

# WATER

Lavelle, Davies, Fahy & Doyle, 2012

The ConsEnSus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four-year research project involving collaboration between TCD and NUI, Galway. The ConsEnSus Project is funded by the EPA under the STRIVE programme. This project focuses on four key areas of household consumption: transport, energy, water and food.

As part of the ConsEnSus Project, the Lifestyle Survey was conducted over a ten-month period between June 2010 and April 2011. The aim of this Lifestyle Survey was to gain an understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles. A total of 1,500 households (750 urban based/750 rural based) were surveyed in 30 EDs across Galway City and County Council areas, Derry City Council area, Limavady District Council area, Dublin City Council area and Fingal County Council area.

Further information is available at: [www.consensus.ie](http://www.consensus.ie)

## Water

Water consumption rates are on the increase globally. Domestic water use accounts for approximately 60% of total water demand in Ireland (EPA, 2006). Average daily water consumption in Ireland is approximately 148 litres per person per day. This is well above the European average, with Denmark averaging 116 litres per person per day (EPA, 2008). Recent flooding, as well as a number of high profile cases of water pollution and contamination particularly in the west of Ireland, has resulted in knock-on effects in terms of bottled water consumption rates. Similarly, a lack of investment in infrastructure has resulted in very high levels of water leakage across the country; up to 55% in certain areas. These figures are quite stark, especially in comparison to other EU countries like Germany and Denmark where the leakage rate is approximately less than 10% (EPA, 2008). With the cost of providing clean drinking water escalating, and with the proposed re-introduction of water charges for domestic dwellings, water and its conservation has become a very important issue for policy makers, businesses and consumers alike.

## Awareness of water usage

- 40% of the respondents surveyed (n=597) stated that they do not pay attention to the amount of water they use in their homes.
- Women tended to be more conscious of their water usage than men, with 62% of women stating that they paid attention to water use in their homes as opposed to 49% of men.
- Respondents in the older age cohorts were more likely to pay attention to the amount of water they used in their homes, as opposed to respondents in the younger age cohorts.
- Slightly, more respondents residing in rural locations (61%, n=456) paid attention to the amount of water they used, in comparison to respondents who were living in urban locations (53%, n=394).

## Water conservation

- More than half of the respondents (51%, n=764) stated that they 'already saved as much water as they could in their homes'.
- Slightly more rural dwellers (53%, n=397), than urban dwellers (49%, n=367), stated that they 'already saved as much water as they could in their homes'.
- More respondents in the older age cohorts reported already saving as much water as they could, with 55% of respondents in the 50-64 age category, 74% of the 65-79 age category and 67% of the 80+ age category declaring this.
- Nearly two thirds of the respondents surveyed (63%, n=945) stated that they had not reduced their water use in the past month for environmental reasons.
- 68% of respondents surveyed (n=1,018) stated that the re-introduction of a water charge would change their water usage.
- Over one third of all respondents (34%, n= 517) reported drinking bottled water on a daily basis (see Figure 6.2).

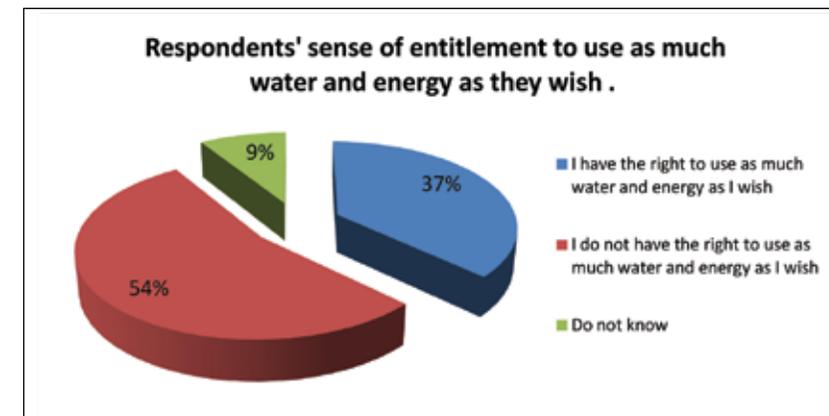


Figure 6.1: Do respondents feel that they have the right to use as much water and energy as they wish?



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## Entitlement beliefs

- Over one third of the respondents (37%, n=558) believed that they should be entitled to use as much water and energy as they wish in their homes (Figure 6.1).

## Need to conserve water

- 80% of all respondents surveyed (n=1,198) across Dublin, Derry and Galway stated that there is 'a need to save water'.
- Only 10% of respondents (n=145) felt that there was no need to conserve water on the island of Ireland.

## Using less water would be unhygienic

- Over one quarter of the respondents (27%, n=410) believed that 'using less water would be unhygienic'.
- Slightly more people (30%, n=223) living in an urban location, as opposed to those people residing in a rural location (25%, n=187), believed that 'using less water would be unhygienic'.
- Respondents in the younger age categories, in comparison to respondents in the older age cohorts, were more likely to state that 'using less water would be unhygienic'.
- There was little variance across the genders with 27% of male respondents and 28% of female respondents stating that 'using less water would be unhygienic'.

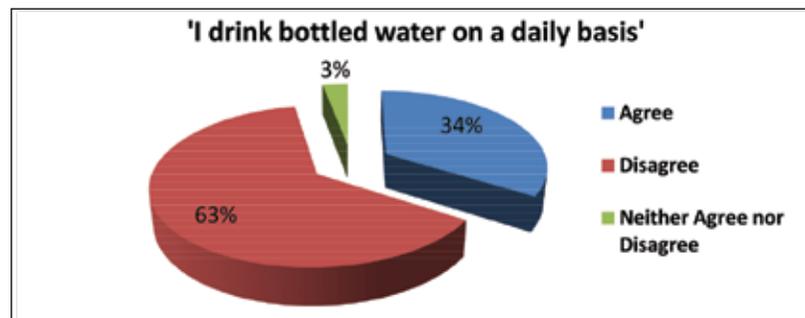


Figure 6.2: Number of respondents (%) who reported drinking bottled water on a daily basis.

## Implications

There were a number of tensions evident in these findings; in that although more than half of the respondents believed they already conserved as much water as they could in their homes, over two thirds of the respondents also stated that the re-introduction of a water charge would change their water usage. These findings reflect the results of a recent OECD study (2011) that indicated that charging for water on a volumetric basis reduces water consumption by approximately 20% in a population.

Further analysis of these findings indicated that the Galway sample had elevated levels of bottled water consumption, in comparison to the other two sample areas. Recent incidences of water pollution and contamination in the west of Ireland, may explain these variations in consumption levels.

Individuals' beliefs about resource entitlement, as well as social norms such as personal hygiene, are areas that require further investigation, also. These factors may explain reported differences in water consumption among the different age cohorts as well as the different genders. Overall, these results indicate that water is very much a contested issue in Ireland, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

## References

- Environmental Protection Agency (2008). *Report on Water Quality in Ireland, 2004 – 2006*. EPA: Dublin
- OECD (2010). *Greening Household Behaviour: The Role of Public Policy. Residential Water Use*. OECD 2011.
- Davies A.R., Taylor D.M., Fahy, F., Meade, H. & O'Callaghan-Platt A. (2005) *Environmental Attitudes and Behaviour: Values, actions and waste management*. Final research report to the Environmental Protection Agency Ireland (research grant # 2001-MS-SE2-M1). EPA: Dublin.