

The Trends reports - *Trends - Young People's Food Choices* and *Trends - Young People and Smoking* are available from SHEU at £10 each or £15 for both reports including p&p. For correspondence email: david.mcgeorge@sheu.org.uk

SHEU

Trends from 1983: Young people - food choices and smoking

The Schools Health Education Unit has been involved in the collection of robust baseline data about young people's health-related behaviour since 1977. It does this through a range of surveys in schools including the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ).

To date, nearly 850,000 pupils, from 8-16 years of age, have taken part in HRBQ surveys in over 6,400 schools across the UK. As well as reporting back to schools and authorities SHEU publishes a series of 'Trends' reports. This article presents some findings from the most recent reports about young people's attitudes to food and smoking.

Food - breakfast

There was an upward trend for all groups who reported having *nothing to eat or drink for breakfast* - the trend became well defined

from 1996-2003. There were clear distinctions across genders and age groups. The main 'breakfast-missers' are 14-15 year old females who have always remained consistently higher than other groups.

Food - breakfast and lunch

Over a number of years we have linked missing breakfast to missing lunch and also the desire to lose weight. These links suggest that having nothing to eat for breakfast is at least partly motivated by a desire to lose weight. For example, in 2007 we found that, among older females, those missing breakfast are nearly twice as likely to have missed lunch the previous day.

Since 1983, there is a clear upward trend, particularly for 14-15 year old females, who report not having a schoolday lunch. Both older groups generally remain higher than

the younger age group. Figures from the 14-15 year old range up to 22% (2007 - females) and up to 14% (2004/05/07 - males).

There is a general downward trend, seen particularly in recent years, of those eating a packed lunch with fluctuations over the period. One would not expect the 14-15 year old females to favour the packed lunch option especially in relation to this group's increasing trend to have *nothing to eat for lunch*. However there appeared to be a general upward trend to around the early 1990s and around 50% chose this option. Over the past 10 years the figures have fluctuated widely and currently are around 30%.

Food - fruit, chips and crisps

Despite the lack of a clear trend in eating *fresh fruit on most days* post 1999, we see many clear associations between food options in the list, so that when we looked among 14-15 year olds in our databank, we found that young people who eat fresh fruit on most days were also more likely to eat healthy items like fish, wholemeal bread, high fibre-cereals salads and vegetables on most days as well. 14-15 year old females who ate *fresh fruit on most days* were also less likely to eat crisps/sweets on most days or to drink sugary fizzy drinks.

The responses to eating chips or roast potatoes on *most days* appear to be diminishing. In our publication 'Young People in 1996' and in the 2007 results we found that those eating a packed lunch were also less likely to eat chips/roast potatoes.

Food - attitudes to weight

The 2007 results confirm the trend we have observed each year in our annual publications. The peak of *wanting to lose weight* may have been reached for the 14-15 year old females and may continue to hover around the 58% average. We have shown each year that far more older females want to lose weight (57% in 2007) compared with the number that are overweight (12% in 2007).

Interestingly the charts show that more 14-15 year old females, in recent years, are *happy with their weight as it is* compared with earlier years.

In 'Young People in 1994' we explored the connections between those who reported not having breakfast, their attitude to weight, worrying about their looks and the type of school lunch they ate. We have explored the same variables using 2007 data.

Type of schoolday lunch	Nothing for breakfast	
	1994	2007
School cafeteria	25%	14%
School set lunch	3%	14%
Packed lunch	25%	23%
Takeaway or shop	12%	6%
Went home	12%	4%
Did not have any lunch	25%	40%

The main items of interest in Table 1 are the similarity (around 25%) of those reporting *nothing for breakfast* and having a packed lunch at school and, in 2007, the rise to 40%, from 25% in 1994, of those having no breakfast or schoolday lunch.

Attitude to weight	Nothing for breakfast	
	1994	2007
Would like to put on weight	13%	14%
Would like to lose weight	20%	18%
Happy with weight	14%	10%

In Table 2, the similarities in the data from 1994 and 2007 are noteworthy. Around 19% of 14-15 year old females, who responded in 1994 and 2007 to having 'nothing for breakfast', also expressed a desire to lose weight.

Table 3. 14-15 year old females - Attitude to weight and worrying about how they look

Attitude to weight	Never worry about looks		Worry a little about looks		Worry a lot about looks	
	1994	2007	1994	2007	1994	2007
Would like to put on weight	8%	12%	41%	36%	51%	52%
Would like to lose weight	3%	5%	29%	29%	68%	66%
Happy with weight	9%	14%	49%	48%	43%	38%

Table 3 shows connections between questions about *worrying about how I look* and *attitude to weight*. The highest percentages (around 67%) relate to those 14-15 year old females that *worry a lot about their looks* and *would like to lose weight* - however, there is little difference between 1994 and 2007.

Smoking - levels

From our work with schools within the same authority we know that smoking levels vary widely from school to school. However, when data are combined from surveys across the country general trends can be detected.

The last ten years show a rise in those young people reporting they have *never smoked at all*. Although 14-15 year old females have always reported smoking more than males there is a clear upward trend of those never trying to smoke. However, it is the 14-15 year old males who are more likely to experiment with smoking.

In recent years, 5-10% of 12-13 year olds, around 15% of 14-15 year old males and around 25% of 14-15 year old females have *smoked recently*. In both age groups the females consistently report smoking more often than the males.

Smoking - 25 a week

Smoking levels of up to 25 a week are barely addictive in adults; what levels are relevant for this age group? Clearly, 14-15 year olds that report smoking regularly need to take account of the health and lifestyle implications of this action. Table 4 shows data from 1997 and 2007, the gradual

decline in smoking of all groups between the two dates and a slight difference between those smoking up to 10 and over 25 cigarettes a week. The figures clearly show

Table 4. 14-15 year old smokers 1997 and 2007

Cigarettes smoked in the last 7 days	1-10 cigs.		11-25 cigs.		over 25 cigs.	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
Males 14-15 yr.	9%	5%	5%	3%	9%	5%
Females 14-15 yr.	12%	8%	7%	3%	10%	7%

the higher percentage responses from 14-15 year old females.

Smoking - giving up

Data from the recent past show around 15% of 14-15 year old females smoke yet also want to give up. This is followed by around 9% of older males. Since 1986, 14-15 year old females consistently provide more responses to *smoke and would like to give up* but a more definite decline is perhaps clearer in the data from 14-15 year old males.

There appears to be no overall trend, in data from 1986-2007, when looking at the proportion who want to give up smoking among those young people that smoke. The figures show that around 25% of regular smokers, across all groups, don't want to give up smoking. The apparent lack of an overall trend suggests that the proportion who don't want to give up is fairly consistent irrespective of any influences that may alter a young smoker's attitude, and despite all health education efforts since the early 1980s