

Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey Bulletin

October 2000 – November 2000

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Behaviour and attitudes of post-primary school pupils towards:

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A survey of the behaviour and attitudes of young people on areas and issues affecting their lives

This bulletin presents key findings from the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, carried out in October and November 2000. The bulletin was initially released in January 2002. It is being re-released now as weighting factors for gender and year group have been applied to the data to compensate for non-response bias.

Central Survey Unit was commissioned by a consortium of government departments and public bodies to design and conduct a survey of the behaviour and attitudes of young people. The research covered a

range of topics, relevant to the lives of young people today (See *Contents* section).

From a representative sample of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, 62 schools agreed to participate in the survey. One class from each year group (Form 1/Year 8 - Form 5/Year 12) was randomly selected. Almost 6300 pupils aged 11 - 16 years took part in the survey.

Tables of frequencies of the weighted survey results are also available. (See bottom of page 4 for details).

School

Generally speaking, pupils have a positive view of school with the majority in agreement that it is a place where the things they learn are important to them (93%), they have learned things that will be useful to them (94%) and which will help them in their adult lives (89%). Seventy two percent find school boring at least some days and just over a fifth (21%) have skipped classes or school this term.

Most pupils indicate that their parents are supportive with regard to school matters, stating that: they are always ready to help them if they have problems at school (76%); they are always willing to come to talk to their teachers (66%); and they always encourage them to do well at school (88%).

Ninety one percent of pupils attach importance to achieving good grades in all their subjects and just over two thirds (67%) feel that their class teachers think their school performance compares well to that of their classmates. Eighty five percent of pupils feel a certain amount of pressure due to the school work they have to do and on occasions, 62% have difficulty falling asleep at night because

they are thinking about school. Seventy five percent of pupils surveyed worry to some extent about answering questions or speaking out in class.

Over three fifths (63%) of pupils think that they will be going to university or a further education college when they leave school. One fifth do not know what they will be doing.

Table 1: Parental expectations

	My parents expect too much of me at school	My parents are satisfied with my school work
Strongly agree	12%	30%
Agree	22%	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	35%	15%
Disagree	22%	6%
Strongly disagree	10%	1%
n	6249	6255

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Nutrition

Almost two thirds (65%) of pupils eat sweets, chocolate bars or biscuits at least once a day, 64% drink fizzy drinks or squashes that contain sugar and 31% eat chips or other fried potatoes. Over half (55%) eat fruit at least once a day and just under two fifths (39%) eat vegetables and salads.

The majority (80%) of pupils eat breakfast on most or all school days and 80% usually have breakfast at weekends.

When asked what they usually do for lunch, half (50%) of pupils eat a school dinner, 19% buy a snack in the school cafeteria and approximately a third (34%) take a packed lunch. For those who do not usually eat a school dinner or snack, 39% cited

the queue as a reason why they do not, followed by just over a third (34%) who don't like school dinners or snacks.

Eighty five percent of all pupils think there is usually a good choice available in the canteen at least some of the time and just over half (52%) would like to see more healthy foods available. Ninety three percent are aware of the benefits of healthy eating and 90% have been taught about it, mainly in Home Economics.

A fifth (20%) of girls, compared to 7% of boys, are on a diet to lose weight, while almost three quarters (74%) of girls, compared to 50% of boys, would like to change something about their bodies.

Sports

Two fifths (40%) of pupils stay behind at school for sports, and 84% take part in sports, at least once or twice a week. Three fifths (60%) state they are more physically active during school holidays than they are at school.

Most pupils enjoy taking part in physical activity or sports (87%) and PE and games classes (88%). Eighty percent exercise or play sports apart from their timetabled PE lessons and 43% play sports for a school team with the majority of these playing soccer/Gaelic Football. Forty six percent are members of a sports club outside of school.

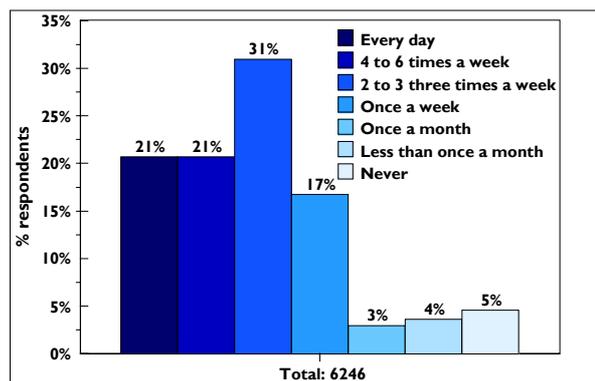
Smoking

Thirty seven percent of pupils (39% of girls and 34% of boys) have smoked tobacco, with most of these smoking for the first time at 12 years of age. On this first occasion, 66% of pupils were given cigarettes by a friend or other person their own age and over half (56%) were somewhere outside such as a park, street, in an entry etc.

Almost a third (33%) of those who have smoked tobacco, currently smoke at least once a week, 43% of these smoke 20 cigarettes or less in a week.

The majority of all surveyed disagree that: smokers have more fun than people who don't smoke (95%); smokers are more likely to have boyfriends or girlfriends than people who don't smoke (90%); smoking makes you look more grown up (89%); and smoking helps you make friends more easily (88%).

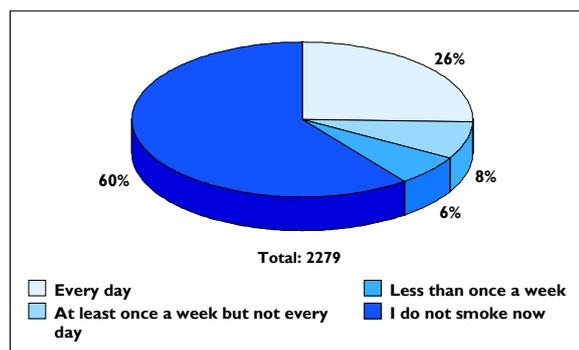
Figure 1: Outside school hours, how often do you usually exercise in your free time?



All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

As regards the dangers of smoking, the majority of pupils believe that: it can cause lung cancer (99%); it can harm the health of non-smokers (96%); and stopping is difficult (93%).

Figure 2: How often do you smoke cigarettes now?



All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Alcohol

Fifty seven percent of pupils (60% of boys and 54% of girls) have taken an alcoholic drink, with most of these drinking for the first time at 12 years of age. The majority of pupils were given alcohol by their friends, the first (45%), and last (37%), time they drank. Also, most pupils were at a pub, party, rave, disco, club or concert, the first (27%), and last (37%), time they drank alcohol.

The most common types of alcohol drunk are spirit based mixers with 47% of pupils who have had an

alcoholic drink claiming to drink them at least every month, followed by alcopops (38%), spirits (32%), and beer, lager or stout (26%). Just over two fifths (44%) of pupils who have had alcohol have had so much of it that they have been drunk on more than one occasion.

The reasons given for drinking alcohol are: to celebrate (86%), because they like the taste (83%), to find out what its like (60%), to feel relaxed (60%) and to cheer themselves up (60%).

Solvents

Just over one fifth (21%) of pupils have been offered solvents on at least one occasion, with most of these being offered them for the first time at 13 years of age.

A minority of pupils claim to have used or tried the following solvents to get high at least once: Butane

gas or lighter refills (6%), aerosols (8%), glue (6%) and Tippex or correcting fluids (7%). Two percent state that they have used or tried at least one other solvent such as petrol, permanent marker and nail varnish. The majority of pupils were 12 years old the first time they used or tried solvents.

Drugs

Twenty nine percent of pupils have been offered drugs, the most common being cannabis. Half (50%) of these were offered drugs the first time by a friend or other person they knew around their own age and 46% were somewhere outside such as the park, street, in an entry etc. Most pupils were 14 years old the first time they were offered drugs. A minority (5%) of all pupils have offered drugs to someone else at least once.

Pupils consider cannabis to be the easiest drug to obtain.

Eighteen percent of pupils have used or tried drugs, mainly cannabis. Of these, 16% have been in trouble with their parent(s) or family, 14% with local people, 10% with school authorities, 5% with police and 22% with friends because of having used or tried drugs.

Just under a third (32%) of all pupils say they know a lot about the effects or risks of taking drugs. In the last school year, almost three quarters (74%) have had drug education at school and just over a fifth (23%) at a youth club or community centre etc.

Policing

Almost two thirds (66%) of pupils have spoken to, or been spoken to by, a police officer in Northern Ireland, mainly through attending a talk in school relating to drugs or road safety etc.

Thirty seven percent have been really pleased, and 38% have been really annoyed, about the way a police officer in Northern Ireland behaved towards them (or someone they know) or how the police handled a matter in which they were involved.

Less than half (46%) think the police in Northern

Ireland treat young people quite or very fairly and 45% are quite or very satisfied with the way they do their job.

Fifteen percent of pupils have been arrested or cautioned by the police in Northern Ireland, mostly for vandalism, underage drinking and disorderly behaviour.

Less than one tenth (7%) of all pupils say they would be interested in joining the police in Northern Ireland when they finish their education.

Personal Safety

While some pupils have been victims of crime such as having things stolen from them (47%) or bullying (43%), the majority tend to worry about being caught in a bomb explosion (67%), having their home broken into (67%) and having things stolen from their home (64%). Pupils feel they are most likely to be subject to name calling (32%) or assault (22%) because of their religion, or to have things stolen from them (21%).

Just over a fifth (22%) of pupils think that the area in which they live is unsafe, mainly due to gangs of other people looking for trouble, vandals and sectarian name-calling.

Forty three percent are worried about going into their nearest town centre at night as they are afraid of being assaulted or because of drug addicts/pushers.

Sexual Experience & Knowledge

Over three quarters (78%) of pupils have had a girlfriend or boyfriend.

Twelve percent have had sexual intercourse, with the majority being 14 years of age the first time. On this occasion, just over three quarters (76%) used some form of contraception, the most commonly used being a condom.

Sixty three percent of all pupils would find it easy to get contraceptives and most would get them from shops or chemists and bars, public toilets etc.

Table 2: How much sexual experience have you had?
(Question asked to majority of pupils in Forms 1–5/Years 8–12, i.e. 11–16 year olds)

None	Small amount	Some, but no sexual intercourse	Experienced including sexual intercourse	n
26%	36%	26%	12%	5141

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Relationships

In general, 42% of pupils feel very happy about their life at present and almost half (46%) never feel lonely.

Almost a third (31%) think their parents are as easy going as their friends' parents when it comes to

allowing them to go out at night etc. Just over a fifth (21%) find it easy to talk to one or both of their parents about sexual matters.

Four fifths of pupils have three or more close friends and 85% have no difficulty making new friends.

The Environment

Almost three fifths (58%) of pupils are worried about litter and rubbish, and 36% are worried about recycling. The majority think that through their own actions, they can make a difference to litter and rubbish (66%) and recycling (60%). Forty two percent of pupils always get rid of their rubbish

carefully by putting it in a bin yet just over half (51%) never sort glass, newspapers etc for recycling.

Most pupils never urge others to use public transport (64%), or to cycle or walk (57%), rather than travel by car because it is good for the environment.

Travelling to School

Over half of pupils use public transport to travel to school (50% by bus and 1% by train), and from school (56% by bus and 1% by train). Of these, 41% get left to the bus or train by car, and 29% get

picked up by car. A quarter of pupils travel less than one mile to school and of these, 46% do not walk or cycle. The reasons given include, not having enough time in the morning and because it's too far.

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