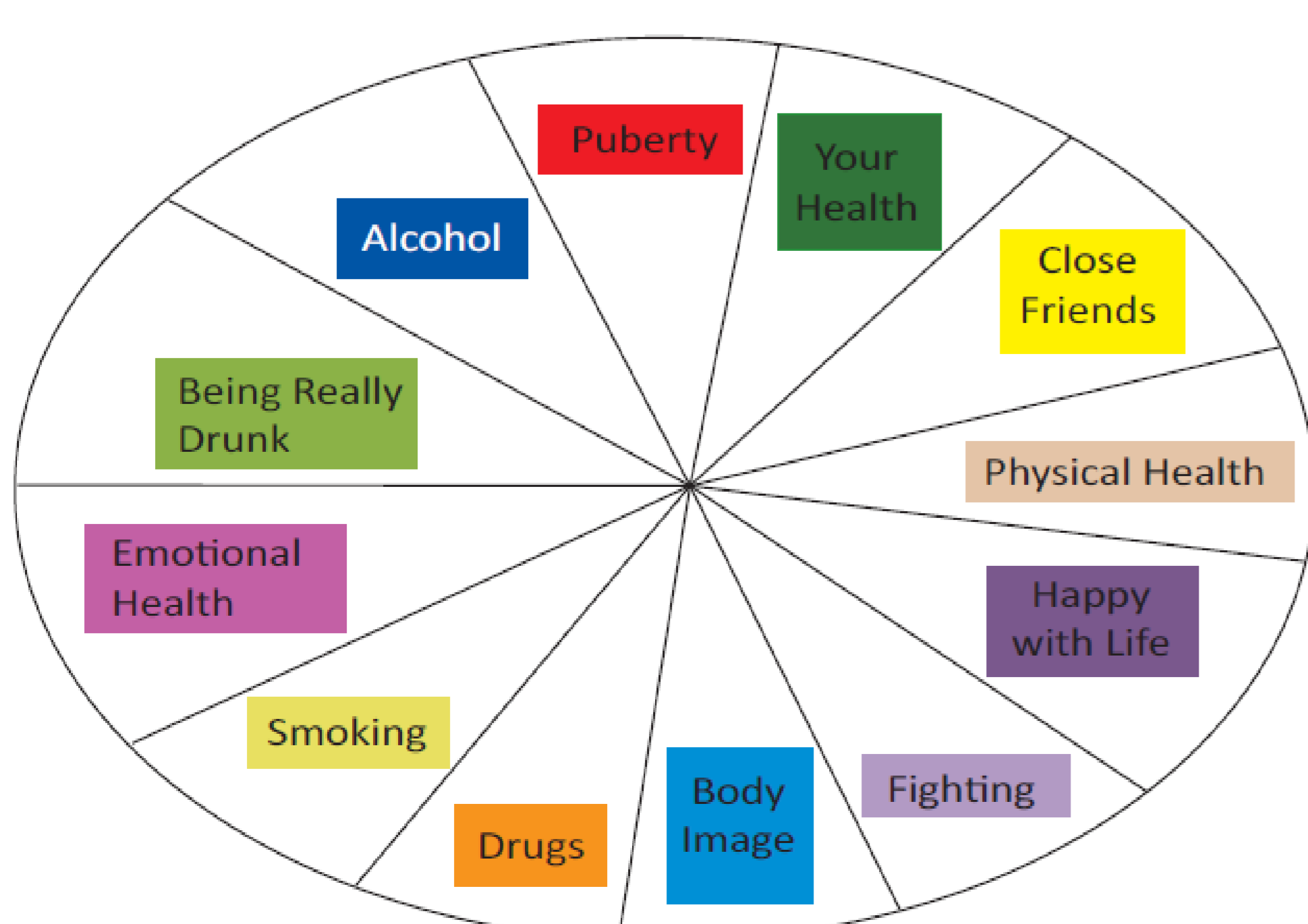
Group Game: The purpose of this activity was to encourage students to feel comfortable to work with the researchers and each other during the workshop.

Group Contract: The students agreed to follow certain principles during the workshop including respect and listening to each other.

Snap Game (card game): A pack of 51 cards, each labelled with a HBSC topic were given to the groups, e.g. physical activity, tooth brushing. The cards were divided evenly among group members and going clockwise in a circle, each student placed a topic card on the table and stated whether they thought it was 'interesting' or 'not interesting'. The group then discussed the classification, resulting in two separate piles of cards: those labelled 'not interesting' were removed. Then each group spread the pile of 'interesting' cards on the table and ranked the topics they found most 'interesting' and would like to know more about. Once the group had decided on their highest ranked 'interesting' cards, the other cards were removed.

Pizza chart construction: Pizza charts were prepared before the workshops. These were large cardboard cut-outs of circles sub-divided into 12 sections. Each group received a blank pizza chart and art materials. Students were requested to paste their top 12 cards ranked most 'interesting' onto each pizza slice. Then they were invited to write on the surrounding space of each pizza slice what they would like to know about the specific topic.

Example of Pizza Chart:



RESULTS

The 12 highest ranked topics that participants found most interesting were, in order; alcohol, puberty, drugs, being really drunk, smoking, fighting, your health, body image, physical health, emotional health, happy with life and close friends.

Health was the seventh highest ranked HBSC topic; prioritised by 9 out of 19 groups. The largest theme discussed within this theme was 'get and stay healthy'. The children had questions relating to exercise and nutrition, get and staying healthy, unhealthy behaviour, personal health information e.g. 'how can you get healthy?', 'Do you live longer if you are healthy?', and 'why are some children sick?'.

Emotional Wellbeing was the tenth most highly ranked HBSC topic; prioritised by 8 out of the 19 groups. The largest theme that emerged was 'care – what to do'. The children had questions relating to importance, effects, age and gender e.g. 'How does having poor emotional health effect you?', 'Do girls have different emotional health to boys?', 'Can you prevent poor emotional health?'.

Happiness was the eleventh most highly ranked HBSC topic; prioritised by 8 out of 19 groups. The largest theme discussed was 'how'. The children had questions relating to benefits and effects, how important is it to be happy?, Gender differences and how many e.g. 'What difference it makes if you're happy with life?', 'What to do if your not happy?', and 'Are most young people happy with life?'.

CONCLUSION

Within this study children clearly articulated the HBSC topics that were of most interest to them and what they would like to know about these topics, resulting in a reference document for those working in health practice and policy. All of the questions young people have, that emerged through this study, relating to health and wellbeing need to be answered both through the school and out-of-school settings.

These findings have potential to impact on future research and practice. This research has identified the content and type of health information young people feel they need in relation to their health and wellbeing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Department of Health, Ireland. We would like to thank the students, teachers and Principals for giving their time to take part in this survey.