

Is school participation good for children?

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Child Participation

- Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989)
- The Irish National Children's Strategy (2000) acknowledges children's capacity to participate and has, as first goal, that children will have a voice in all matters that effect them.

As a Health Promotion Research Centre

- Participative Research Processes (PRP) with children
- Health Promoting Research?

School Participation

- Pupil participation in school is a term used to 'embrace strategies that offer pupils opportunities for active involvement in decision-making within their schools' (Flutter, 2007, 344).
- Research has shown that increased democracy, demonstrated in genuine participation, benefits both the teachers and the students: better relationships and improved learning experiences (MacBeath *et al.*, 2001; Fielding, 2001).
 - But what about health and well-being?

Healthy participation?

- Providing an appropriate space for the students to participate genuinely in relevant aspects of decision-making processes at school is one of the key tasks of a democratic health-promoting school (Simovska, 2004).
- Research has yet to address a number of issues surrounding participation in schools
 - Do we need special (decision-making) types of participation?
 - Is participation an outcome in itself – or are there other (health) benefits?
 - Do patterns vary by student gender and age?

Research questions

- To explore associations between school participation and health and well-being among school students
 - **Participation in school** – expressing own views, organising activities and taking part in making rules
 - **School related outcomes** – perceived academic performance and liking school
 - **Health and well-being outcomes** – self-rated health, happiness and life satisfaction

HBSC - background

- A cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe
- HBSC was initiated in 1982 and is conducted every 4 years. Ireland has been involved since 1998
- HBSC 2006 involved more than 180,000 children from 41 countries



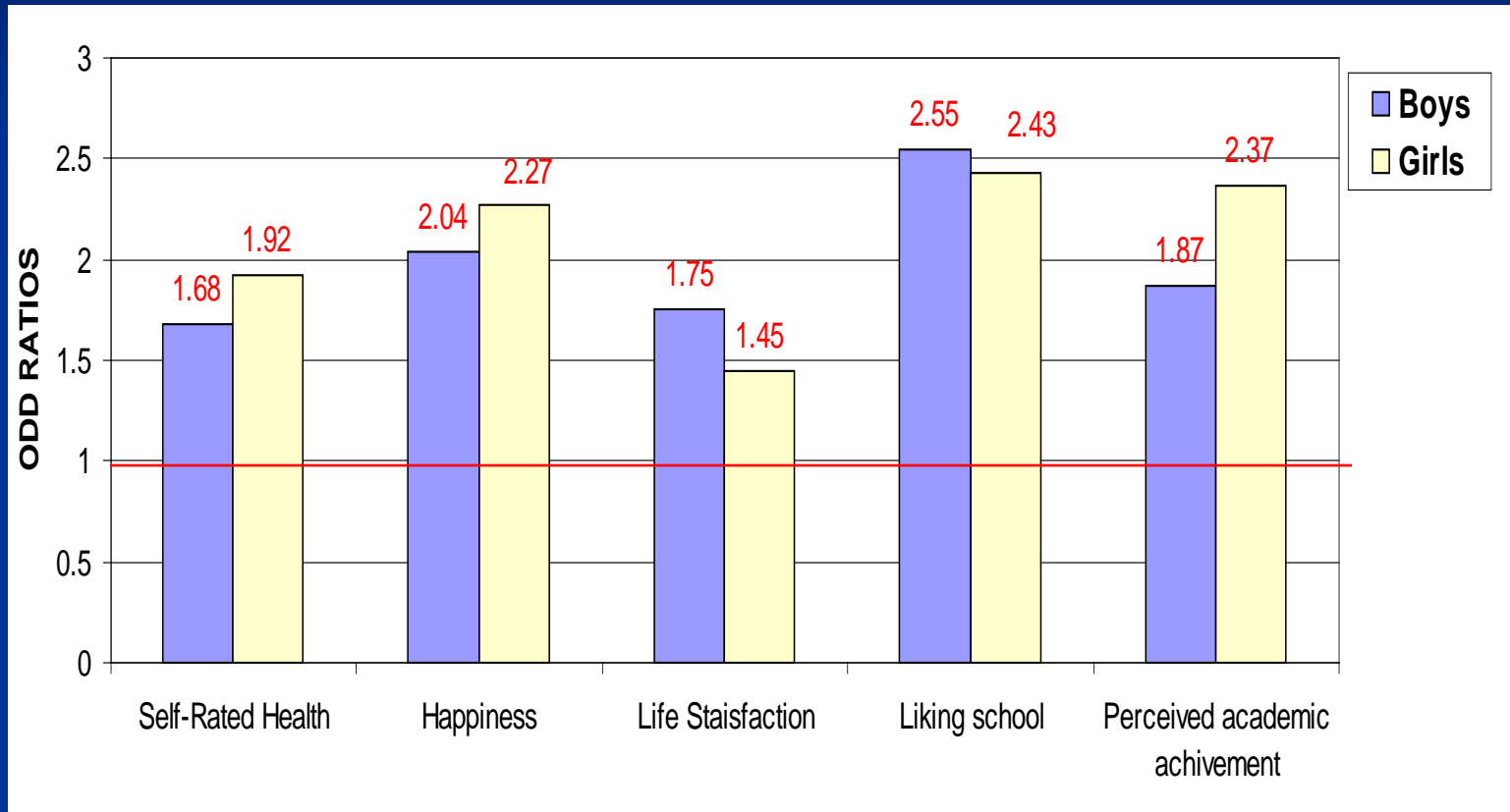
HBSC Ireland - methodology

- Nationally representative sample of school-aged children
- Consent from schools, parents & children
- In-school, self-completion questionnaire
- Ethical approval from the NUI Galway REC
- 215 primary and post-primary schools took part
- Children in 5th class to 5th year were invited to partake n = 10,334 students (10-18 years).

Results

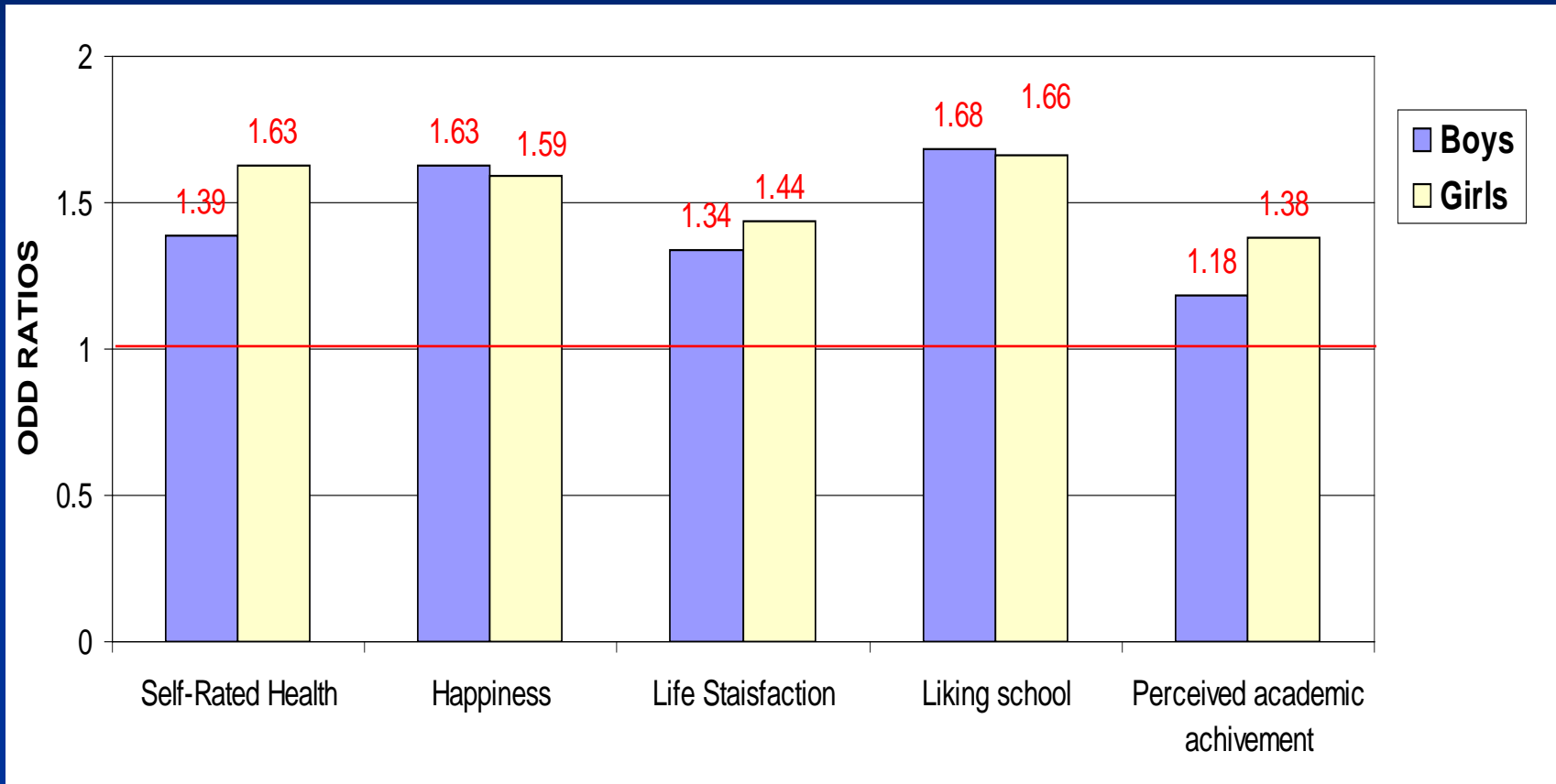
- Encouraged to express views
 - 63% overall
 - Higher among girls
- Take part in organising school events
 - 58% overall
 - Higher among girls
- Take part in making school rules
 - 23% overall
 - Decreases with age for both genders

Encouraged to express views



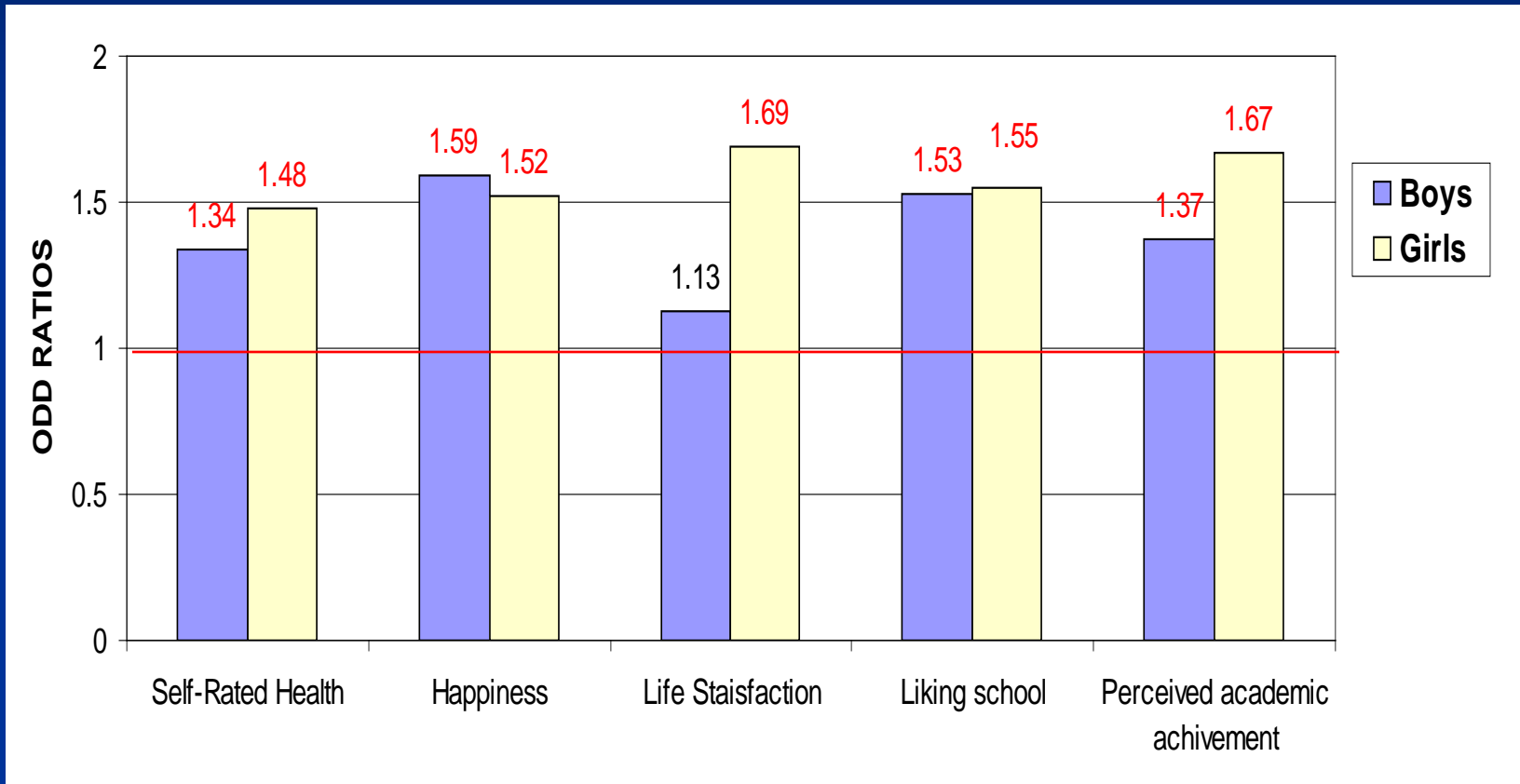
Odds are stronger for younger students of both genders

Organising events



Odds are stronger for older students of both genders

Participate in making school rules



Odds are stronger for younger students

Discussion

- Participation varies and is generally lower among older students
- Participation is (consistently) associated with a range of school, health and well-being outcomes
- Different types of participation might be more important at different ages
- Longitudinal studies need to confirm patterns
- Higher levels of participation should be encouraged – on health as well as educational grounds
- Health promoters need to work with educationalists to achieve this
- Students should validate whether participation is ‘real’.

Acknowledgements

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- Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs
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