

Weight concerns among boys in the Republic of Ireland

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Body weight and body image concerns are common among adolescents and various strategies are used to achieve an ‘ideal’ body weight or shape⁽¹⁾. The type of body weight concern can differ by gender and associated risk and protective factors observed for girls may also differ for boys.

For this study, data from the 2006 Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study were employed to investigate the prevalence of weight concerns among boys in Ireland. In addition, because the family environment has the potential to influence weight concerns^(2–4), associations between family meal times, relationships and family structure and reported weight concerns among boys were explored.

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children is a school-based survey with data collected through self-completion questionnaires administered in the classroom. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Ireland collected data in 2006 from school children, aged 10–18 years (*n* 10 334). Ethical approval was granted for the study and consent from schools, parents and children was obtained.

Boys who reported that they were currently dieting or doing something else to lose weight and those who expressed a desire to lose weight were classified as having a body weight ‘loss’ concern. Those boys who reported a desire to gain weight were classified as those with a body weight ‘gain’ concern. Associations between family meal times, communication, maternal employment, family structure and weight concerns were expressed in OR from logistic regression analysis in PASW 18.

	10–11 years % (<i>n</i>)	12–14 years % (<i>n</i>)	15–17 years % (<i>n</i>)
No weight concern	74.3 (413)	69.3 (1747)	68.5 (1418)
Weight ‘loss’ concern	23.2 (129)	24.9 (627)	22.0 (455)
Weight ‘gain’ concern	2.5 (14)	5.8 (147)	9.5 (197)

	Desire to lose weight	<i>n</i>	Desire to gain weight	<i>n</i>
Breakfast with mother/father every day	0.73***	4748	0.57***	3904
Evening meal with mother/father every day	0.93	4745	0.71**	3899
Open communication with father	0.66***	4343	0.50***	3600
Open communication with mother	0.67***	4414	0.55***	3656
Father present in the home	1.19	4498	1.12	3687
Mother working	0.98	4537	1.09	3723

****P*<0.001; ***P*<0.01; **P*<0.05. Analyses were controlled for age.

A desire to gain weight increased with age, whereas weight ‘loss’ concerns remained relatively stable with age. Boys who reported frequent family meal times and good communication with their mothers and fathers were less likely to report any weight concern.

Body weight concerns among boys in Ireland are prevalent. Communicating these findings to parents and practitioners alike is important. Further exploration of both the risk and protective factors for weight concerns among boys will broaden the evidence base and have important implications for practice.

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