

A new survey of primary-school children in 1991-92

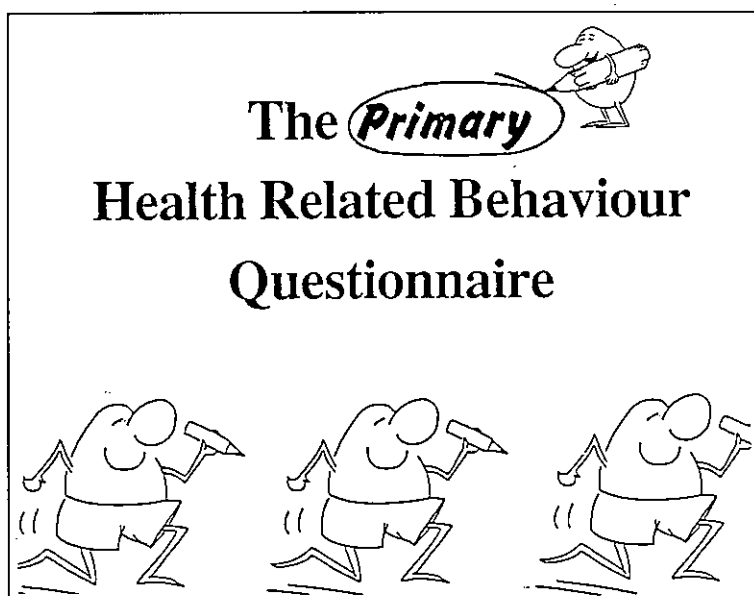
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A health-related peep at 7,852 very young people

The Health Related Behaviour survey method, which has been in use in secondary schools and is now in its 16th version, began life in the Department of Community Health, Nottingham University, in 1975. It has been in ever-increasing use as a method of gathering baseline data (a) for healthcare planning by DHAs, and (b) for curriculum review in schools since that time. In 1994 alone it will be completed by over 80,000 young people from 300 schools, representing 47 DHAs from around the UK.

The method evolved in 24 schools, and from the outset primary school heads were putting pressure on us to provide a complementary method for use by them. Currently we are using Version 5 (primary), which complements the Version 16 (secondary) in use through secondary schools. The primary version is becoming more and more widely used. It is quite common now for the survey in the secondary school to be carried out at the same time as the complementary survey is carried out in its feeder primary schools. The opportunity to bring staff together and link programmes is enhanced through the collection of relevant, and very interesting, life-style data.

The maturation process that can be discovered across this break in the schools is very illuminating. In general the reported behaviour, attitudes and aspirations by the older, more experienced secondary-school pupils fit nicely in



step with those recorded by the younger primary children.

The results from the secondary Health Related Behaviour surveys have been published in regular annual reports, under the title *Young People in...*, since 1986. We have been aware of the widespread interest in the primary results, and were determined to publish a similar report as soon as we had enough data available. The result is *Very Young People in 1991-2*, and this article looks at some sample tables from this report, which is in course of publication.

It will be noted that over half of the 7,582 pupils surveyed were in Year 6, with progressively fewer in the younger year-groups. Where there is overlap with the questions in the secondary questionnaire we have included the Year 7 data from our 1992 databank to show how behaviours compare across the primary-secondary divide.

Table 1. Percentage responses to *I am fairly sure or certain that in the next few days I shall eat quite a lot of these*

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Brown bread	29.8	33.9	25.3	24.6	27.2	30.5
Fresh fruit	71.4	80.2	69.7	77.9	70.1	80.2
Fresh vegetables	50.7	58.9	44.4	53.4	52.8	64.0
Fried food	43.2	40.0	54.2	44.7	47.4	33.7
Sweet things	57.2	54.4	66.0	59.8	63.3	53.9
Crisps	59.1	56.7	64.0	65.7	61.8	56.5
Valid responses	660	684	959	920	2315	2314

Table 1. I am fairly sure or certain that in the next few days I shall eat quite a lot of these foods.

This question selects some 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods as examples of dietary intention. There is a marked difference between the two groups of food items with respect to the choices exercised by the boys and girls. Almost without exception, a higher percentage of boys than girls select the 'unhealthy' foods, with more girls than boys choosing the 'healthy' items.

This suggests that even young children are aware of dietary considerations to the extent of putting their knowledge into practice, and that parents are allowing them to exercise choices.

Table 2. How many times did you clean your teeth yesterday?

Please note that the Year 7 response, taken from the secondary Health Related Behaviour

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Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)		Year 7 (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Not at all	4.3	2.8	6.6	1.9	4.4	1.4	3.3	1.1
Once	22.2	19.6	25.4	19.1	26.3	19.3	16.4	15.0
Twice	59.8	62.8	53.8	63.3	59.2	67.0	61.9	61.1
3 times	10.9	11.4	11.3	12.2	8.6	10.1	16.4	19.2
4 times	1.6	2.7	2.2	2.7	1.1	1.7	2.1	3.6
5 or more	1.2	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.4	-	-
Valid responses	562	597	906	890	2235	2259	428	532

Questionnaire, only goes up to a 4 or more category.

The girls appear to be more conscientious than the boys about cleaning their teeth. Even so, about 30% of all the boys and 20% of all the girls had cleaned their teeth only once or not at all. The Year 7 data for the secondary pupils suggests improved dental hygiene for this group, and in fact the 1992 secondary data as a whole gives values of about 20% (boys) and 10% (girls) in the 'never or once' category. Is dental hygiene promoted more in secondary schools? Is it a result of enhanced concern about their appearance and personal freshness? Do they have more freedom to clean their teeth whenever they like? If the latter, are some parents failing to establish healthy brushing routines by their youngsters?

What is a satisfactory frequency, and when is the best time of day to brush teeth?

Table 3. Percentage responses to *Have you had an alcoholic drink since this time last week?*

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)		Year 7 (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
No	76.4	82.5	73.4	83.6	67.2	81.4	73.5	83.7
Yes	23.6	17.5	26.6	16.4	32.8	18.6	26.5	16.3
Valid responses	517	549	928	905	2217	2228	336	465

Table 3. Have you had an alcoholic drink since this time last week?

As might be expected, the year 6 pupils are more likely than the others to have had at least one alcoholic drink during the previous week. There is a definite gender effect, with more boys than girls in all age groups reporting drinking.

Clearly, large numbers of very young school-children experience the use of alcohol. Adults use it abundantly, and it is often available, particularly in the home. It is not known to what extent these very young people are consuming alcoholic drinks with parental knowledge.

Amongst older groups (as described in our book *Young People in 1992*), we find that as many as 40% of the parents of Year 10 pupils do not always know when their children drink at home. In the Year 7 age group, this figure is 20%.

We suggest that a primary school could usefully consider alcohol education in partnership with parents, who might welcome sympathy and guidance at the beginning of this difficult transition period.

Table 4. Percentage responses to *Which of these activities did you do after school yesterday?*

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Watched TV	71.7	77.6	81.8	83.8	82.3	84.5
Watched TV until bed	10.9	8.6	12.7	9.1	7.3	4.3
Watched videos	58.3	53.7	55.5	49.7	61.8	56.6
Played with friends	24.2	19.4	28.4	20.8	25.1	16.5
Played computer games	44.8	18.3	45.0	21.7	45.4	19.3
Read a book for pleasure	37.7	54.1	37.0	53.9	37.0	51.3
Went to a club	22.6	18.9	19.0	19.6	18.8	16.5
Did something else	49.4	50.0	42.8	45.5	42.7	52.6
Valid responses	660	684	959	920	2315	2314

Table 4. Which of these activities did you do after school yesterday?

Watching live television programmes is the most popular activity for all young people — over half also watched videos — but this table does not reflect the amount of viewing done. Computer games are also popular with boys, but much less so with girls, over half of whom like to read a book for pleasure. The number watching a television screen all evening until going to bed is quite low, but obviously may be a cause for concern.

Slightly more boys than girls reported that they played with friends. *Did something else* reveals a wide range of other activities.

Went to a club includes sporting activities, cubs, brownies, and other organised groups. Bearing in mind that the question refers only to one weekday evening, the total weekly participation may be much higher than the percentages shown here, indicating that a substantial proportion of these young people participate in out-of-school activities.

Table 5. Percentage responses to Smoking: Which statement describes you best?

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)		Year 7 (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Never smoked	91.9	93.0	88.9	91.6	82.8	86.9	72.1	75.2
Tried once or twice	5.7	5.0	7.7	7.1	13.3	10.9	16.9	16.5
Used to	1.5	0.6	2.1	0.8	3.0	1.7	7.1	5.0
Would like to give up	0.0	1.3	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.4	2.5	3.1
Do not want to give up	0.9	0.2	0.9	0.3	0.3	0.1	1.2	0.4
Valid responses	528	543	940	905	2255	2247	409	521

Table 5. Smoking: which statement describes you best?

The percentage stating that they have never smoked shows an ever-larger fall from year to year. The largest change occurs between years 6 and 7, which of course coincides with the young people's transfer from primary to secondary school.

Assuming that the best way of combating regular smoking is to discourage people from experimenting, these figures imply that 'smoking education' should certainly begin in the primary school, before the youngsters start mixing with their more 'sophisticated' seniors. This might challenge the image of smoking, as well as showing them ways of refusing offered cigarettes.

Smoking education could be one of the cur-

riculum areas where co-ordinated policies between a secondary school and its feeder schools would be beneficial.

Table 6. How much pocket money did you get last week?

Using the figures in the table, the mean amounts received are approximately as follows:

Year 4: boys £1.60, girls £1.20.

Year 5: boys £1.80, girls £1.50.

Year 6: boys £2.10, girls £1.80.

Year 7: boys £2.70, girls £2.40.

The familiar pattern of girls receiving less than boys (the difference being about 30p per week) is demonstrated once again!

Many of the older pupils will do some sort of paid work, and so will have more spending money than appears in this table.

Table 6. Percentage responses to How much pocket money did you get last week?

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)		Year 7 (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Nothing	20.5	21.4	18.7	19.7	15.4	16.7	14.3	16.1
Up to 50p	8.7	12.9	7.0	9.5	3.7	3.8	3.4	0.8
51p-£1.00	23.5	28.7	20.9	23.3	17.5	21.4	9.9	13.3
£1.01-£2.00	23.2	21.4	23.4	24.6	26.5	27.4	22.7	21.6
£2.01-£3.00	9.7	7.0	11.8	11.4	15.5	13.9	16.9	17.2
£3.01-£4.00	2.9	2.1	5.3	3.6	6.0	4.8	6.8	6.1
£4.01-£5.00	6.7	3.3	6.7	4.2	8.9	7.7	14.1	18.2
£5.01-£10.00	4.1	3.0	5.8	3.4	5.7	4.0	9.9	5.7
More than £10.00	0.8	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.8	0.3	2.1	0.8
Valid responses	630	668	900	877	2212	2230	436	538

Table 7. Percentage responses to If you have a bicycle and you are allowed to ride on the road, is it...?

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Very busy (lots of cars)	8.5	6.5	9.3	5.0	12.0	5.8
Quite busy	15.1	11.7	25.9	19.1	38.2	25.9
Not very busy (few cars)	35.3	32.6	36.7	40.1	34.6	44.9
Very quiet (hardly any cars)	41.1	49.1	28.2	35.9	15.2	23.4
Valid responses	331	230	603	404	1716	1413

Table 7. If you have a bicycle and you are allowed to ride on the road, is it...?

The percentages in this table refer to cycle-owners only.

Note that fewer girls than boys are cycling on very busy or quite busy roads. Does this suggest that boys and girls have a different standard of 'busyness', or that girls dislike busy roads, or that their parents think they are more vulnerable?

From other data in the questionnaire, the following percentages of very young people are allowed to ride on roads of whatever category on their own.

Year 4: boys 50%, girls 34%.

Year 5: boys 63%, girls 44%.

Year 6: boys 76%, girls 61%.

About 90% of very young people report that they own a bicycle.

Worryingly, about 40% and 20% of all the surveyed Year 6 boys and girls respectively are riding bicycles on very busy or quite busy roads.

Table 8. Which adult do you get on best with?

It will be noticed that the very large majority selecting Mum and Dad reduces for the older age groups, Mum alone achieving an increasing importance. This effect persists through the secondary age ranges.

This sample of the 41 tables in *Very Young People in 1991-2* shows that the book presents a wide range of behaviours for study. Some of the data is also available as a database for analysis using most commonly-available computer programs. The content is attractive to children and has obvious potential in maths, information technology, and other curriculum areas.

For further information about the Primary Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire or the information arising from the surveys, please contact Anne Wise at the Unit (0392 264728). *Very Young People in 1991-2* will be available shortly.

Table 8. Percentage responses to Which adult do you get on best with?

Responses	Year 4 (8-9)		Year 5 (9-10)		Year 6 (10-11)		Year 7 (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Mum	14.0	14.1	16.7	17.9	19.8	26.1	20.6	26.0
Dad	9.4	5.0	7.1	5.8	8.6	6.3	8.4	8.7
Mum and Dad	60.8	63.6	59.5	63.0	59.7	55.1	53.6	49.4
Other adult relation	8.0	8.3	7.3	5.4	6.1	6.0	5.6	5.1
Teacher	2.1	3.5	2.7	2.9	1.6	1.9	0.3	0.4
Adult friend	3.0	2.8	4.3	2.8	2.2	3.3	2.3	2.0
No one	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.3	2.0	1.0
Valid responses	572	601	933	900	2258	2268	394	508