

Angela Balding is the Survey Manager at the SHEU. E-mail: angela.balding@sheu.org.uk and visit the website at www.sheu.org.uk

Angela Balding

A Snapshot of the Health Related Behaviour of Young People in Further Education Colleges

This paper looks at data collected, to Summer 2005, from over 1700 further education students. The data come from the SHEU surveys and are collected from paper questionnaires and from the online survey. 30% of students were enrolled on BTEC courses, 18% on NVQs, 22% A levels, 10% GNVQs, 20% other courses.

Studies

Females more than males feel involved with their college: 47% of males and 54% of females said that they 'felt a real part of their college'. 34% overall said that they were included in lots of activities at college. Maybe this level of involvement was higher for the females because, 54% of males and 66% of females said that their level of effort in their course was 'high or very high'. Interestingly, in these anonymous, independent surveys, 29% of students said that they had too much college work to do while the majority, 68%, said it was about right.

Health

Contrary to popular belief, most students were getting plenty of sleep with only 14% of students having 5 hours or less of sleep 'last night' and another 16% had 6 hours of sleep. These data are perhaps surprising, as one might expect the figures to have been much higher, 24% said that they didn't get enough sleep for their health or to concentrate on their studies.

Over many years, of carrying out surveys with school pupils, we have come to expect that many more females than males report wanting to lose weight. So it comes as little surprise to find that 29% of male students and 69% of female students said that they 'would like to lose weight'. Also 27% of males and 75% of female students said that they had 'tried to lose weight' at some point.

Females worried more than males; 52% worried about study/work problems. 37% worried about their looks and 31% about 'what people think of you'. 36% of the males worried about money and 14% said they worried about the future.

Taking risks

Would female students worry more

than males when it comes to taking risks? 54% of males and 39% of females said that they don't worry much about risks. Interestingly the responses change when alcohol is associated with risk taking. 38% of males and 43% of female students said that they were more likely to do risky things when they have had a drink or two.

Smoking

Are the majority of student smokers likely to be male or female? 32% of males and 41% of females said that they smoke. What influence has life at college had on these young people? Of those smokers, 24% of the males and 15% of the female students had begun smoking since they had started college.

Similar results, to our school pupil surveys, show that 74% of students smokers said that they would like to give up. There is also a significant minority that could use the help of Student Services - 37% of the students in this sample said they would like help to give up smoking. 69% of the smokers have less than 10 cigarettes a day.

Alcohol

What are the expectations here? Are the majority drinkers? In this sample, 45% of students report drinking alcohol on a regular basis. We shouldn't be surprised to find that 69% of students said that people their age drink alcohol 'to get drunk'; 63% said 'to feel relaxed'; 50% said 'because their friends do'.

We might have expected a higher proportion to tell us about the harmful aspects of alcohol. However, only 14% of students said that they thought the amount that they personally drink is harmful to their health. Worryingly, 12% said that they didn't know if it was.

Drugs

Only 10% of students reported using cannabis weekly, and another 9% use cannabis less than once a week. Would we have expected these figures to be higher?

Fitness and Exercise

37% of males and 59% of female students

said that they didn't think they took enough exercise for someone their age to keep healthy. 80% of females and 68% of males said that they would like to take more exercise. It is of no great surprise, as we know the figures from the school pupils, that the proportion of males and females playing regular sport seems to diminish as they get older. In this student sample, 43% of males and only 13% of females said they play sport weekly. 24% of students go to clubs and, 43% go to the pub at least once a week.

Money

In this sample, 57% of students have a regular paid job.

Food and Diet

Who is preparing the food at home? Is FE college catering desirable? 66% of students usually have a main meal prepared at home each day and 7% report using a take-away/supermarket.

As for healthy eating, well there seems to be some scope for innovative and interesting campus meals as 37% said they thought their diet was unhealthy and 70% of students said they would like to eat more healthily.

Sexual Health and Relationships

26% of students said that their knowledge about sex was OK but they would still like to know more. 71% of students said that they knew pretty much all they needed. 30% of the males and 24% of the females said that they had had sex with no one.

On the last occasion they had sex, 19% of students used no form of contraception, 78% of males and 37% of females said they used a condom, 17% of males and 45% of females said that the pill was the method they used.

29% of students said they didn't know where to get free condoms. 23% of students said that they were able to get condoms free of charge at college. When asked what effective methods college could do to improve aspects of students health: 24% said flyers or leaflets would be helpful; 21% said posters/stickers in toilets; 17% said via the college website.