

A unique contemporary archive of young people, 'Young People in 2001' provides the answers to over 100 health-related behaviour questions.

John Balding

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Young People in 2001

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To date, figures from the HRBQ include more than 4,800 separate school surveys involving nearly 610,000 young people.

Annually since 1986, the Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU) has published the collected Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) results.

The 'Young People' series reports on data from primary and secondary school surveys across different regions of the country. To date, figures from the HRBQ include more than 4,800 separate school surveys involving nearly 610,000 young people.

The important dimension of 'Young People in 2001' is to be able to see at the same time the behaviours from both primary and secondary school. Many surveys have involved individual secondary schools at the same time as their feeder primary schools. These results inform action in communities.

Striking changes

In 'Young People in 1998' we saw some striking changes looking back over the last 17 years of data. We didn't see a lot of additional change between 1998 and 2001, but some important findings have been repeated - like the changes in worrying about school, and the reports of illegal drug use.

This latest report provides the answers to over 100 health-related behaviour questions. 15,881 young people, between the ages of 10 and 15, tell us about what they do at home, at school, and with their friends.

Good news

The data tables show clearly the changes of behaviour as children move to secondary school and begin to mature. The tables should

The 'Young People' series

'Young People in 1986' (YP86) began the series and was based on a sample of 18,002 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 in 88 schools in England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland. They had completed version 10 of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ). Reported in 'Education and Health' (vol. 5 no.4), the YP86 article was based on a selection from almost 200 tables contained in the report.

We believed then that YP86 was the most up-to-date and comprehensive of its kind ever published - a claim which would still be upheld today with YP2001.

Reading from the 1986 article a number of interesting comparisons can be made with current data as presented in this article. For example in 1986:

- * 20% of 14 -15 year old females had nothing at all for breakfast
- * Approximately half the sample had visited their doctor within the last three months
- * Approximately 6% of the 14 - 15 year olds worked for more than 10 hours a week

'Young People in 1998' also provided a unique portrait of the health-related behaviour of young people. HRBQ results from 200,000 pupils since 1983 were analysed. 'Education and Health' (vol. 17, no.1) summarised the report.

Among the headlines were:

- 'more girls than ever want to lose weight'
- 'involvement with physical activities decreases with age'
- 'the trend for smokers has been upwards'

dispel the illusion that all is innocence in the primary school, but also give some heart to those that work with older children - there is a lot of good news here.

As usual we offer some key findings from the report together with examples from the data tables.

Key findings

- ▷ The older they get, more young people think that drugs are 'always unsafe'. Cannabis is the only drug which is considered to be safer by the older groups, and is by far the most common drug used with around 27% of 14-15-year-old males and females reporting having tried it.
- ▷ 'The way you look' is the principal worry for young people, but school, money and career worries are also high on the list of the older teenagers. Females are more likely to worry about all the topics than males, with 55% of 14-15-year-old females worrying 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about 'the way you look', and 39% about 'school work problems'.
- ▷ 20% of the 14-15 year old females had 'nothing at all' for breakfast 'this' morning.
- ▷ 39% of 10-11 year old males do not know an illness called AIDS.
- ▷ 37% of the 10-11 year old girls have had fears about going to school because of bullying.
- ▷ 66% of all pupils have Internet access which rises to up to 81% of 14-15 year olds. 67% of 14-15 year old males browse without adult supervision.

61% of 14-15 year old females want to loose weight

questionnaire (version 21) contains a checklist of 15 common food items against which the pupils indicate typical levels of consumption. The figures that have always attracted a lot of attention here have been those related to the very high proportion of young women who want to lose weight – 61% this year.

We have been able to relate this desire to low self-esteem and general anxiety about their appearance. In their behaviour, we find these female pupils who want to lose weight are more likely to skip breakfast or lunch, and to eat a calorie-conscious diet – but it's certain that most of these young women do not need to lose weight. We would like to add our voice to those who wish to see a much greater variety of body shapes presented positively in print and other media.

- ▷ **Breakfast (Table 1)**
20% of the 14-15 year old females had 'nothing at all' for breakfast 'this' morning.
- ▷ **Lunch**
18% of the 14-15 year old females ate no lunch on their previous day at school.
- ▷ **Breakfast & Lunch**
25% of the 14-15 year old females who had nothing to eat at breakfast 'this' morning had nothing to eat at lunch the previous day at school.
- ▷ **Healthy eating**
Females are more likely than males to take health into account when choosing what to eat. 27% of the 14-15 year old males never do.
- ▷ **Weight**
61% of the 14-15 year old females and 25% of the 14-15 year old males would like to lose weight, but 13% of males and females are 'clinically' overweight.
- ▷ **Food choices**
Up to 70% of older pupils have dairy products. For females, there is an age-related drop in frequency of consumption of chips and sugary cereals. Females, from 10 - 15 years, show a greater preference for fresh fruit and vegetables.

Food choices and weight control

This section of the has passed through more revisions than any other. The latest version

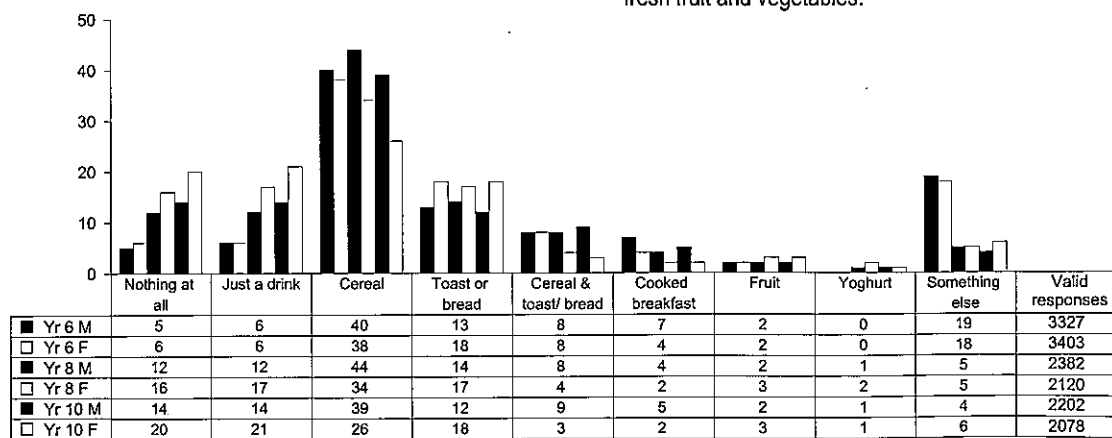


Table 1
BREAKFAST
What did you have for breakfast this morning?



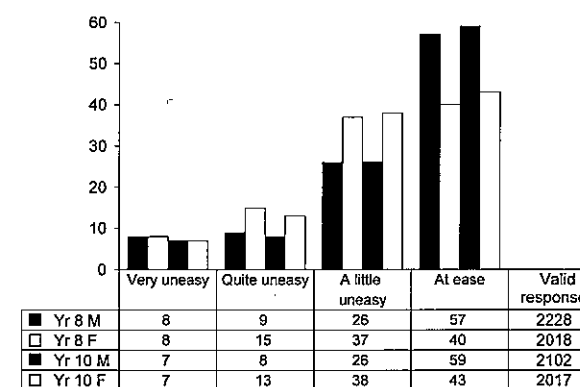
Up to 23% of the females felt 'quite uneasy' or 'very uneasy' on their last visit to the doctor.

Table 2
CONFIDENCE WITH DOCTOR
On this last visit, did you feel at ease with the doctor?

Doctor and Dentist

We know amongst adults that there are wide variations how much we get out of the health service – and some of that has to do with our own attitudes.

Are GPs aware of the perhaps surprisingly high frequencies of attendance of young people? In the introduction to 'Young People in 2001', we report how one GP was so unbelieving of the attendance figures reported locally that he checked his own practice records, and found them consistent with the rates recorded



in the survey.

We can see differences emerging in young people in how confident they are with a doctor. Some of our earlier work showed that young people are more confident if they see a female GP.

Toothbrushing frequency, as we have demonstrated over the years, is related to several other aspects of lifestyle, including birth order, ease with the opposite sex, region of the country, self-esteem and smoking.

- ▷ **Going to the doctor**
About 27% of the pupils reported visiting their GP within the previous month, and about 50% of all the young people had done so within the previous three months.
- ▷ **Confidence with the doctor (Table 2)**
58% of the males, compared with 41% of the females, reported being 'at ease' on their last visit.
- ▷ **Toothbrushing**
Around 25% of 10 - 15 year old males brush only once. Up to 17% of all females brush their teeth three times or more a day.
- ▷ **Going to the dentist**
About 75% reported visiting the dentist in the previous six months. 11% of the older males have not visited a dentist in over 12 months.



Health and Safety

Many of the questions in this group reflect a traditional view of health - physical cleanliness, use of medicines, and common ailments. There are also questions about accidents, and the vulnerability of young cyclists is also a major concern. Those that report taking painkillers continues to remain high. This year, 46% of the 14-15 year old females had taken painkillers on at least one day during the previous week.

- ▷ **Cycling**
58% of the Year 6 males 'hardly ever' or 'never' wear a safety helmet when cycling.
- ▷ **Toilet hygiene**
Few pupils 'never' or 'almost never' wash their hands after using the lavatory.
- ▷ **Baths & showers**
20% of the Year 10 females had eight or more baths or showers during the week before the survey.
- ▷ **Asthma**
Up to 18% of all pupils report having asthma. Our mental health monograph 'No Worries?' (Balding, 1998), describes a strong connection between general levels of worry and asthma and its symptoms.
- ▷ **Eczema**
Almost twice as many females as males report having eczema with 15% of females saying 'yes'. We have never seen it suggested that eczema is more common in females, and so try to find an explanation for this unexpected result. Perhaps they are just more likely to complain of skin rashes.
- ▷ **Dyslexia**
At least 4% of males said they had dyslexia

- ▷ **Disturbed nights**
About 30% of the males and around 42% of the females experience disturbed sleep though coughing.
- ▷ **Medication (Table 3)**
46% of the 14 - 15 year old females had taken painkillers on at least one day during the previous week. Can all the Year 10 females, who are taking painkillers, be suffering from period pains during the week before the survey? Assuming that up to a half are, the other 23% must be taking painkillers for other reasons, which is similar to the proportion of males that are doing so.
- ▷ **'Wheezers'**
Around 60% of females report having trouble breathing (not just feeling out of breath) when they run.
- ▷ **Safety outside after dark and during the day**
Up to 29% of the sample felt that safety after dark was 'poor' or 'very poor' in their neighbourhood, with females and the younger age group feeling more apprehensive.
- ▷ **Being bullied**
37% of the Year 6 and the Year 8 females are afraid of going to school because of a fear of bullying. Many items in the survey can be linked with fear of bullying, most notably low self-esteem and poor perceived control, and also, asthma, eczema and birth order.
- ▷ **Accidents**
During the previous year, around 36% of the males needed treatment from a doctor or at a hospital. 36% of the Year 6 males had a cut needing treatment. Most accidents occur while 'playing sport', for males, and 'at home' for older females.
- ▷ **Sunburn**
Few do not take precautions to avoid sunburn but there are clear gender and age differences in the data. Up to 17% of males take no precaution.

Almost twice as many females as males report having eczema with 15% of females saying 'yes'.

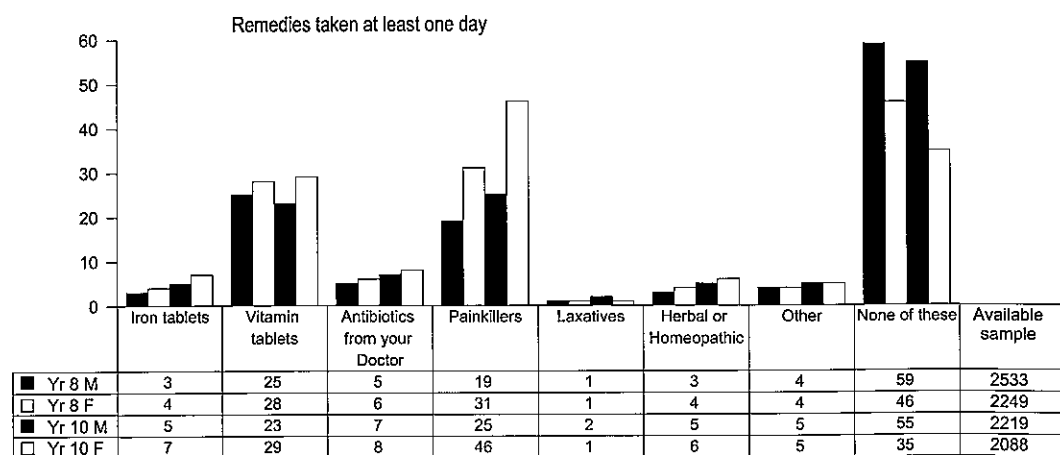


Table 3
MEDICATION
On how many days in the past week have you used these remedies or medications?



Family and Home

Young people spend the majority of their time in and around the home. Relevant questions in the HRBQ relate particularly to the kind of home they live in and the things they do when at home. The home is such an important feature of young people's health careers. We notice this year that responses to the questions about accessing and browsing the Internet are generally up by around 10% for older pupils. We also note the 36% of older males reporting doing no homework and we need to carry out further research to determine if recent data reveals a new trend. However it is clear that more girls than boys do homework and they spend longer at it.

- ▷ **Family structure**
Up to 66% of the young people live with both parents, and up to 17% live in single-parent families. Around 40% live in a household with five or more people, and the majority live in a home with two children. About 60% have at least one younger sibling and up to 17% of the younger pupils live in a family with five or more children at home.
- ▷ **School journey**
Around 50% walk to school, up to 19% go by school bus, and over 21% (the majority female) go at least part of the way to school by car. Over 45% of the sample have two or more cars in their family.
- ▷ **Television**
At least 85% watched some TV during the evening prior to the survey. At least 17% watched more than 3 hours of TV, whilst 15% or fewer did not watch any TV at all. Similar levels of males and females watched different amounts of TV.

66% of all pupils have access to the Internet which rises to 81% of 14-15 year olds.

- ▷ **Homework**
More females than males did homework on the evening before the survey, and they tended to spend longer at it. 36% of the 14-15 year old males did no homework.
- ▷ **Computer games (Table 4)**
Up to 73% of the males, compared with up to 35% of the females, spent some time playing computer games on the previous evening. The data reveal that significant percentages of males in this sample spent a considerable amount of time playing computer games during the evening before the survey. While there are some benefits to playing some computer games, (Griffiths, M. *The educational benefits of videogames*. Education and Health, 2002: 20: 3, 47-51), it is easy to suppose that their time might be better spent.
- ▷ **Internet**
Up to 81% of 14-15 year olds accessed the Internet 'in the last month'. This figure is up 10% on last year. More than 66% of all pupils in the sample do have access to the Internet. At least 42% have access at home, again a figure which is around 10% higher than last year. 67% of 14-15 year old males browse without adult supervision compared to 54% in last year's figures.
- ▷ **Evening activities**
The most common of all is television watching (about 86%). Activities more popular with males: (5+% difference) playing computer games, meeting with friends and playing sport. Activities more popular with females: (5+% difference) reading a book. The fall in the percentage of 'readers' between Year 6 and Year 10 implies a decline in the importance of books in the lives of children as they grow older.

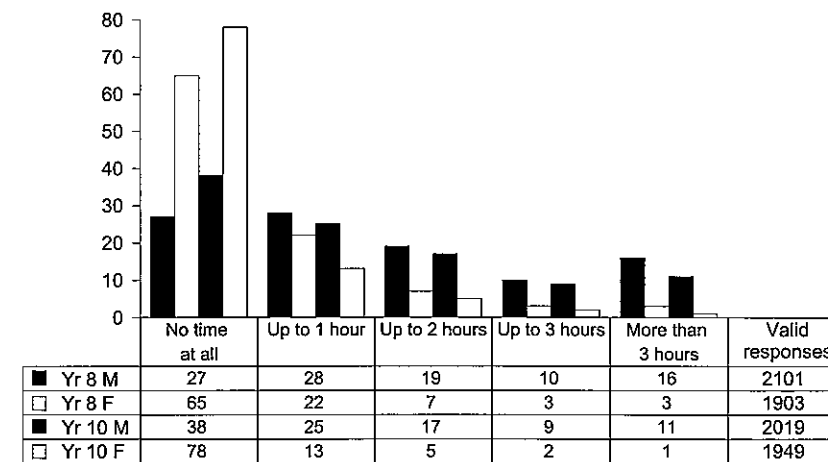
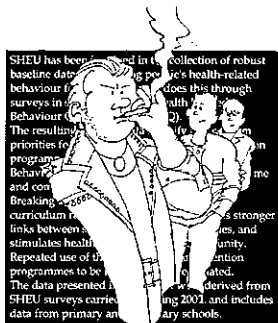


Table 4
COMPUTER GAMES
How long did you spend playing computer games after school yesterday?



Legal and Illegal drugs

The proportion of young people under sixteen in the UK who don't drink has remained around 40% since the late 1980s. However the remaining 60% of young people are revealing some alarming trends including the rise in excessive or heavy drinking (see *Binge Drinking*. Education and Health, 2002:20: 3, 46).

Drug experimentation with cannabis was the main story reported by the media this year following the publication of the 'Young People' report. Up to 29% of the Year 10 pupils report taking cannabis compared to up to 19% reported in 1999.

▷ Experience of alcohol

Over 13% of the 10-11 year olds, more than 24% of the 12-13 year olds, and 47% of the 14-15 year olds had consumed at least one of the listed alcoholic drinks during the previous week.

▷ Beer or lager

34% of the males and 16% of the females, aged 14-15, drank at least one pint of beer or lager during the previous week.

▷ 'Alcopops' (Table 5)

30% of the 14-15 year old females had drunk at least one small bottle of 'Alcopops' during the previous week. This percentage is the same as 1997, but much higher than for the years 1998 - 2000.

▷ Wines and Spirits

20% of the 14-15 year old females had drunk at least one glass of wine during the previous week. Since 1996, the data shows that older females 'overtook' the males as spirit-drinkers with 20%, 14-15 year old females, drinking one or more measures in the past week.

▷ Alcohol units and frequency

Almost twice as many males (10%) than females (6%) in Year 10 (14-15 year olds) drink 15 or more units of alcohol in the previous week. 14% of the Year 10 males drank on 3 days or more during the previous week

▷ Obtaining alcohol

The off-licence is the most important source of purchased alcohol, especially for the 14-15 year olds, followed by the pub or bar.

▷ Drinking at home

Most 'drinkers' drank at home and substantial numbers of 14-15 year olds used other venues including friends, disco, club, party, pubs and outside in a public place. Of those who do drink at home, about half do so with their parents always knowing about it.

▷ Smoking levels

28% of the 14-15 year old females and 20% of the 14-15 year old males smoked at least one cigarette during the previous week.

▷ Sources of cigarettes

14% of the 14-15 year old females were able to buy cigarettes from a shop and 7% of the same group were supplied by friends.

▷ Attitude to smoking

Between Year 8 (12-13 years) and Year 10 (14-15 years) the number of regular smokers more than triples. Up to 65% will have smoked by Year 10. The majority of current smokers say they would like to stop. 56% of the Year 10 females have a close friend who smokes. The contrast in smoking between females with or without friends who smoke is dramatic, but the highest proportion smoking of all is among Year 10 females with a 'smoking' sister.

▷ Drug safety

The older they get pupils think that illicit drugs are 'always unsafe' except cannabis which is considered to be 'always unsafe' by a smaller percentage of the older groups.

▷ Drug users

Up to 61% of the 14-15 year olds are 'fairly sure' or 'certain' that they know an illicit drug user.

▷ Drug experience

About 1 in 5 pupils in Year 10 - four times as many as in Year 8 - have tried at least one illicit drug. Cannabis is by far the most likely drug to have been tried, with almost 29% of 14-15 year olds reporting having taken it.

Up to 61% of the 14-15 year olds are 'fairly sure' or 'certain' that they know a drug user.

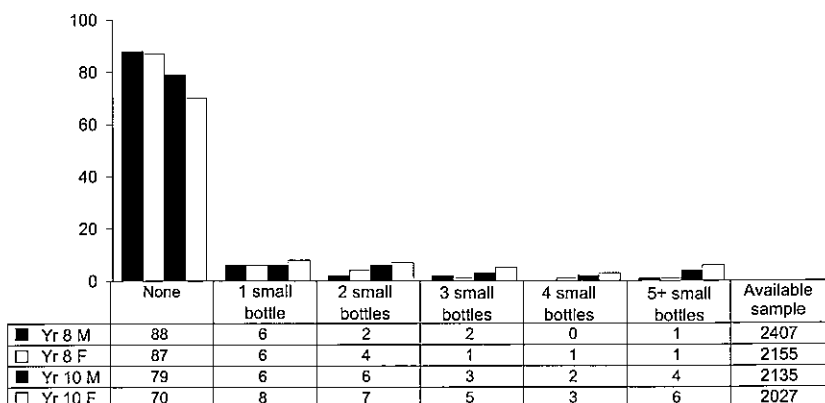


Table 5
ALCOPOPS
During the last 7 days, how many small bottles of 'alcopops' have you drunk?



Money

Work and money open up all sorts of opportunities, including the opportunity to explore health-risky behaviour.

- ▷ **Paid work during term time**
The percentage of young people with a regular job rises from about 25% (12-13 years) to around 40% (14-15 years).
- ▷ **Hours worked**
Around 12% of the 14-15 year old workers worked for more than 10 hours a week before the survey. The average hours worked per. week was between 4.2 and 6.3.
- ▷ **Money earned**
Over 28% of 14-15 year olds earned more than £20 a week. The average for the same group was over £23 for males and over £19 for females.

- ▷ **Pocket money (Table 6)**
64% of 10 -11 year olds receive up to £5, while 29% of the 14-15 year olds receive more than £10 per week.
- ▷ **Total income**
20% of the 14-15 female pupils receive more than £20 per week from pocket money and job.
- ▷ **Saving money**
More males than females are savers and up to 39% saved something.
- ▷ **Spending money**
36% of older males spent more than £10 during the week before the survey.
- ▷ **Items bought last week**
Sweets remain the favourite item for all age groups. In Year 10, spending on alcohol, cigarettes and fares becomes important.

Around 40% of 14-15 year olds have a regular job.

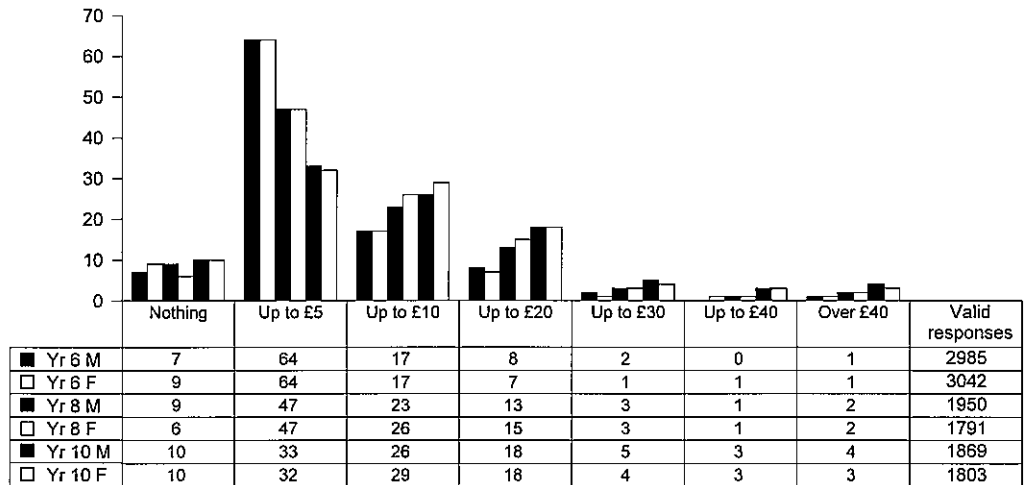


Table 6
POCKET MONEY
How much money do you receive as your weekly pocket money or allowance?



Exercise and Sport

There is widespread concern at what appear to be generally low levels of physical activity in the daily life of young people. If, as has been suggested, the four-year-olds starting in our primary schools will have a life expectancy in excess of a hundred years, then we need to ensure that they have a healthy respect for the role that physical fitness plays in their quality and enjoyment of life.

The questions in this section cover physical activity, perceived fitness, and which sporting activities (if any) young people took part in out of school time.

The results show that up to 70% of 10-11 year olds think they are 'fit' or 'very fit'. Over 25% of the Year 10 females describe themselves as 'unfit' or 'very unfit'. However research is underway that promotes regular exercise and makes links between physical activity and academic achievement (Balding, A. *Pupils get Fit to Succeed*. Education and Health, 2001:19: 1, 17-19).

▷ **Enjoyment of sport** (Table 7)

49% of the 10-11 year old females enjoy physical activity 'a lot'. However, far fewer females than

Over 80% of primary school pupils and over 65% of the secondary pupils enjoy physical activity 'quite a lot' or 'a lot'.

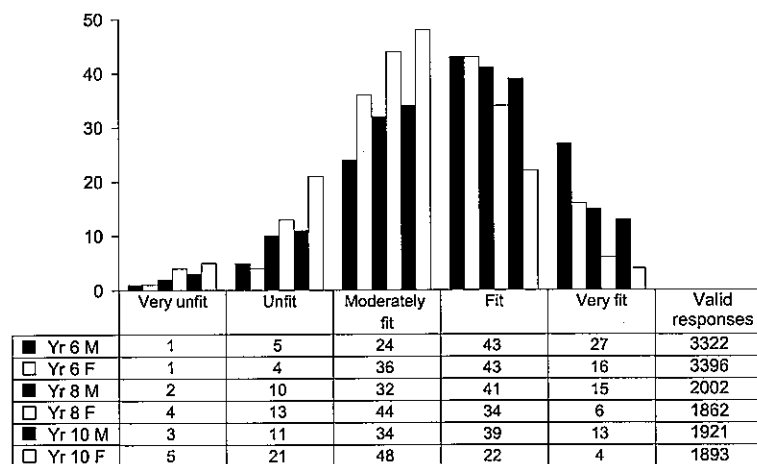


Table 7
ENJOYMENT OF SPORT
How fit do you think you are?

males in each year group report liking sport 'a lot'. Half as many 14-15 year old females as males say they enjoy physical activity 'a lot'. Nevertheless, over 80% of primary school pupils and over 65% of the secondary pupils enjoy physical activity 'quite a lot' or 'a lot'.

▷ **Active sports**

Many of the 36 activities listed show a decline in involvement with increasing age except for: 5-a-side football, soccer, scrambling, badminton, fitness exercises, weight training and horse riding for females. Golf, hiking, fishing and volleyball remain generally constant for the older age groups and between genders.

▷ **Fitness** (Table 7)

43% of pupils in Year 6 think they are fit. Over 25% of the Year 10 females describe themselves as 'unfit' or 'very unfit'. Perceived fitness declines with age in males and females.

▷ **Aerobic exercise**

Over 80% of all groups (10-15 year olds) had exercised to the level of 'breathing hard' at least once in the previous week. The gap is seen to widen between males and females among the frequent exercisers as they get older. More than 11% of all groups never exercise.

Social and Personal

The questions included in this group refer to social relationships, sources of information about sex, and problem-sharing. Questions to discover the pupils' awareness about AIDS and contraceptive services are also included.

From the results we find that school lessons are an important source of information about sex. However, between Years 8 and 10 we see a trend away from parents and school lessons, and a trend towards friends. Other information

suggests that schools are conscientious in their teaching about sex and relationships, but teaching about parenthood, relationships and the prevention of infection is often poor (OFSTED. *Bare facts of life are not enough*. Education and Health, 2002:20:2, 38-39).

We find, from this year's results, that the level of self-esteem tends to increase with age, with the 'high' group including more males than females. 'The way you look' continues to be the principal worry for older females.

Since we started collecting these figures in

the early 1990s, there has been a decline in the knowledge and concern about AIDS/HIV. The figures, for those Year 6 males who did not know an illness called AIDS (or HIV) is: 1999 - 34%, 2000 - 40% and 2001 - 39%. Schools may be delaying their coverage of AIDS or balancing their programme with more detail about other infections than HIV. Nonetheless, the trend is not reassuring.

▷ **Information about sex** (Table 8)

Between Years 8 and 10 there is a trend away from parents and school lessons and a trend towards friends. Parents should be the main source of information particularly for females according to these young people.

▷ **Worries**

14-15 year old females top the list of most problem areas. 'The way you look' is the principal worry for these young people, (including 55% of the Year 10 females), but school, family and career worries are also high on the list of the older teenagers.

▷ **School problems**

There has been a marked rise in worry about school work since 1996. Mother and father are the most common source of support.

▷ **Career problems**

Mother and father are the most likely source of support and up to 18% of older pupils would turn to a teacher. Up to 17% of older pupils would turn to a teacher.

▷ **Friend problems**

Gender differences are pronounced. More males say mother and father, or 'would keep it to myself'. More females say mother. A similar proportion, however, would share the problem with another friend.

▷ **Family problems**

Females are twice as likely than males to turn to a friend. Males are more likely to go to mother and father or to 'keep it to myself'.

▷ **Gambling problems**

Around 25% would keep it to themselves.

▷ **Self-esteem**

The level of self-esteem tends to increase with age. The 'high' group included more males than females.

▷ **Control over health**

The majority feel they are in control of their health. At least a quarter do not think they can influence their health by their own efforts.

▷ **Getting on with adults**

Up to 47% 'get on best' with both parents. Older pupils show a move away from parents towards other individual family members and friend.

▷ **Life satisfaction**

Males are more satisfied than females. This difference is in line with evidence that females worry about more things than males.

▷ **Awareness of AIDS or HIV**

39% of the year 6 males do not know an illness called AIDS

▷ **Transmitting HIV**

Sharing needles and unsafe sex are correctly seen as the top risks. Within each year group, the females' knowledge is more accurate than the males'.

▷ **Information about HIV**

TV programmes and school lessons are the most widely-mentioned useful sources.

▷ **Precautions against HIV**

More males than females say they will not take care of getting infected with HIV. Over 20% of the 12-13 year old males say 'no' or 'not sure'.

▷ **Birth control services**

49% of the 14-15 year old females knew about the service for young people, and knowledge grew with age. 53% of the older males did not know of a source of free condoms whereas two-thirds of the females said they did know.

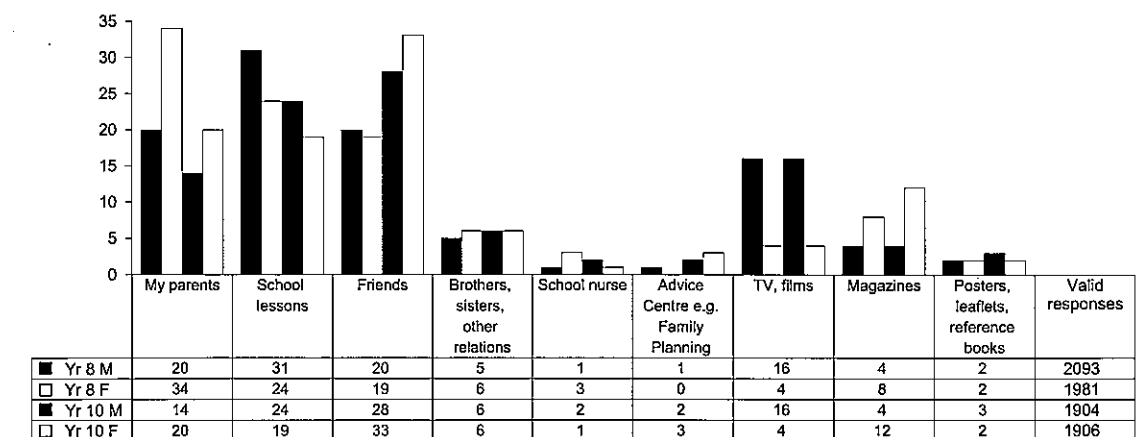


Table 8
INFORMATION ABOUT SEX
Which of these is your main source of information about sex?

