

# John Balding

## Young People in 1993

The first of our 'Young People' reports, *Young People in 1986*, contained data collected from about 18,000 secondary-school pupils that completed the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire during the year. Our decision to publish this data was based on the discovery that our large samples, although not deliberately selected to be nationally representative, achieved a close match with data collected by research bodies when we were able to compare results for behaviours represented in the different data sets, such as smoking and alcohol consumption.

We have now published the eighth report, *Young People in 1993*, which contains data on 29,074 young people between the ages of 11 and 16. Our 'accidental' sample is a particularly large and well-balanced one, containing the following numbers of pupils within each year group:

- Year 7: 2135
- Year 8: 8744
- Year 9: 6343
- Year 10: 9676
- Year 11: 2176

The report is divided into eight sections, each one of which concentrates on a particular aspect of the young people's lifestyle: diet, doctor & dentist, health & safety, home, drugs, money, sport, and social & personal. A sample table

Table 1. The young people's attitude to their current weight.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Like to increase	10.4	7.2	12.1	6.7	13.7	6.1	18.4	6.8	22.4	6.5
Like to reduce	26.5	44.3	26.4	49.2	23.8	51.5	21.9	55.7	20.4	57.6
Happy with weight	63.1	48.5	61.5	44.0	62.5	42.4	59.7	37.5	57.2	35.9
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Valid responses	1039	1074	4395	4238	3122	3159	5020	4572	999	1163

from each section is presented here.

### Diet: Weight control

Table 1 shows some obvious gender differences in all three responses. An increasing number of the older boys would like to, while a smaller but consistent number of girls come into this category. About half the girls and up to a quarter of the boys would like to lose some weight. It would seem that around 60% of the boys are consistently contented with their weight, while 50% of contented year 7 girls reduce to 35% in year 11. From previous years' work we have recorded that about half of all boys, and about three-quarters of all girls, have made some attempt to lose weight, usually through dieting.

### Doctor & dentist: Frequency of toothbrushing

Table 2 permits the average number of times the young people cleaned their teeth to be calculated, as follows:

- Year 7: boys 2.0, girls 2.2
- Year 8: boys 1.9, girls 2.1
- Year 9: boys 1.9, girls 2.1
- Year 10: boys 1.9, girls 2.2
- Year 11: boys 1.9, girls 2.2

The professional recommendation is to brush

Table 2. The number of times the young people cleaned their teeth on the previous day (a weekday).

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
None	4.0	0.9	3.6	1.4	4.2	1.4	2.5	0.7	3.1	0.6
Once	15.8	10.8	17.6	9.7	17.3	9.9	18.0	8.6	19.0	9.1
Twice	62.7	63.2	64.8	67.6	62.4	63.9	65.1	64.7	61.6	62.3
3 times	15.5	21.7	12.4	18.9	14.0	22.3	13.1	22.7	13.9	25.0
4 times	1.9	3.4	1.7	2.3	2.1	2.5	1.4	3.3	2.4	3.0
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Valid responses	1042	1058	4442	4262	3139	3183	5056	4590	1005	1168

twice a day, once before or after breakfast, and once before going to bed. The average frequencies are close to this figure, with the girls brushing slightly more often. It should be remembered that this data is for a school day, when it is probably less easy or comfortable to brush teeth during the day than when at home, so weekend brushing frequency could possibly be higher.

It is interesting that the percentages of pupils within each category show little or no change with age. This implies that toothbrushing habits set in early childhood persist through adolescence and, perhaps, into adulthood. About 15% of boys and 25% of girls brush their teeth more often than twice a day, although evidence quoted in the Unit's forthcoming publication *Toothbrushing in Adolescence* (1) suggests that while brushing once or less is inadequate, brushing more than twice a day has little additional effect on plaque control.

Note that the question does not ask the young people what they 'usually' do. This invariably inflates the frequency, and is probably being interpreted as what they think they ought to do. To avoid this problem all our questions refer,

whenever possible, to behaviour within a specified interval of recent time.

### Health & safety: Use of medicinal remedies

Table 3 suggests that if you do not already invest in pharmaceutical companies, now may be a good time to review your portfolio! Vitamins, painkillers and lotions or creams would appear to be the best bet. The use of painkillers, in particular, is substantial, a third of the youngest girls and over a half of the oldest having taken at least one during the previous seven days.

It must be remembered that this table refers to frequency, not to amount. Analysis of other data suggests that most of the young people took a painkiller on just one or two days during the previous week.

The bottom line (*None of the above*), if subtracted from 100%, reveals that over half the boys and 70-80% of the girls had used at least one of the listed categories of medicine on at least one day during the previous week.

Table 3. Medicinal remedies used during the previous 7 days. More than one item can be recorded.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Iron tablets	3.9	2.9	3.9	3.6	3.9	5.5	4.4	7.0	4.2	8.1
Vitamin tablets	22.9	22.5	21.0	23.5	20.5	24.0	20.5	26.1	18.2	24.9
Antibiotics	5.1	6.3	4.9	7.2	5.6	9.4	6.5	9.2	6.2	11.5
Painkillers	23.9	31.2	28.2	41.4	30.4	49.6	30.9	54.6	33.1	56.2
Lotions or creams	16.9	38.7	19.5	47.6	20.8	46.3	22.7	49.9	19.7	48.8
Laxatives	0.9	1.6	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.1	2.3
Herbal/homoeopathic	2.5	3.9	2.9	4.5	2.7	4.5	3.8	5.9	2.7	7.6
Other	3.3	4.6	4.3	3.9	3.9	3.7	4.1	4.6	4.3	5.7
None of the above	47.3	32.2	45.1	24.2	43.3	21.8	41.5	17.5	42.5	18.0

Table 4. The young people's activities after school on the previous day. More than one item can be recorded.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Watched TV	80.8	82.7	87.4	90.5	87.6	90.3	89.4	91.4	89.7	90.0
Homework	60.7	66.2	62.3	71.1	61.5	71.8	67.7	74.9	62.7	75.8
Watched video	12.8	10.6	16.5	11.5	14.6	10.1	14.5	10.8	13.2	9.7
Listened to music	45.8	53.5	51.4	67.8	59.4	73.6	70.2	81.8	75.1	80.4
Met friends	56.0	43.5	56.3	47.7	58.6	48.2	54.4	49.5	50.7	43.3
Used computer	49.0	26.1	59.9	27.5	51.8	19.6	51.8	17.3	41.4	14.2
Drew for pleasure	23.6	21.8	20.2	19.3	18.4	13.8	14.1	12.5	12.7	10.7
Wrote for pleasure	7.7	16.4	7.5	16.1	5.4	14.4	6.1	13.7	4.9	13.6
Read a book	38.1	52.1	32.8	44.8	26.5	41.1	26.3	37.0	19.9	33.6
Read magazines	37.7	41.4	45.2	50.4	44.0	53.8	49.7	50.6	42.0	46.8
Pets	47.0	54.5	48.6	56.0	46.3	55.3	43.4	52.4	41.6	50.7
Scouts, guides etc.	8.8	10.9	8.5	10.3	7.5	7.4	7.5	6.1	4.9	4.9
Played instrument	14.8	23.9	13.1	19.6	13.4	18.3	12.9	15.1	13.9	12.3
None of these	1.3	2.0	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.3

### Home: Activities after school

Table 4 shows the percentage of young people that spent any time at all on these different pursuits on the previous evening. Amounts of time are not presented here, although they are recorded in the databank for watching television and doing homework.

Television watching, homework, and listening to music come high in the list, although about half the young people also spent time with friends and with their pets. Computer games are important in the lives of many male teenagers, although interest may be waning among the older boys. Reading books is a declining interest, but more girls than boys spend time doing so.

Table 5. The young people's smoking categories.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Never smoked	73.3	77.5	65.0	59.5	52.1	44.1	42.5	36.1	39.6	31.7
Tried smoking once or twice	19.1	15.2	22.5	22.7	26.5	27.1	28.2	24.2	23.6	25.6
Used to smoke	4.9	4.0	6.4	9.6	8.6	9.6	9.0	11.7	6.2	9.4
Smoke occasionally	2.0	2.6	3.2	5.3	5.8	10.2	9.9	13.1	13.1	13.9
Smoke regularly	0.7	0.7	2.8	2.9	7.0	9.0	10.3	14.9	17.5	19.3
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Derived % of smokers	2.7	3.3	6.0	8.2	12.8	19.2	20.2	28.0	30.6	33.2
Valid responses	1043	1063	4387	4236	3108	3156	5004	4584	997	1158

This checklist of activities was originally derived from the free responses of young people. The tiny percentage in the bottom line shows that most interests have been covered!

Since the young people are not restricted to the selection of just one activity from the list, the responses also reflect the number of different activities that one person gets through on one evening. If each respondent did only one thing, the column totals would amount to exactly 100%. Since they typically amount to about 500%, it follows that the average young person is doing five activities in the list.

### Drugs:

#### Smokers and non-smokers

Table 5 sorts the young people into five ca-

Table 6. The regular paid jobs carried out during term-time.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Babysitting	6.9	22.2	7.0	33.4	6.4	34.8	6.1	38.0	9.1	32.0
Hairdressing	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.2	0.3	0.2	2.8	0.2	1.9
Working in a shop	7.4	7.0	7.7	6.8	4.9	12.0	10.3	14.4	15.4	20.8
Manual work	7.4	0.0	6.2	1.5	5.5	0.7	7.5	1.2	9.3	0.6
Paper/milk round	28.2	22.2	46.7	21.2	55.7	17.1	53.6	13.9	38.3	5.6
Hotel, bar or café	1.4	5.7	2.4	2.9	3.5	10.4	4.8	12.4	9.7	24.8
Farm work/gardening	11.6	3.8	8.1	3.4	8.0	3.0	6.4	2.7	5.8	1.8
Paid housework	25.9	32.9	12.8	22.0	9.0	13.5	3.8	6.7	2.6	8.7
Other work	10.6	6.3	9.1	8.1	6.9	8.3	7.3	8.0	9.5	8.7
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Valid responses	216	158	1043	892	1132	979	2054	1803	462	621

tegies of 'smoker' that we have used for several years. Although our data is not truly longitudinal — in other words, different groups of pupils represent each year's sample — the figures do progress from year to year in a consistent pattern. Since different parts of the UK have different representation in each year group within the survey sample, this implies that young people's overall smoking behaviour does not show much variation across the UK districts represented in the data.

The upper line in Table 5 shows the expected large decrease with age of those who have never tried smoking, with girls leading the boys in experimentation. However, the second line (*tried smoking once or twice*), which might be expected to show an increase with age, shows little trend between years 8 and 11. Does this imply that about 20% of youngsters have experimented with smoking by the age of 12 and given up; if they try their first cigarette after that age, they are likely to carry on smoking?

The percentage of smokers, derived by adding together the occasional and regular smokers, shows that the largest percentage increases take place in years 8, 9 and 10.

Looking at the data for year 11, which effectively summarises the young people's smoking history up to that stage in their development, we can say that approximately one third have never tried smoking, one third have tried and given up, and one third smoke occasionally or regularly — this proportion are likely to be smokers in adulthood, according to the adult smoking figures that are currently available.

### Money: Regular paid jobs

Table 6, which shows the percentages of workers, not of the whole sample, reveals obvious and expected differences between the boys' and the girls' choice of paid work. *Babysitting* is more likely to be a girl's job: at nearly 40% in year 10 it is the girls' largest category, and also unlawful for those under 14! Of the working boys, 40-50% are involved in *paper or milk rounds*. *Shops, cafés, etc.* employ increasing numbers of older respondents, although

## LIFESTYLES: Data about pupils for pupils

A set of datafiles containing Health Related Behaviour results for 200 mixed year 10 pupils. The 18 variables can be read by any database program used by schools, supporting a range of work from simple description of the sample to verification of hypotheses about linked behaviours. The first datafile, *Mainly Social*, includes relationships, smoking and drinking, self-concept, and aspects of physical health. It can contribute to many NC subjects. Price £10, including manual and postage, from the Unit.

Table 7. The young people's personal assessment of their physical fitness.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Very unfit	0.6	1.7	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.4	1.1	2.1	1.1	1.4
Unfit	5.1	6.9	5.7	7.9	5.9	10.9	7.2	12.6	6.6	15.2
Moderately fit	26.8	36.4	28.4	42.4	31.1	48.3	30.2	51.2	31.3	51.1
Fit	47.5	45.6	47.5	42.1	47.2	34.5	47.6	30.0	47.1	27.5
Very fit	20.0	9.3	17.1	6.4	14.9	4.9	13.9	4.1	13.8	4.7
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Valid responses	997	1030	4229	4154	3008	3109	4895	4520	961	1144

more girls than boys are involved in this particular employment. The descending number receiving payment for *housework* may reflect parents' increased willingness to let older offspring work for others.

This is term-time work. Other data presented in the report shows that over 20% of the oldest boys are working for more than 10 hours a week, and some are working for more than 20 hours. It is hard to believe that these high values do not conflict with school work.

### Sport: Assessment of personal fitness

Table 7 presents the young people's judgment of their own fitness. Joint research with Prof. Neil Armstrong has indicated that pupils' physical fitness levels derived from physiological measurements correlate with their own estimates on the scale shown here.

Perceived fitness levels are lower for girls than for boys, and, with increasing age, it ap-

pears that fewer members of either sex report being *very fit*. The percentage of *fit* girls falls with increasing age, with a very steady rise in the *moderately fit* and *unfit* categories. Up to 20% of girls fail to identify any form of exercise that they do at all regularly out of school. The percentage of *fit* boys holds steady with increasing age.

### Social & personal: Information about sex

The question presented in Table 8 has been included in the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire for many years, and the prominence of *parents* as a *desired* source of information is well-established. This has sometimes been used to support the claim that parents are failing to support their children when it comes to 'facts of life', as they have a much lower score in another question asking what, in practice, young people's main source of information is. However, follow-up work and the experience of

Table 8. Responses to a question asking the young people who or what *should be* their main source of information about sex.

Responses	Year 7 (11-12)		Year 8 (12-13)		Year 9 (13-14)		Year 10 (14-15)		Year 11 (15-16)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Parents	54.6	72.4	53.0	68.0	50.8	61.6	42.2	55.1	43.1	54.6
School lessons	20.8	12.9	24.9	16.7	27.4	21.0	32.8	26.2	30.6	25.5
Friends	6.3	3.6	6.8	5.7	6.4	6.4	7.8	8.1	9.9	7.4
Siblings, relations	2.6	2.0	1.8	2.2	2.0	2.6	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.4
Doctor/school nurse	6.6	4.6	4.0	3.1	3.8	2.6	3.3	2.4	2.1	1.7
Family Planning Clinic	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.9	1.7	3.2
TV, films	4.4	1.1	5.2	1.5	4.7	1.1	6.4	1.1	5.0	1.4
Stories in books/magazines	1.6	1.5	1.4	0.8	1.6	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.4
Posters, leaflets, ref. books	1.9	1.2	2.1	1.4	2.3	1.8	2.7	1.8	3.9	2.4
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Valid responses	1018	1023	4234	4118	3003	3056	4777	4427	923	1104

numerous interviews indicates that young people would find talking about 'sex' with their parents as embarrassing as the parents would themselves!

A method has been developed at the Unit which permits the examination of this and associated data at a parents' evening, the objects being firstly to make them more comfortable, and secondly to enable them to participate with the school in a co-operative programme of sex education across the five years of compulsory secondary schooling.

### Survey data collected over the past decade shows an upturn in smoking and no decrease in levels of alcohol consumption.

#### Static, or changing?

When one searches for changes in behaviours across this time-span, one discovers some interesting items in connection with attention to appearance and with washing and grooming behaviours, the most recent data showing higher levels of attention by young people to these matters. There are also some changes indicated with respect to the use of illegal drugs. Concerning smoking, our data between 1985 and 1988 showed a decline in the consumption of cigarettes, but an increase has occurred since that time. In connection with the use of alcohol by young people, the figures always show frequent use of a wide range of alcoholic drink, and substantial levels of consumption. The levels of consumption by the large number of young people surveyed have always been high. Across this period of time there is no sign of a decrease in levels of consumption; if anything, there may be an increase.

#### The sample

The vast majority of our information comes from pupils in mixed comprehensive schools, and the schools are encouraged to represent the whole ability spectrum in their classroom surveys. We therefore believe that the data gives a good picture of the young people in each area (usually corresponding to a District Health Authority) surveyed.

This very large sample thus represents a much larger group of young people than the one from which it was drawn — probably more than twice the number. However, we do not know to what extent these samples and drifts are representative of the country as a whole, although where comparison data is available our figures are usually in line with more deliberately sampled national data from, for example, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Some examples of these

comparisons are presented in *Young People in 1993*.

In areas with a substantial independent school provision, some of the 'cream' may be lost from the comprehensives, although independent schools may still elect to be involved in a district survey. Many of the behaviours recorded in the questionnaire are linked to ability and home background, so this 'creaming' could, in some cases, result in a slight bias. However, this may be offset by the absence of up to 10% of the school population through illness or truancy, affecting principally the low-achieving pupils.

### Conclusion

Once again, the use of our surveys has generated a detailed picture of the changing lifestyles of young people across the UK. The sample from the 150 surveys carried out in 1993 is a substantial, well-spread one from many parts of the country, the 29,000 pupils represented within it having been drawn from a population of about 60,000. As mentioned earlier, *Young People in 1993* is the eighth book in a series which began in 1986.

Across the last ten years the survey has been used in over one thousand secondary schools and in hundreds of primary schools. Amongst the secondary schools, two have used the survey on six occasions, a few on four occasions, several three times, and many twice. Many Health Authorities have also used the survey on more than one occasion, and two Regional Health Authorities have now surveyed twice, the second surveys being currently in progress.

The variety of ways in which the data is used by schools now includes examination of their own data on computer disc in IT lessons to look for connections between behaviours and to consider lifestyles. It is now also possible to return data to individual pupils that wish to assess their health risk, using an appraisal score to measure the extent to which responses to selected questions in the survey indicate the associated risk to their health.

We are always looking at ways of making the survey data more accessible to a wider audience. Of particular interest is the possibility of automatically inserting the results for selected questions into a sheet or card which carries sufficient background information to constitute a complete classroom resource on that particular topic.