

# Monitoring health inequalities in adolescence

## The Finnish School Health Promotion study

Minna Pietikäinen, Pauliina Luopa, Riikka Puusniekka,  
Hanna Harju, Annikka Sinkkonen, Jukka Jokela

**In Finland the well-being and health of adolescents have been monitored in schools since 1995 as part of the School Health Promotion study, which has been carried out in all secondary schools, upper secondary schools and vocational schools.**

### Methods

The School Health Promotion study data is gathered by an anonymous classroom-administered questionnaire that covers living conditions, school experiences, health, health behaviour, health knowledge and experiences of student welfare services. Schools participate biannually in the SHP study (Figure 1). In 2008 there were 60 000 respondents in the 8th and 9th grade of secondary school (14–16-year-olds), 29 000 respondents in the 1st and 2nd grade of upper secondary school (17–18-year-olds) and 19 000 respondents in the 1st and 2nd year of vocational school (17–20-year-olds).

### Results

Regional, municipal and school results are reported within eight months of the data gathering. Municipalities receive a wide variety of results from a written report to school-specific figures and tables. The results show trends (Figure 2) as well as differences between the sexes. It is also possible to compare students in different types of schools.

Here are two examples of notable differences in health behaviour and school experiences between students in different types of schools. In 2008 every sixth pupil in secondary school and every tenth pupil in upper secondary school smokes daily. Smoking is four times more common among the students in vocational schools than in upper secondary schools (Figure 3).

School burnout is more common in secondary and upper secondary schools than in vocational schools (Figure 4).

### Conclusions

The SHP study is designed to gather information for promoting the well-being and health of adolescents. Municipalities and schools can use the results for example in making municipal health promotion strategies or in planning health promotion in schools. The SHP study makes it possible to monitor the health inequalities of adolescents in different school types, with different family backgrounds or in different regions. Monitoring health inequalities makes it easier to target health promotion actions at those with the greatest needs.

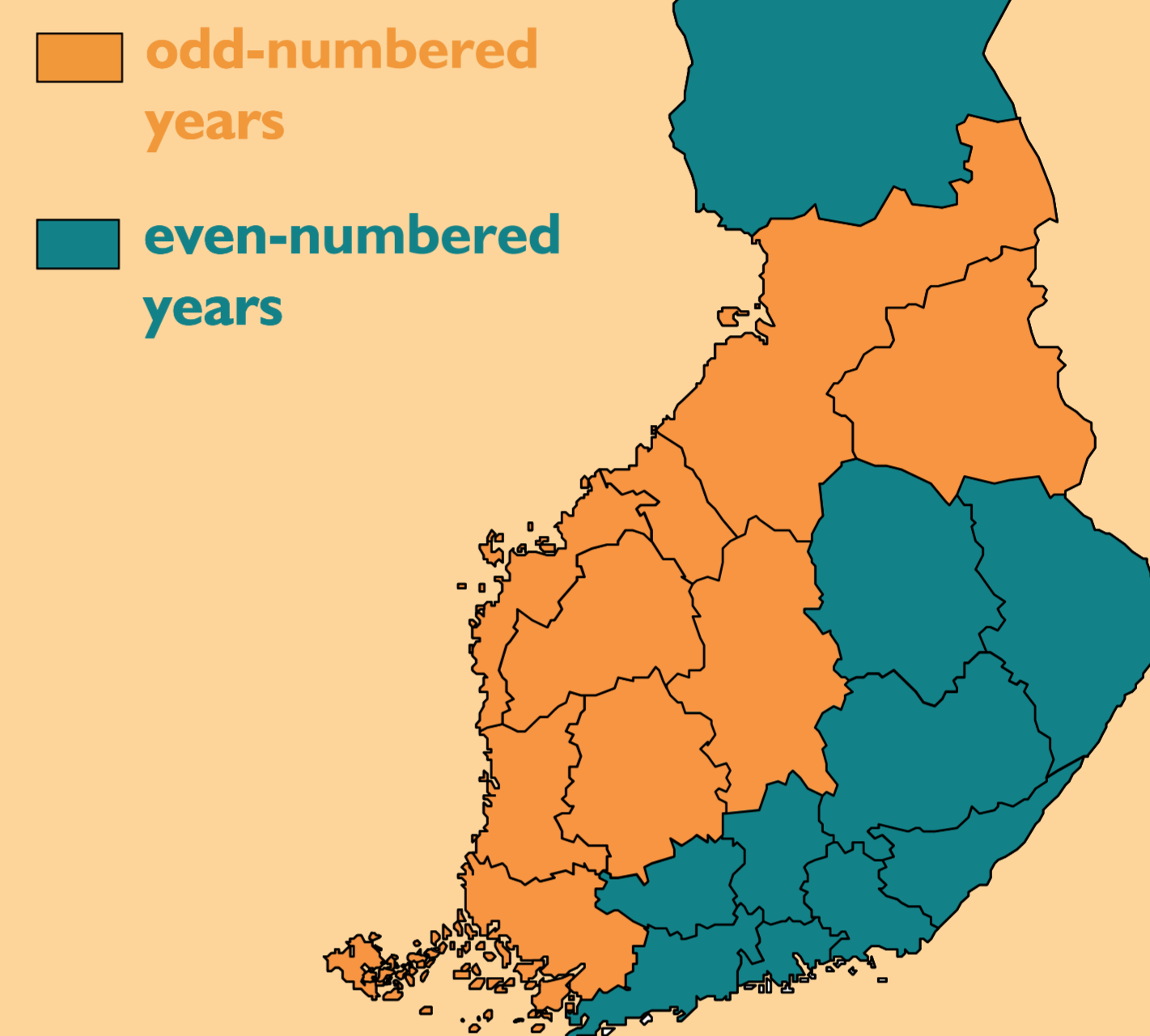


Figure 1. Participation in the SHP study.

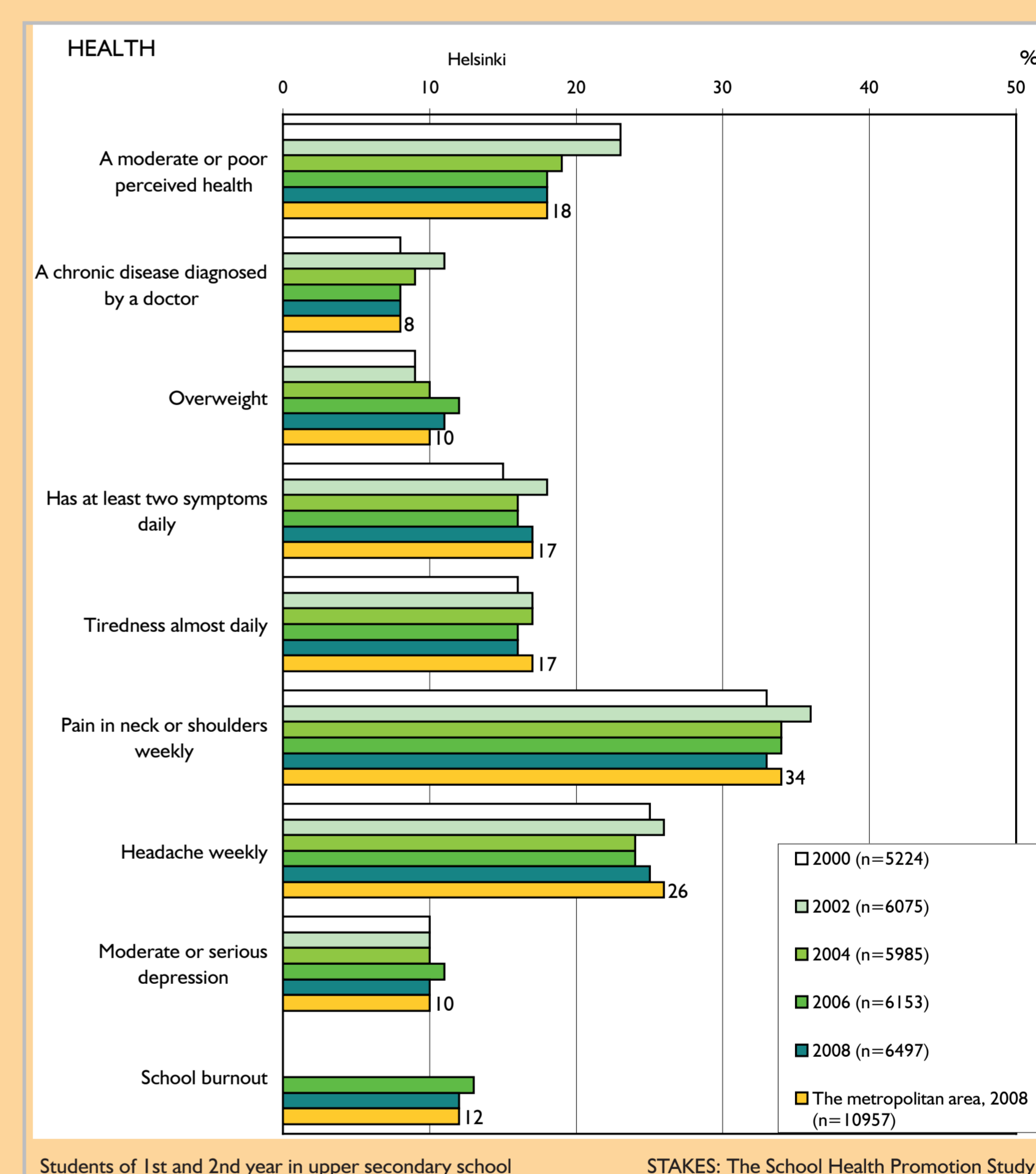


Figure 2. Example of reporting.

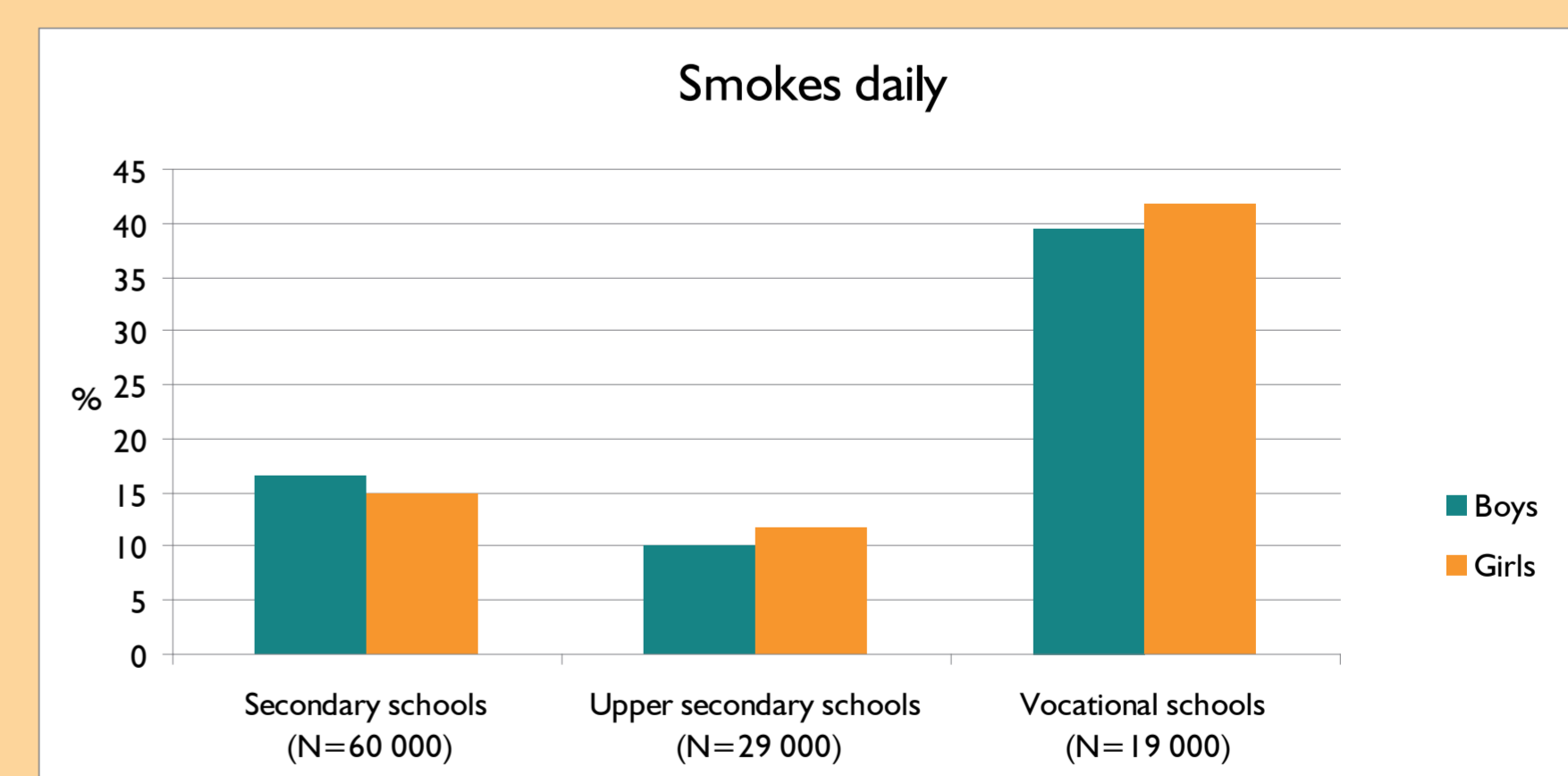


Figure 3. Daily smoking among students in different types of school in 2008.

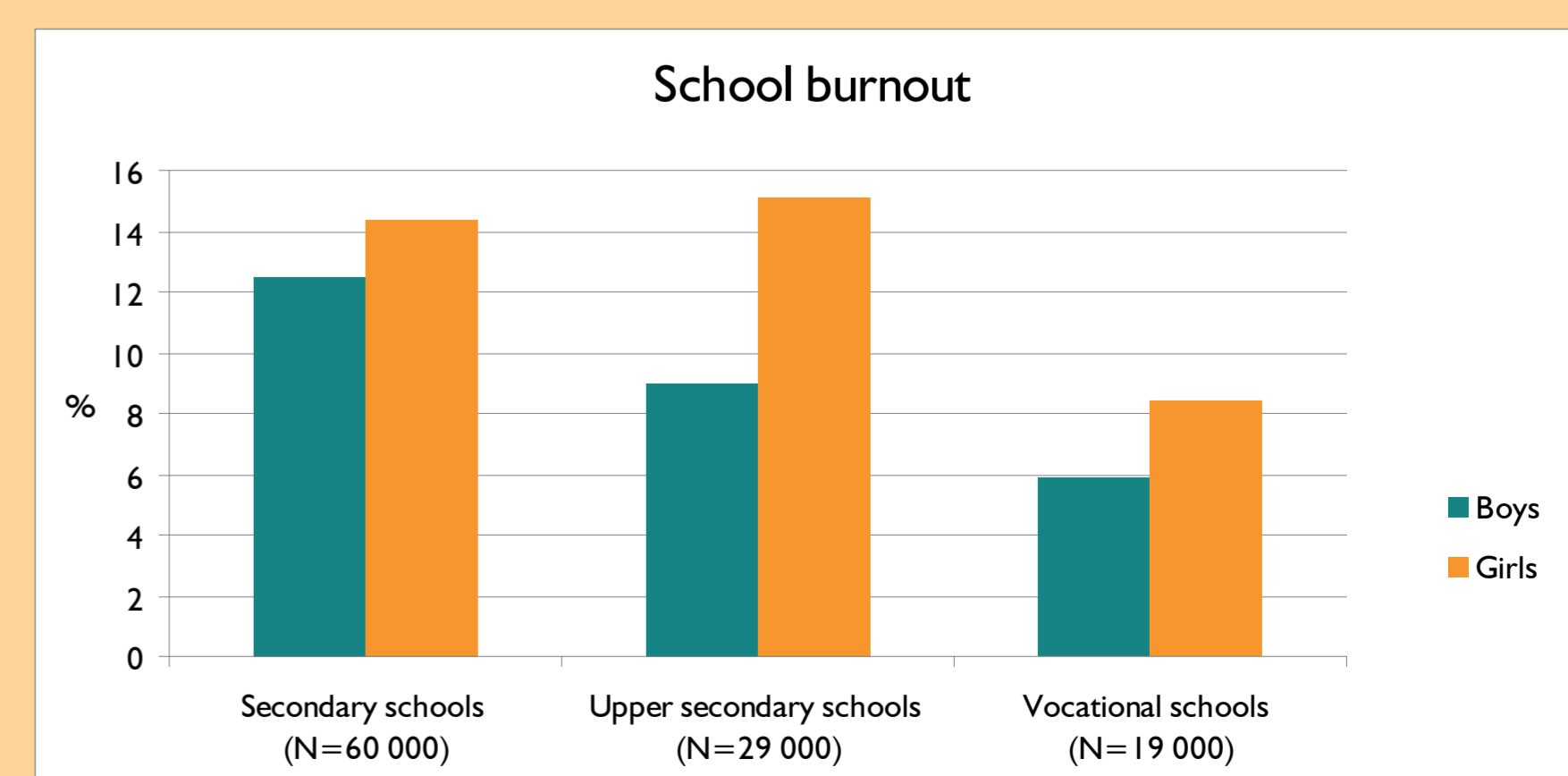


Figure 4. School burnout among students in different types of school in 2008.