SENSE OF BELONGING

The Galway Healthy Cities Project, which is part of a World Health Organization (WHO) initiative, aims to promote the health and wellbeing of all in Galway City through everyone working together. As part of the WHO project, the Galway City Health and Wellbeing Survey was conducted by NUIG Health Promotion Research Centre during October and November 2007. The aim of the survey was to get the views of people living in Galway City on the issues affecting them and what they think would make Galway a better place to live. General health and lifestyle factors were also documented. A representative random sample of over 1,000 people in the City aged 18+ were selected to complete the questionnaire in their own homes, with 587 respondents.

Galway Healthy Cities Project
Gaillimh Tionscnamh na gCathracha Sláintiúla
Galway City Development Board
Bord Forbartha Cathrach na Gaillimhe
ciste na gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant accounts fund
HPRC Health Promotion Research Centre
National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging to one's family, friends, and community promotes one's health by providing social support. A sense of belonging has been linked to better health, particularly psychological and social health (Berkman, 1995).

Residency in Galway City

Participants were asked how long they had lived in Galway City. Just over one quarter (28%, n=154) reported living in Galway City more than ten years; just under a quarter (22%, n=122) less than a year; with the remaining half (51%, n=285) between one and ten years (see Figure 13.1).

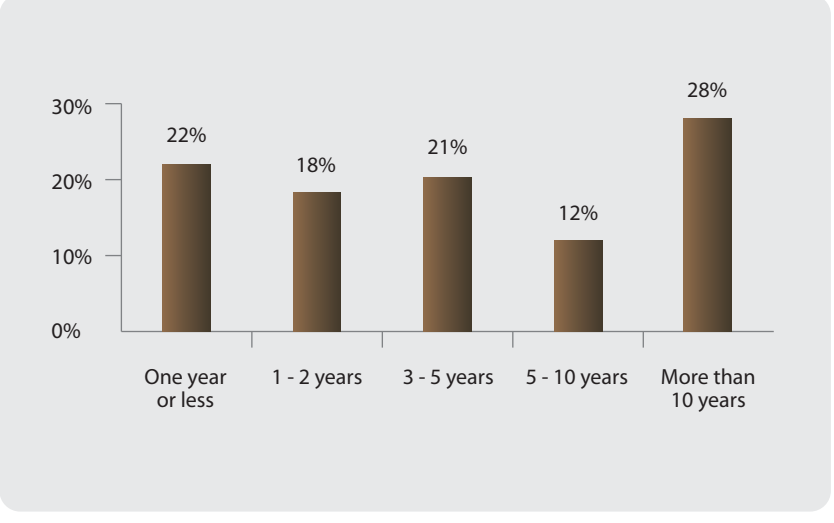

Figure 13.1: Length of time living in Galway City

Sense of belonging among Galway City residents

Participants were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-10 how they agreed with a number of statements relating to their sense of belonging to the area in which they lived. 1 was strongly disagree, while 10 was strongly agree. They were also asked if they regularly joined in the activities of a number of different types of organizations.

Sense of pride in area

- Three quarters (75%, n=417) of participants agreed (scoring 6 or more) that they were proud to tell people they lived here (see Figure 13.2)
- This sense of pride was lower among the 35-44 year old age group and general medical scheme (GMS) card holders

Sense of belonging in area

- Over two thirds 68% (n=347) of participants agreed that they felt that they belonged in the area.
- This sense of belonging was lower among: less educated individuals, unemployed individuals, those renting accommodation and GMS card holders

Support of friends or neighbours in area

- Three fifths (60%, n=328) of participants agreed that they felt they had the support of friends or neighbours in the area.
- This sense of support was lower among: 18-34 year olds, less educated individuals and those renting accommodation

Desire to remain in the area

- Just over three fifths (62%, n=336) of participants agreed that they would like to be living in the area three years from now.
- This preference was lower among: 18-34 year olds, less educated individuals, unemployed individuals, those renting accommodation and GMS card holders

Activity participation

- The most commonly participated in organisation is sports clubs (37%, n=213), followed by religious groups (22%, n=126), evening classes (20%, n=118) and community groups (19%, n=110) (see Figure 13.2)

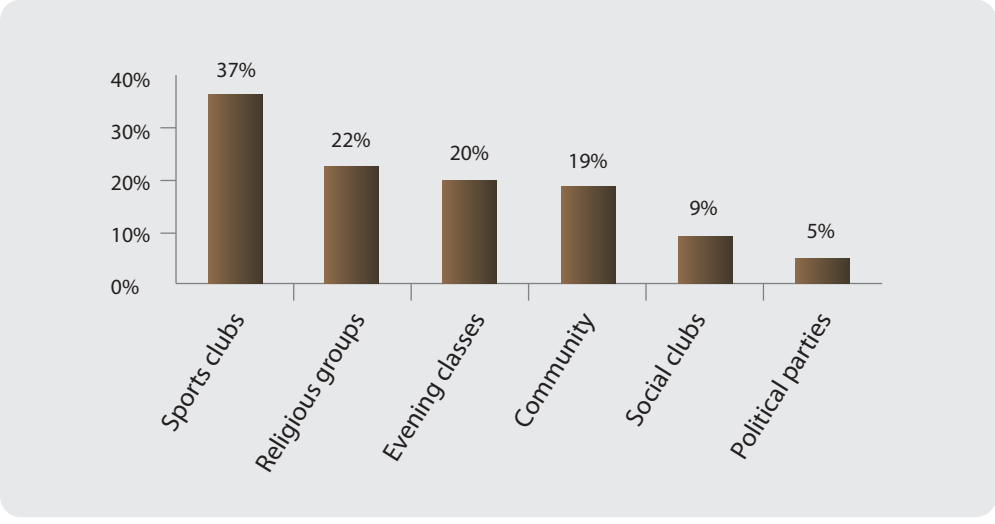

Figure 13.2: Regular participation in organisations

Sports clubs

- Participation in sports clubs, gyms and exercise classes was less common in: the oldest (45+) and then the youngest (18-34) age groups, unemployed individuals and GMS card holders

Church or other religious

- Participation in religious or charitable organisations was less common among more educated individuals

Evening classes

- Participation in evening classes, arts or music groups or education activities was less common among: the oldest and youngest age groups, less educated individuals and those renting accommodation

Community

- Participation in community groups was less common among 18-34 year olds

Social clubs

- Participation in social clubs was less common among less educated and employed people

Political parties

- Participation in political parties, trade unions and environmental groups was less common among women and more educated individuals

Implications for Galway City

Although the majority of participants report feeling pride, belonging, support and a desire to stay in the area in which they live, there is a significant percentage that do not. These sentiments vary among groups, but are particularly common among GMS card holders, those with less education, those renting and the unemployed. It is critical to support these groups in changing their community, or their experience of their community, in order to increase their sense of belonging and promote their health.

There is huge scope to promote participation in clubs, groups and classes among the Galway City population. This has the potential to promote health on a number of levels, for example, social and mental health by promoting interaction and integration and physical health by promoting sports club and gym participation. Certain groups, such as women, identified not having someone to exercise with as a disincentive for participating in physical activity. Thus, promoting group classes and participation has the potential to work on several different aspects of health simultaneously.

Reference

Berkman, L. (1995) The role of social relations in health promotion Psychosomatic Medicine 57 (3): 245-254