

# Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2005/06

Top line Results

January 2007

## Contents

- General Health
- Diet and Nutrition
- Cigarette Smoking & Drinking
- Mental Health
- Obesity
- Breast screening and cervical smear tests
- Physical Activity
- Allergies



Commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

This bulletin presents some of the key findings from the third Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2005/06.

Central Survey Unit was commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to conduct a survey on the health and wellbeing of the Northern Ireland population.

The survey covered a broad range of issues

## General Health

Overall, 63% of people said their health had been 'good' in the previous 12 months, 23% said it was 'fairly good' and 15% said it was 'not good'.

36% of men and 40% of women indicated that they have a long-standing illness.

The proportion of men and women with a long-standing illness increased with age. 12% of men and 14% of women aged 16-24 had a long standing illness in comparison to 68% of men and 70% of women aged 75 and over.

Respondents were asked if they had ever been informed by a health professional that they had high blood pressure. 22% of men and 28% of women said they had been diagnosed with high blood pressure. The incidence of high blood pressure increased with age for both men and women.

33% of men and 38% of women said they had consulted a doctor regarding back pain on at least one occasion.

14% of men and 18% of women reported

and was designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 16 and over living in Northern Ireland.

The survey was carried out by Central Survey Unit between February 2005 and March 2006 on a random sample of 5000 private addresses in Northern Ireland. The results presented are based on information from 4245 individuals.

that they had experienced severe back pain in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Respondents were asked if they had ever experienced certain medical conditions (Table 1). 10% had been told by a doctor that they were suffering from asthma and 6% from angina. 76% stated that they had not experienced any of the conditions mentioned.

**Table 1. Circulatory illness, diabetes and asthma reported by respondents aged 16 and over.**

Common Conditions	All	Men	Women
Angina	6%	6%	5%
Heart attack	3%	5%	2%
Heart murmur	4%	3%	5%
Other kind of heart trouble	4%	4%	3%
Stroke	2%	2%	1%
Diabetes (Not during pregnancy)	4%	4%	4%
Asthma	10%	9%	12%
COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease e.g. chronic bronchitis)	2%	2%	3%
None of these	76%	76%	75%
Base	4240	1743	2497

## Diet and nutrition

Just over a quarter (27%) of adults said they eat on average five portions of fruit or vegetables per day. Women were more likely to have eaten on average five portions of fruit or vegetables per day (31%) than men (22%).

Respondents aged 55-64 (34%) were more likely to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day than those aged 75 and above (18%) or 16-24 (20%).

Table 2 illustrates food products consumed

by respondents on most days.

**Table 2. Products consumed most days**

Products	All	Men	Women
Processed meat/ chicken products	17%	23%	12%
Potatoes	66%	66%	65%
Chips, Roast Potatoes	11%	14%	8%
Biscuits	46%	49%	43%
Sweets and chocolate	25%	28%	23%
Crisps, tortilla chips	23%	27%	20%
Cakes, buns, desserts	16%	18%	15%
Sugary fizzy drinks	31%	35%	27%
Base	4240	1745	2495

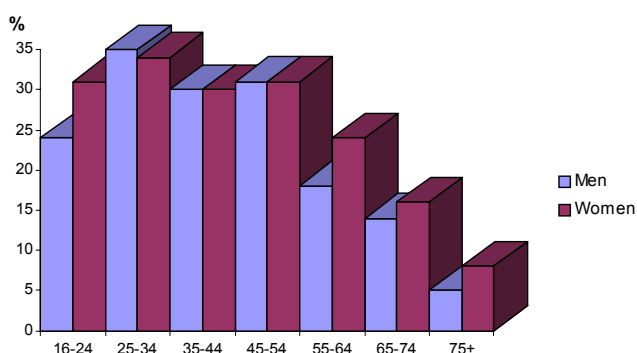
## Cigarette Smoking & Drinking

26% of people aged 16 and over reported that they currently smoke cigarettes – 25% of men and 27% of women, 30% had given up smoking and 44% had never smoked cigarettes.

The prevalence of cigarette smoking was highest in the 25-34 age group (35%) and lowest amongst those aged 75 or above (7%).

13% of smokers smoked an average of 25 or more cigarettes a day. Men who smoke were more likely than women to be heavy smokers, 17% and 10% respectively.

Figure 1. Smoking prevalence by gender and age



Overall, more than three in four (78%) people were current drinkers, 6% used to drink and 15% were lifetime abstainers. More than four in five (83%) men and just less than three in four (74%) women were current drinkers.

A higher percentage of people in the younger age groups than in the older age groups drink alcohol. More than four in five (86%) in the 16-24 age group compared to less than half (48%) in the 75 and over group drink alcohol.

Respondents were asked about the types of alcoholic drinks they had in the last 12 months. 50% had consumed beer, lager, stout or cider, 50% had consumed wine/champagne, 42% had consumed spirits whilst 17% had consumed alcopops.

Men were much more likely than women (78% and 22% respectively) to drink beer, lager, cider or stout. Women were more likely to drink wine or champagne, 60% of women having consumed these in the last 12 months.

Men were more likely than women to drink above the sensible weekly limit. Almost one in four (23%) male drinkers exceeded their sensible weekly limit of 21 units; while almost one in seven (15%) female drinkers drank over their 14 unit sensible limit.

The highest proportion of those drinking above recommended levels was reported in the 16-24 age group for both men and women (31% and 34% respectively). The lowest proportions were amongst those aged 75 or above - 8% and 6% for males and females respectively.

## Mental Health

Respondents were asked about the level of stress they had experienced over the previous 12 months. Overall, 10% of persons aged 16 and over had experienced a great deal of worry or stress and 67% had experienced little or no worry or stress.

Women were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress than men, 11% compared with 8%.

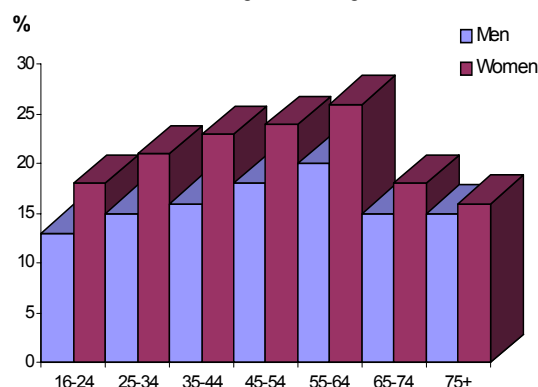
19% of all people aged 16 and over showed signs of a possible mental health problem such as depression, by scoring highly on the GHQ12. Women were more likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem (21%) than men (16%).

Respondents were asked about the amount of social support they received from family and friends.

Overall, 39% of people aged 16 and over experienced a lack of social support, with 13% experiencing a 'severe lack' of social support.

Men were more likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support (15%) than women (12%).

Figure 2. Possible indication of a mental health problem by gender and age



## Obesity

Obesity levels were estimated using the Body Mass Index. This is a widely used indicator of body fat levels which is calculated from a persons height and weight.

As part of the survey height and weight measurements were sought from all individuals aged 2 or above at cooperating households.

### Adults

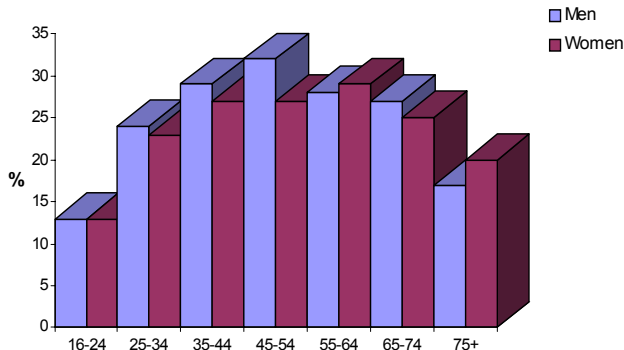
Overall, 59% of adults measured were either overweight (35%) or obese (24%). A similar proportion of men (25%) and women (23%) were obese. Men were more likely (64%) than women (54%) to be either overweight or obese.

Obesity was most prominent amongst the middle aged. Almost a third (29%) of 45-54 year olds were obese, compared with 13% of those aged 16-24.

29% of young men aged 16-24 and 32% of young women were either overweight or obese.

Before their height and weight was measured, respondents were asked how they felt about their weight. Overall, 47% felt their weight was about right, 39% felt they were too heavy and 4% felt they were too

Figure 3 Obesity levels by age and sex



light. Women (45%) were more likely than men (33%) to feel they were too heavy.

### Children

The calculation of BMI in children depends on the age and sex of the child as well as their height and weight.

There is some debate over the most appropriate way to use BMI to measure childhood obesity rates in the UK. One approach uses the United Kingdom National BMI percentiles. Using this approach, 18% of children aged 2-15 were obese, 20% of boys and 15% of girls. Just over a third (36%) were either overweight or obese. There are some concerns that this method could overestimate obesity.

An alternative approach to measuring childhood obesity which is gaining acceptance was put forward by the International Obesity Task Force. Using this approach, nearly one in ten (8%) children were obese, 8% of boys and 7% of girls. Just over one in four (26%) were either overweight or obese. There are some concerns that this method could underestimate obesity.

Children were also asked a few questions regarding how they felt about their weight. Just over two thirds (70%) of children aged between 8 and 15 felt they weighed about the right amount, 14% felt they were too heavy, 8% felt they were too light and 7% were not sure.

Children aged 8 or above were asked if they were trying to lose weight, gain weight or not trying to alter their weight. The majority, (91%) were not trying to alter their weight, 7% were trying to lose weight and 2% were trying to gain weight.

## Breast screening & cervical smear tests

86% of women aged 20-64 had taken a cervical smear test. Of these women, 35% had taken the test in the previous year, 26% between one and two years ago, with almost one in ten (9%) indicating it was more than five years since they had the test.

Those women who had never taken a cervical smear test, but were invited/advised to do so, were asked about reasons why they had not taken the test. Just over a quarter (28%) said they were too embarrassed, 22% said they couldn't go at a convenient time, and 21% were afraid it might be too painful.

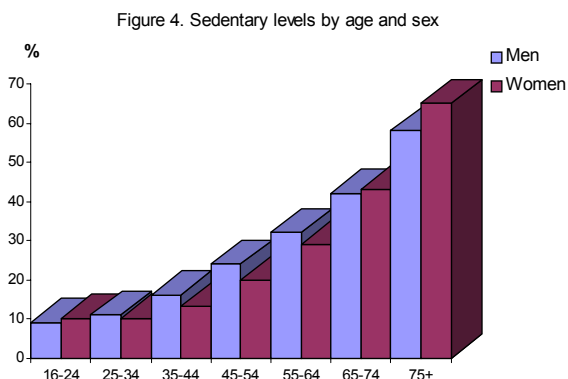
Women aged 50-64 were asked if they had ever undergone breast screening. 84% had undergone breast screening at some point in their lives.

34% of those who had been screened had undergone breast screening in the previous year, 34% between a year and two years ago, 26% between two and five years ago, 4% more than 5 years ago and 2% could not remember when they were screened.

## Physical Activity

Within the definitions used in the survey, 23% of all people aged 16 and over can be classed as sedentary. That is, they have not performed any activity of at least a moderate level, lasting 20 minutes, on at least one occasion in the last 7 days.

The elderly are considerably more likely to be sedentary than the young. 63% of people aged 75 and over were sedentary in comparison to only 10% of 16-24 year olds.



30% of all people take above the recommended level of physical activity of at least 30 minutes per day on 5 days a week.

Men (33%) were more likely than women (28%) to have taken above the recommended level of physical activity.

The highest proportion of adults taking above the recommended level of physical activity was reported in the 25-34 age group (38%), falling to 13% in those

aged 75 and over.

36% of respondents had taken part in a sporting activity during the previous 4 weeks, including teaching, coaching, training and practice sessions.

Men were more likely than women to have taken part in sporting activities in the previous 4 weeks, 40% and 33% respectively.

Participation in sporting activities during the previous 4 weeks fell from 67% of those aged 16-24 to 42% of those aged 35-44, 19% of those aged 55-64, 11% of those aged 65-74 and 4% of those in the 75 or above age group.

The most popular sports/ exercises were - going to a gym/ exercise bike/ weight training (33%), swimming (32%), exercises (e.g. press-ups, sit-ups) (31%) and football or rugby (25%).

Respondents were asked how often they had gone on a walk of at least 15 minutes at a time in the last 4 weeks. This included country walks and walks in the course of their work or to and from work.

Just over three fifths (61%) of respondents took at least one walk of 15 minutes or more a week.

Overall, 23% of people said that they were not regularly active in the previous six months and did not intend to be so in the next six months.

29% of men and 33% of women said they had an injury/disability/medical condition which limits their physical activity; however this did not necessarily stop them from taking above recommended levels. 16% of respondents who said they had an injury/disability/medical condition of this sort took above the recommended level of physical activity.

## Allergies

Respondents were asked if they had any allergies and a quarter (26%) reported at least one allergic reaction. The most common allergies were to grass/pollen (12%), house dust (5%), antibiotics (5%), certain foods (4%) and domestic pets/ horses or animals (3%).

Just under a quarter of people who reported an allergic reaction to foods were allergic to milk (23%), wheat (18%), fruit (16%) and eggs (14%).

Just over a quarter (28%) of people who reported food allergies were allergic to other foods including cheese products, spicy foods and gluten products.

6% of people with an allergy, (2% of all respondents) had been told by their doctor that they had suffered a life threatening allergic reaction or anaphylactic shock brought about by their allergy.

### For additional copies of this bulletin please contact:

Central Survey Unit  
McAuley House  
2-14 Castle Street  
Belfast BT1 1SY

Tel: (028) 90348244

E-mail: [stuart.bennett@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.bennett@dfpni.gov.uk)

Visit the CSU website

[www.csu.nisra.gov.uk](http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk)