

Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001

Bulletin number 4

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HEALTH AND ILL-HEALTH

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



This is the fourth in a series of bulletins produced from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001.

This bulletin presents some of the key findings relating to health and ill-health. The bulletin focuses on 8 main areas: General health, long standing illness, detection of high blood pressure, circulatory illness, asthma and diabetes, respondents diagnosed with angina, respondents diagnosed with asthma, back pain and musculoskeletal conditions.

No causal inference is implied by the figures quoted in this bulletin as other explanatory factors such as age, social class etc needs to be considered.

In addition to this bulletin, tables of all the key areas analysed by all the classificatory variables along with the survey questions and a technical supplement are available on-line. Information on how to access these is provided at the end of this bulletin.

General health

Overall, 52% of people said their health had been 'good' in the previous 12 months, 31% said it was 'fairly good' and 17% said it was 'not good'.

Age and sex

Women were more likely than men to say their health was not good in the previous 12 months, 18% compared with 15%.

Reports of poor health increased substantially from 8% of those aged 16-44 to 25% of those aged 45 and over.

Socio-economic group (SEG)

The proportion of people who reported that their health was not good in the previous 12 months was highest in the unskilled SEG (25%) and lowest in the skilled non-manual SEG (10%).

Employment status

Respondents who were economically inactive were almost 5 times as likely as those in employment to have said their health was not good in the previous 12 months (28% compared with 6%).

Cigarette smoking and drinking

Current cigarette smokers were more likely to say their health was not good (20%) than ex-smokers (16%) or those who have never smoked (15%).

14% of respondents who drink within the recommended levels and 13% of those who consumed more than the recommended levels said their health was not good in the

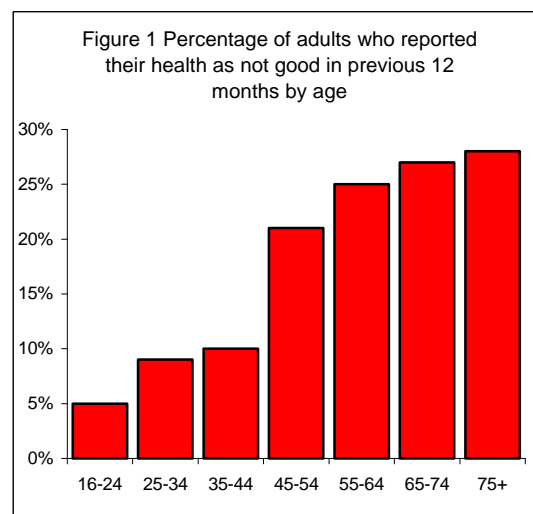
previous 12 months compared with 35% of ex drinkers and 23% of lifetime abstainers.

Self perception of weight

Respondents who said they weigh less than they should were more likely to report their health as not good (29%) than those who said they weigh more than they should (18%) or just about the right amount (12%).

Level of physical activity

Respondents who were sedentary were more likely to say their health was not good in the previous 12 months (42%) than those who undertake an intermediate level of physical activity (9%) or above recommended physical activity levels (7%).



Long standing illness

Age and sex

38% of both men and women said that they have a long-standing illness disability or infirmity.

The proportion of men and women with a long-standing illness disability or infirmity increased with age. 13% of men and 14% of women aged 16-24 had a long standing illness in comparison to 65% of men and 67% of women aged 75 and over.

26% of men and 29% of women indicated that they have a health problem or disability that substantially limits their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Socio-economic group (SEG)

Limiting long standing illness was lowest in the professional/ managerial SEG (19%) and skilled non-manual SEG (20%) and highest in the unskilled SEG (36%).

Employment status

Respondents in employment were less likely to have a

limiting long-standing illness (10%) than respondents who were unemployed (33%) or economically inactive (47%).

Cigarette smoking and drinking

There was no significant difference in the proportions of current smokers, ex-smokers or those who have never smoked who reported a limiting long-standing illness.

Approximately a quarter (23%) of respondents who drink had a limiting long-standing illness compared with a half (49%) of ex-drinkers and two-fifths (39%) of lifetime abstainers. The higher proportion of older people who do not drink may partially explain this.

Self-perception of weight

Respondents who said they weigh less than they should were more likely to have a limiting long standing illness (36%) than those who said they weighed more than they should (30%) or just about the right amount (22%).

Detection of high blood pressure

Age and sex

Women were more likely than men to have had high blood pressure detected by a health professional (27% compared with 19%). The proportion of women with high blood pressure reduced to 21% when high blood pressure during pregnancy was excluded. 9% of all women had high blood pressure detected during pregnancy.

Young women in the 16-34 age group were more than twice as likely as men to have had high blood pressure detected, 15% compared with 7%. This difference is related to the high proportion of women in this age group that had high blood pressure detected during pregnancy (10%).

Socio-economic group (SEG)

The prevalence of high blood pressure was lowest amongst the skilled non-manual SEG (21%) and the prof/ managerial SEG (22%) and highest amongst the unskilled SEG (31%).

Employment status

15% of respondents in employment had high blood pressure detected by a health professional, compared with 22% of those who were unemployed and 35% of those who were economically inactive.

Stress

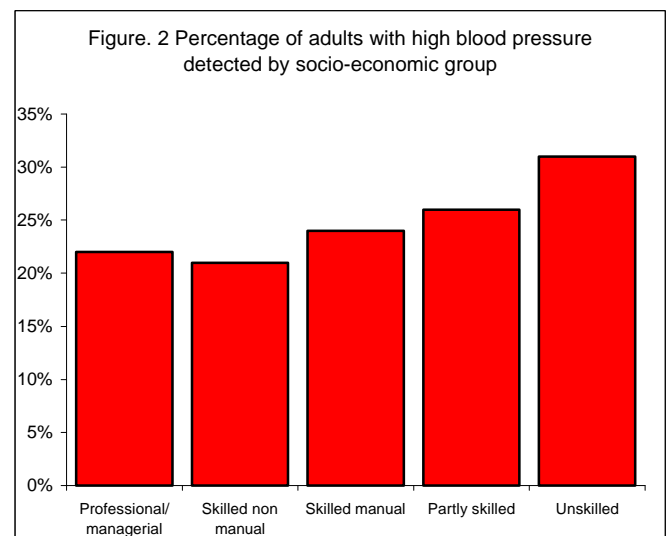
Respondents who had experienced quite a lot or a great deal of worry or stress in the previous 12 months were more likely to have had high blood pressure detected (26%) than those respondents who had experienced just a little or no worry or stress during this time (23%).

Physical activity levels

Respondents who were sedentary were over twice as likely to have had high blood pressure detected as those respondents who undertook more than the recommended level of physical activity (38% and 18% respectively).

Advice or treatment for high blood pressure

76% of respondents who received treatment or advice about their high blood pressure had been advised about their diet, 44% about exercising, 26% about the amount they smoke and 15% about the amount they drink.



Circulatory illness, asthma and diabetes

Respondents were asked about circulatory illness, diabetes and asthma that had been diagnosed by a doctor or health professional.

The most frequent condition mentioned was asthma (11%), followed by angina (7%). Diabetes (other than during pregnancy), heart attack, heart murmur and any other kind of heart trouble were mentioned by 3% of respondents. Other heart troubles mentioned included; blocked arteries, irregular heartbeat and palpitations.

76% of both men and women said that they had not experienced any of the conditions mentioned. The majority (85%) of respondents in employment had not experienced any of the conditions mentioned compared with approximately three quarters (76%) of the unemployed and two thirds (66%) of those who were economically inactive.

Figure 3. Circulatory illness, diabetes and asthma reported by respondents.

Common Conditions	All	Men	Women
Angina	7%	7%	6%
Heart attack	3%	4%	2%
Heart murmur	3%	2%	4%
Other kind of heart trouble	3%	3%	3%
Stroke	1%	2%	1%
Diabetes (During pregnancy)	NA	NA	1%
Diabetes (Other than during pregnancy)	3%	4%	2%
Asthma	11%	10%	11%
None of these	76%	76%	76%
Bases	4690	1968	2722

Respondents diagnosed with angina

7% of respondents had been diagnosed as having angina at some point in their lives. 70% of this group had experienced angina in the previous 12 months.

Age and sex

7% of men and 6% of women had been diagnosed by a doctor as having angina.

Angina was most prevalent amongst the elderly, with almost no one under 45 reporting angina. The proportion of respondents diagnosed with angina increased substantially from 5% of those aged 45-54 to 11% of 55-64 year olds and 20% of those people aged 65 and above.

Employment status

Respondents who were economically inactive were more

likely to have been diagnosed with angina (13%), than those who were either employed (1%) or unemployed (3%), possibly reflecting the older profile of this group.

Cigarette smoking and drinking

5% of respondents who smoke cigarettes on a regular basis had been diagnosed as suffering from angina, compared with 8% of ex-smokers and 7% of those who have never smoked.

Respondents who never drink or used to drink were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with angina, 12% and 11% respectively, as current drinkers, 5%.

These differences may be partially explained by the higher proportion of older people who do not drink or smoke cigarettes.

Respondents diagnosed with asthma

11% of respondents had been diagnosed by a doctor as having asthma. Approximately one quarter (26%) of asthma sufferers had suffered an asthma attack during the previous 12 months. 27% of asthma sufferers had controlled their asthma over the previous 12 months with medication.

Age and sex

10% of men and 11% of women had been told by a doctor that they had asthma.

Young people were more likely to be asthma sufferers than older people. 12% of respondents aged 16-44 had been diagnosed with asthma compared with 10% of those aged 45 and above.

Employment status

Respondents who were unemployed or economically inactive were more likely to have been diagnosed with asthma (16% and 12% respectively), than respondents in employment, (9%).

Cigarette smoking and drinking

13% of cigarette smokers had been diagnosed with asthma compared with 9% of respondents who never smoke.

There was no significant difference in the percentage of respondents diagnosed with asthma across the various drinking levels:- 11% of drinkers, 13% of ex-drinkers and 10% of lifetime abstainers were diagnosed with asthma.

Back pain

Age and sex

39% of men and 42% of women had consulted a doctor regarding back pain.

There was no significant difference between the proportions of men and women who had consulted a doctor regarding back pain in most age groups, however women in the 16-24 age group were more likely than men to have consulted a doctor regarding back pain (23% and 14% respectively).

Overall, the proportion of people who had consulted a doctor regarding back pain increased with age from 19% of 16-24 year olds to 50% of those aged 65-74 and then fell to 37% of respondents aged 75 and above.

Socio-economic group (SEG)

Respondents from a manual occupational background were more likely to have consulted a doctor regarding back pain than those from a non-manual background (44% and 40% respectively).

Stress

Respondents who experienced quite a lot or a great deal of worry or stress were more likely to have consulted a doctor regarding back pain (49%) than respondents who have experienced just a little or no worry or stress (36%).

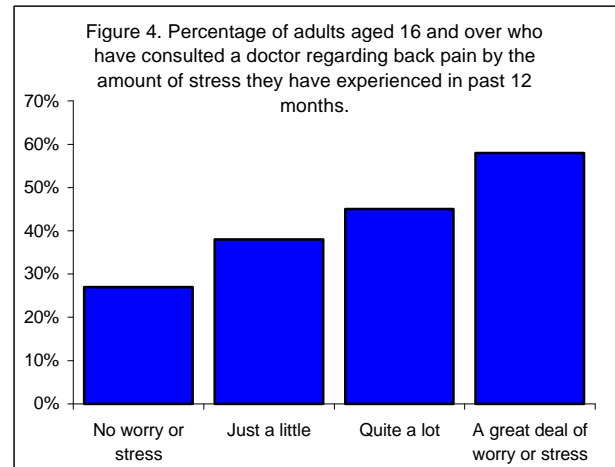
Possible mental health problem

Respondents exhibiting signs of a possible mental health

problem were more likely to have consulted a doctor regarding back pain (56%) than those respondents without a possible mental health problem (37%).

Severe back pain in previous 12 months

Approximately one fifth (21%) of respondents had experienced severe back pain in the previous 12 months. Women were more likely than men to have experienced severe back pain during this time (22% and 18% respectively).



Musculoskeletal conditions

Respondents were asked if they suffer from any recurrent or continuous pain, swelling or stiffness in any of their joints, their neck or their back.

42% of all adults aged 16 and over said they experienced recurrent or continuous pain, swelling or stiffness in any of their joints, their neck or their back. Women were more likely than men to suffer from recurrent or continuous pain, 43% and 40% respectively.

The elderly were over three times as likely to suffer from recurrent pain in any of their joints than the young, 58% of those aged 55 and above compared with 19% of those aged 16-24.

Respondents from a manual occupational background were more likely to suffer from recurrent pain (47%) than

respondents from a non-manual background (37%). Respondents who were affected by recurrent pain, swelling or stiffness were then asked to indicate which parts of their bodies were affected. 33% of these people indicated their upper body only was affected, 27% lower body only and 40% both upper body and lower body.

Approximately half (47%) of adults affected by recurrent pain in their joints said that the recurrent pain, swelling or stiffness limited them in walking or climbing the stairs, 46% had problem sleeping, 34% said they had difficulty gripping, turning or holding things, 32% had difficulty in reaching up for things and 28% had no difficulty doing any of the things mentioned.

For additional copies of this bulletin or for the detailed tables and technical report, please contact:

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