

Drug education linked to drug use

We recently came across some official research that showed a link between lower drug use and usefulness of drug education. We thought we might be able to show a similar association in our own data, and indeed, we can.

Our new annual report, 'Young People in 2002' is now available (details are available on the website; www.sheu.org.uk/pubs/index.htm), and we report here on some further analysis of the most recent data in relation to drug education and drug use.

We ask a question in our secondary questionnaire, about pupil's recall and assessment of school lessons about a variety of PSHE topics. When looking among the 13,809 Year 10 pupils who answered this question in 2002, we find 32% said they *cannot remember* any lessons about drug education (including tobacco and alcohol), while 10% thought that they were *not at all useful*, 20% thought their lessons were *of some use*, 21% *quite useful* and 15% *very useful*. There were marked differences in the drug experience of the pupils depending on how they rated their drug education. If they said they could not remember any drug education, 32% said they had *ever taken a drug* [other than medications, alcohol and tobacco]. Figures for the *not at all useful* group was 40%, 27% *some use*, 23% *quite useful* and 23% *very useful*. So, the more useful that they thought their drug education was, the less likely it was that pupils had ever tried drugs.

We can find this association in males and females separately, and in a data set from Hull and East Riding where a much smaller questionnaire was used that focussed only on drugs. So, this association can readily be replicated.

It is tempting to interpret this finding as meaning that good drug education inhibits or retards experimentation with drugs. However, it might also be the case that those young people who are most likely to experiment with drugs are those least likely to respond well to drug education of any quality. Perhaps the best reaction to these data is to ask ourselves how we can offer drug education that will be useful to all young people, whatever their background or likely future habits.

SHEU News

Angela Balding - Survey Manager

I am busy chasing schools to make sure they return their questionnaires before they begin 'tidying up' before the summer break. Our last years figures show that nearly 38,000 young people were involved in telling us about their health related behaviours through our survey work. We are very keen therefore to ensure that Primary Care Trusts and their partner organisations make full use of the data.

David Regis - Research Manager

Following David McGeorge's redesign of our website, I have been adding some little features that visitors might also enjoy like a search engine, random quote generator and providing forms for visitors to offer comments or sign up to our mailing lists. We had a nice opportunity recently to begin analysis of a data set about passive smoking collected in the South West. Far from being an academic exercise, the original purpose of the survey was to raise awareness in schools, so the first product of my work has been to construct a report for each school that can be used in schools by teachers and pupils. 'Young People in 2002' has been occupying us all recently and I have been interested to read about the new figures about Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Di Bish - Data Preparation Manager

Summer holidays are over and colleagues have returned refreshed. The schools that surveyed in the summer will have received their data by the end of September. The data preparation team look forward to the new school year and the autumn surveys arriving shortly.

Cheryl Lewis - Project Manager

Camden Children's Fund were pleased with the results of their consultation with children taking part in the Coram Primary Schools Project and the results will be posted on the Coram website (www.coram.org.uk) and the Camden Borough Council website. We are currently producing a leaflet for them highlighting some key discussion points arising from the exercise together with a resources list for teachers and other professionals. We hope to be able to assist Coram in their evaluation of the project. The Unit continues to seek more evaluation work, building on the recent drug education evaluation work undertaken.

Michelle Dickinson - SHEU Secretary

Congratulations to Michelle and Andy on the birth of their son Aidan. In Michelle's absence all your queries are being looked after by Dan Hawkins who is very pleased to assist.

David McGeorge - Editor

This issue contains a useful collection of articles about young people and sport, videogames and alcohol. It is also worth checking on the web site as some articles are available to download in pdf format. (www.sheu.org.uk/pubs/eh.htm). Thank you for your continued interest in the journal. I look forward to your company in the next issue.

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