

# Men in Northern Ireland: Report 6 June 2010

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The Men in Northern Ireland (MINI) series is produced by ARK, a joint initiative between Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. Its aim is to make material on the social and political life of Northern Ireland available to the widest audience.

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This factsheet was produced to inform Men's Health Week 2010. More information can be obtained from the Men's Health Forum in Ireland at [www.mhfi.org](http://www.mhfi.org)

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## Men and physical activity

### Key facts

- 21% of men in Northern Ireland (NI) and 18% in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) take part in physical activities daily.
- 19% of men in NI and 23% of men in RoI never do this.
- Younger men are more likely to be physically active.
- The most popular activities for men are soccer, golf, fitness and walking.
- Three quarters of men who take part in physical activity get a lot or a fair amount of enjoyment out of it.
- Most men take part for health reasons, as well as to meet people. Competition and looking good are also reasons for younger men.
- 44% of 10-11 year old boys think that they don't get enough sport or PE at school, and a half think they get the right amount.
- 61% of boys enjoyed all kinds of PE at school.

### Introduction

Physical activity – or the lack of it – is consistently in the news. Public health messages are that physical activity can benefit every aspect of health: regular exercise reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, osteoporosis and depression. It also reduces stress, improves sleeping patterns, builds-up bone and muscle strength and helps to control weight.

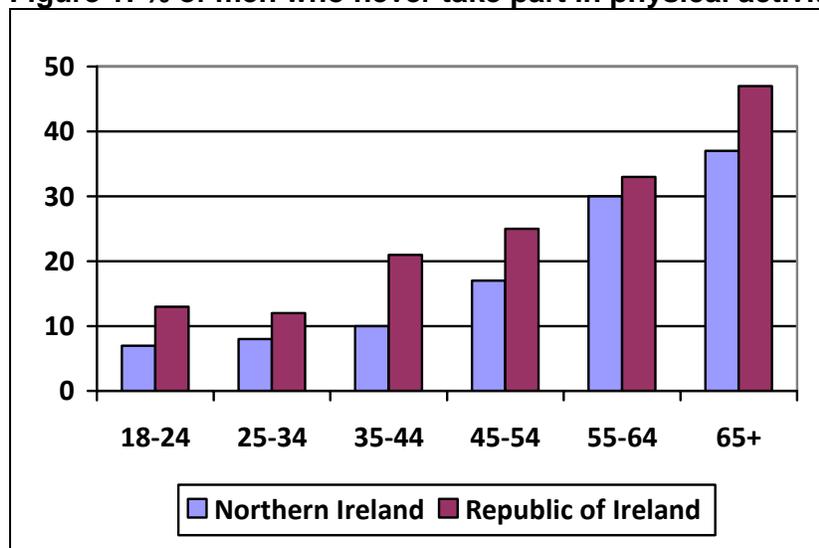
Linking in with Men's Health Week 2010, this factsheet explores survey data relating to men and physical activity in Ireland, North and South. The data come from responses to the Leisure Time and Sports module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). As part of the ISSP, the same module of questions is asked in over 40 countries worldwide. In Northern Ireland, this module was incorporated into the 2009 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, and 470 men completed the module. In addition, 915 men participated in the relevant Irish survey, which was undertaken in 2007.

### Frequency of physical activity

Approximately one in five men said that they took part in physical activities – such as sports, going to the gym or going for a walk – on a daily basis (21% in Northern Ireland, and 18% in the Republic), with slightly higher proportions doing so several times a week. At the same time, around one in five men said that they *never* do these things (19% in the north, and 23% in the south).

There were statistically significant differences by age, with younger men being much more likely to participate in physical activities. In Northern Ireland, only 7% of those aged 18-24 never did, compared with 37% of those aged 65 years or over (see Figure 1). In the Republic, the figures were 13% and 47% respectively (see Table 2).

**Figure 1: % of men who never take part in physical activity, by age group**



Attending sporting events as a spectator is an activity undertaken by approximately two thirds of men, but on an infrequent basis – see Table 1. As with participation in physical activities, there is a statistically significant age dimension, with younger men much more likely to attend than those in the older age groups.

**Table 1: How often do you attend sporting events as a spectator?**

	%	
	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Daily	2	<0.5
Several times a week	8	9
Several times a month	15	23
Several times a year or less often	38	36
Never	36	30
Can't choose	<0.5	2

In summary, then, a higher proportion of men participate in sport than attend sports events as spectators. However, the rate of participation is slightly higher in Northern Ireland than in the Republic, whilst the reverse is true for spectators.

Most men said that they watch sport on TV, with football – soccer and Gaelic football – being the sport most identified.

## Types of activity

The most popular sports or physical activity that respondents took part in most frequently include soccer, golf/mini-golf, fitness and walking. The type of activity undertaken by men varies by age. For example, in Northern Ireland, soccer is the sport played most frequently by one half of men aged 18-24 years, but it is not mentioned by any men in the oldest age group. Conversely, golf is not identified by any men in the youngest age group, but is the sport played most frequently by a quarter of men in the oldest age group, who are aged 65 years or over).

## Why do it?

Taking part in physical activities is a positive experience for three quarters of men who take part: around one half of men say that they get a great amount of enjoyment, with a further quarter getting a fair amount of enjoyment. Only 8% of men in Northern Ireland, and 5% of the Republic of Ireland say that they get no or not much enjoyment out of it – see Table 2.

**Table 2: Level of enjoyment from taking part in physical activities such as sports, going to the gym, going for a walk**

	%*	
	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
No enjoyment	2	1
Not much enjoyment	6	4
Some enjoyment	19	15
A fair amount of enjoyment	24	28
A great amount of enjoyment	49	51

\* excludes men who say that they never do this.

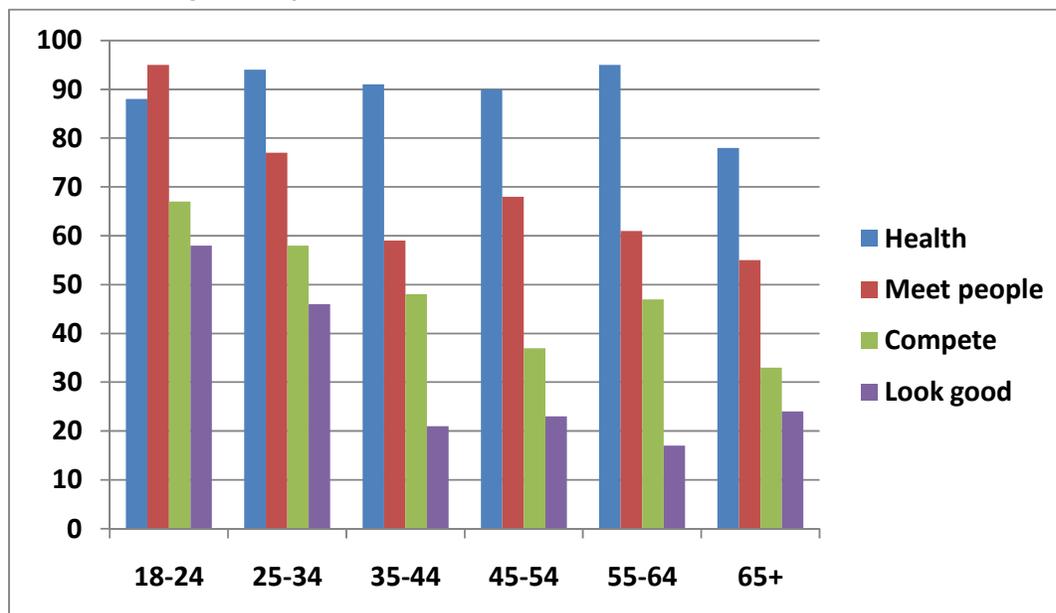
Physical or mental health was a significant factor in men taking part in sports or games, with over one half of men identifying this ‘very important’ reason. The second most important reason was more social - to meet other people. Competing against others and looking good were less important factors, although competition was rated as very important by approximately one in five men (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Importance of reasons for taking part in sports or games**

	% saying very important	
	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Physical or mental health	54	55
Meet other people	31	36
Compete against others	17	21
To look good	11	15

Health is a major reason for taking part in sports or games across all age groups, whilst other reasons are more age specific. Figure 2 shows the breakdown by age group for men in Northern Ireland. Nearly all 18-24 year olds (95%) said that meeting people is a very or somewhat important reason for them taking part in sports or games. In contrast, this was less of a factor (55%) for men aged 65 years or over. Competition and looking good is an issue for two thirds of the youngest age group, but less so for men in other age groups. A similar pattern can be seen among men living in the Republic of Ireland.

**Figure 2: Reasons for taking part in sports or games, by age group (% saying very or somewhat important), Northern Ireland**



### Funding for sport

More than half of respondents thought that Northern Ireland’s government should spend more money on sports: 21% strongly agreed, and 37% agreed. In the Republic of Ireland, support for more funding for sport was higher – 24% strongly agreed, and 41% agreed. As might be expected, there were differences in opinion depending on how often respondents took part in physical activities. Thus, in Northern Ireland, 72% of men who took part in sport or physical activities daily agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 51% of those who never did. In the Republic of Ireland, the figures were similar (77% and 58% respectively). Similarly, those men who got a great amount of enjoyment from taking part in physical activities supported extra funding, compared with those who get little or no enjoyment.

### Children and sport

There was general agreement for the idea that taking part in sports develops children’s character, with more than eight out of ten men in both areas agreeing to this statement to some degree (88% in Northern Ireland, and 82% in the Republic).

Initial findings from the 2010 Kids’ Life and Times Survey of Primary 7 children in Northern Ireland (aged 10 or 11 years) show that more than four out of ten boys (44%) thought that they do not get enough sport or PE at their school. Approximately one half thought that they got the right amount, and only 1% thought that there was too much. Boys were generally happy with the type of sport and PE classes that they received – 61% said that they enjoyed all kinds of PE and would like more of it at school. Very few boys (2%) said that they did not enjoy PE at all. Just over one quarter of boys said that would like to do different types of sport or exercise, with the most commonly identified sports being football, rugby, tennis and basketball.