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## David Regis

### Trends among young people

We have just published *Young People into 2018* (Balding & Regis, 2018), which presents aggregate figures from local surveys in 2017. This report is the 32<sup>nd</sup> in a series begun in 1987, and is the first where we have a sample of more than one hundred thousand young people (100,976).

The full press release, summarising all the headlines, is on the SHEU website (SHEU, 2018), and the complete report may be obtained in PDF format by [application to SHEU](#).

#### Where are the figures from?

Every year, SHEU carry out healthy lifestyle surveys with young people for local authorities and each year these surveys involve tens of thousands of young people. At the end of each calendar year, we put all the results from all the surveys together, and publish a report.

These reports contain findings from over 100 health-related behaviour questions using answers from pupils in primary and secondary schools. They tell us about what they do at home, at school, and with their friends.

#### What's new?

We are always asked by journalists, what's new? Some of the latest figures are different from those we last published in 2017, but not all the differences are new – it's better to describe them as continuations of trends that we have seen going on for some time.

Some of the trends are unwelcome but we can point to several positive trends.

Schools working with us typically survey in even-numbered year groups: 4, 6, 8 and 10.

#### Continuing to increase:

- ↑ Use of computer games by 12-13yo males
- ↑ Fresh fruit on most days
- ↑ Females drinking at least a litre of water yesterday

#### Continuing to decrease:

- ↓ Enjoyment by 14-15yo females of physical activity
- ↓ Proportion of 14-15yo females scoring in the highest bracket of self-esteem
- ↓ Experimentation with tobacco cigarettes
- ↓ Drinking alcohol in the week before the survey
- ↓ Intending to stay in full-time education
- ↓ Use of computer games by females

#### Newly reported in this volume:

- Increase in reports of bullying (since 2011)
- Increase in the fear of bullying (since 2011)

#### Previously increasing but now steady:

- Skipping lunch
- Eating 5-a-day (portions of fruit/veg)
- Experimentation with cannabis
- 14-15yo females wanting to lose weight
- Use of computer games by males
- Enjoyment of school lessons
- Worrying about exams/tests

#### Previously decreasing but now steady:

- Eating crisps on most days

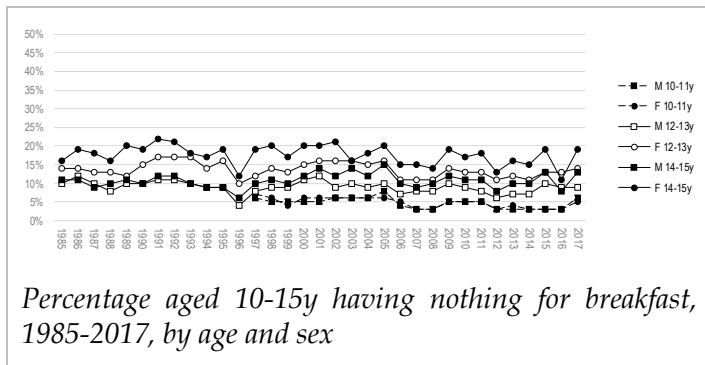
Pupils in these groups are aged as follows:

Year 4	8-9y
Year 6	10-11y
Year 8	12-13y
Year 10	14-15y

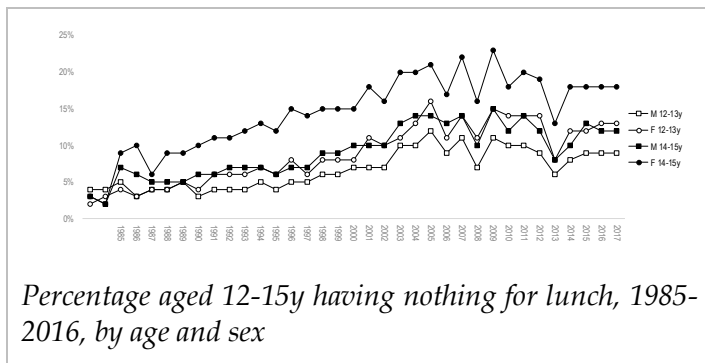
Below we show some trends from the last 20-30 years of collecting information from young people. The trends selected are for those questions which have remained the same or very similar over the years.

- KEY**
- M 10-11y
  - F 10-11y
  - M 12-13y
  - F 12-13y
  - M 14-15y
  - F 14-15y

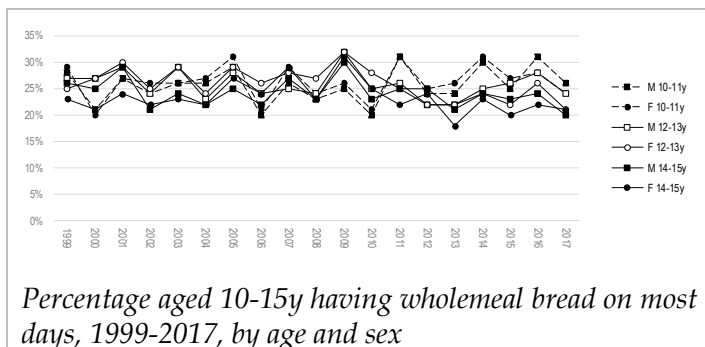
**Diet**



Skipping breakfast has stabilised across the board, and seems to be sitting at a lower level now than when we first started.

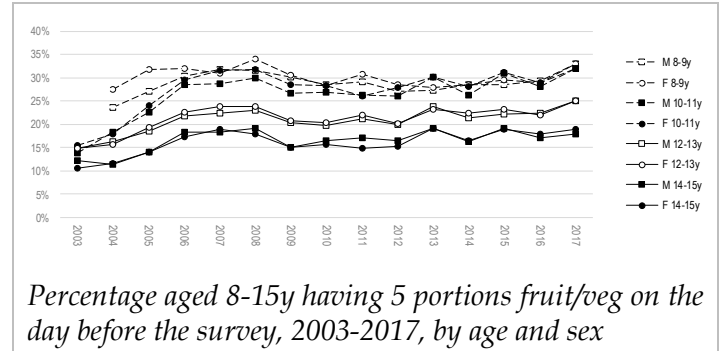


Skipping lunch rose steadily until about 2008, while current levels seem fairly level. Older females are consistently the group most likely to skip breakfast or lunch.

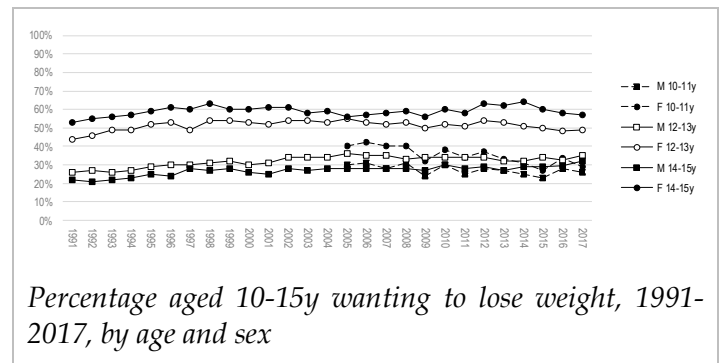


Many authorities use us every other year, and so will appear and disappear from the data sets.

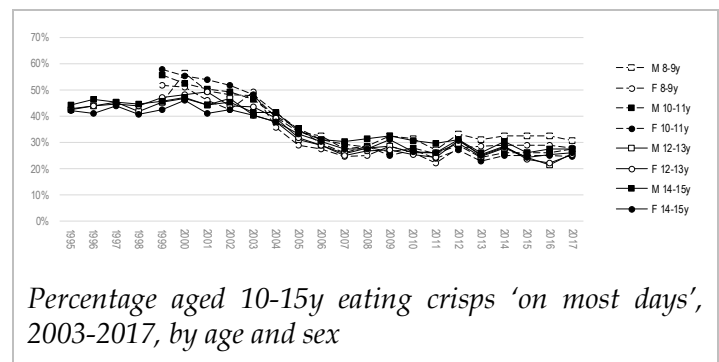
There are some trends in which we can see evidence of a consequent regional effect in the figures we obtain – as in the case of figures for eating wholemeal bread *on most days* in the middle 2000s, which shows a ‘rollercoaster’. Something of the same effect can be seen in the skipping lunch chart previously shown.



After an initial rise, the proportion eating 5-a-day has settled to a fairly constant level. The figures for young people in the Health Survey for England (2016) show the same shape for the trend.

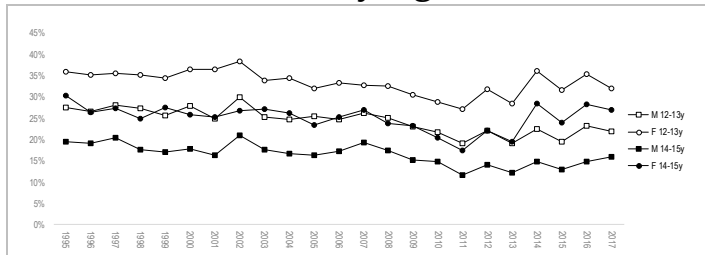


The proportion wanting to lose weight crept upwards from 1991 but from 1997 has shown no clear change. We know from previous work that not all those young people who say they want to lose weight actually need to, while many who are overweight express no desire to change.

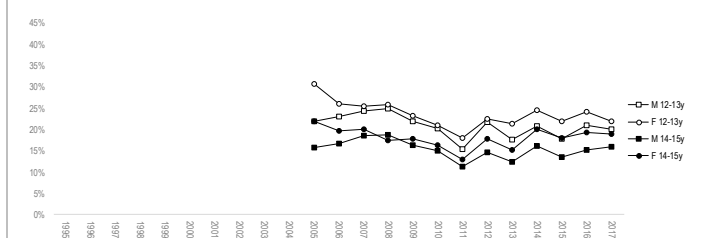


There was a very notable decline in eating crisps on most days from the late 1990s, but levels today are similar to those a decade ago. School tuck shop and ‘healthy snack’ policies may well have played a role here.

## Bullying



Percentage aged 12-15y fearing going to school because of bullying at least sometimes, 1995-2017

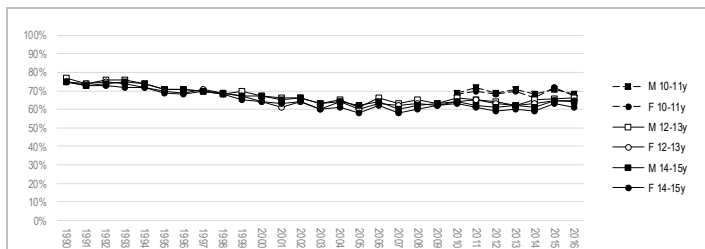


Percentage aged 12-15y who report being bullied at or near school in the last 12 months, 2005-2017

We have shown these two related charts on the same horizontal axis. The proportion of young people fearing bullying and being bullied generally declined from 2005-2011, but then took a turn upwards.

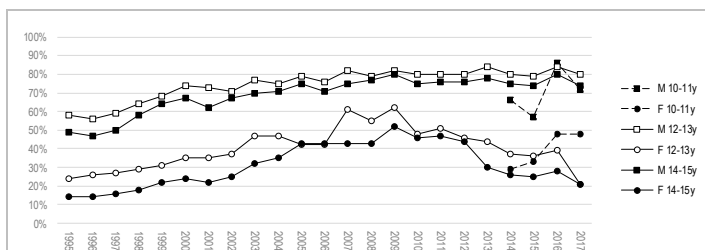
This trend has not previously been reported. Face-to-face as well as online bullying must be considered.

## Home and Leisure



Percentage of pupils aged 10-15y reporting living with mother and father at home 1990-2017

A long decline 1990-2005 has stabilised.

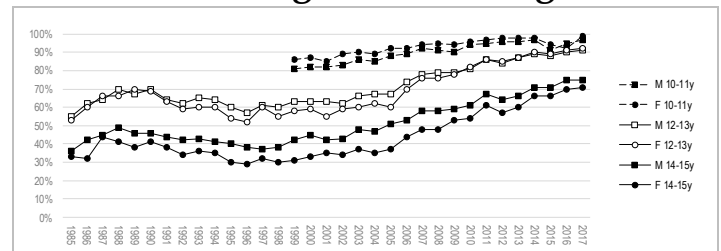


Percentage aged 12-15y who reported spending any time at all on computer games 1995-2017

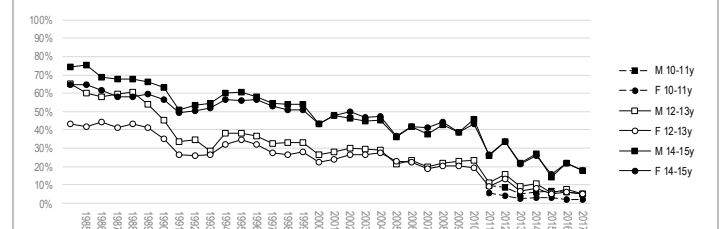
There is a rise among boys 12-15y playing computer games 1995-2007, while levels now are similar to those a decade ago; a similar rise 1995-

2007 is also seen among girls but since 2007 the trend has been downward.

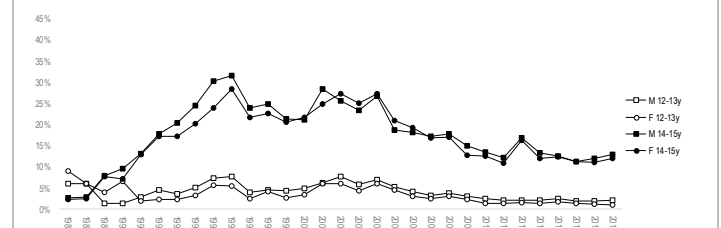
## Smoking, alcohol, drugs



Percentage of pupils aged 10-15y who have never smoked at all, 1985-2017



Percentage of pupils aged 10-15y who drank last week, 1985-2017

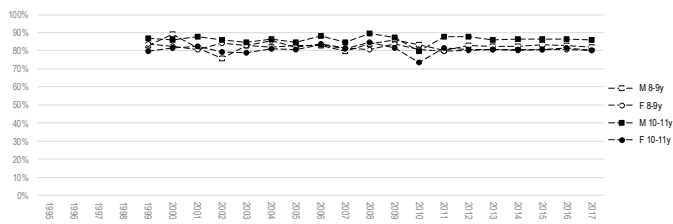


Percentage of pupils aged 12-15y ever trying cannabis, 1987-2017, by age and sex

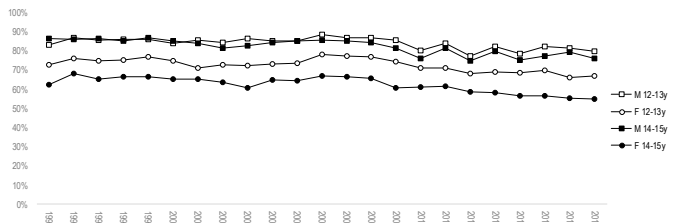
The use of substances – tobacco, alcohol and cannabis – is generally in long-term decline since the middle 1990s, although cannabis use seems to have levelled off. The figures for young people in the Government’s national surveys generally show the same shapes for the trends, but they report a recent jump for cannabis (NHS Digital, 2017).

What happened in the middle 1990s, so that smoking, alcohol and cannabis use started to decline? We would like to credit the decades of dedicated and skilled work by teachers in schools, but this is not possible to prove. There may be a clue in that we can see similar declines in, for example, drug use among adults in England, reported crime in England, and indeed reported and recorded crime elsewhere, so this may be part of a much wider phenomenon. There is discussion in academic circles about the International Crime Drop (van Dijk *et al.*, 2012), although what factors might be behind it are not yet established – at least 17 theories have been suggested.

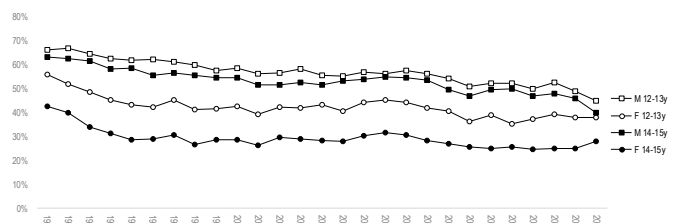
## Physical activity



Percentage of primary pupils aged 8-11y reporting that they enjoy physical activities 'quite a lot' or 'a lot', 1995-2017



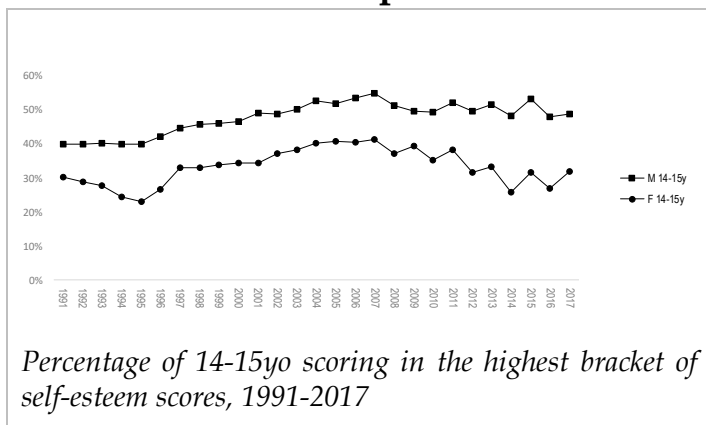
Percentage of secondary pupils aged 12-15y reporting that they enjoy physical activities 'quite a lot' or 'a lot', 1995-2017



Pupils aged 12-15y reporting they are 'fit/very fit', 1991-2017

These three charts all use the same horizontal axis. Young people's enjoyment of physical activities remains high but is drifting downwards among secondary pupils; self-reported fitness is also in long-term decline in the secondary phase.

## Social and personal



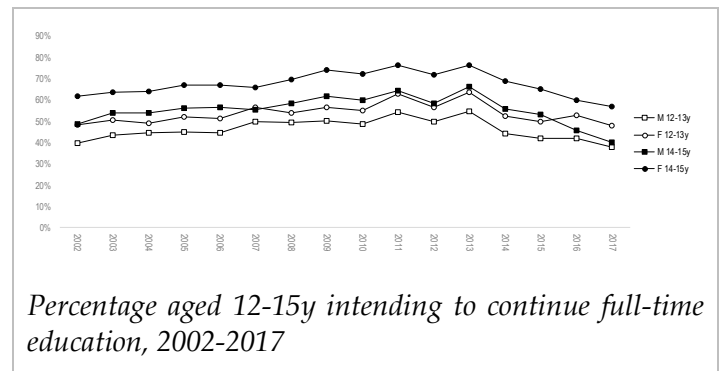
Percentage of 14-15yo scoring in the highest bracket of self-esteem scores, 1991-2017

We have reported before that the proportion of 14-15yo females scoring in the highest brackets of self-esteem scores took a turn for the worse in 2007. Figures for males are more stable. A

related question about satisfaction with life in general show just the same pattern of a fall among the females since 2008.

The reasons for this fall are not clear; the rise of online social media has been pointed to by some, but it is not possible to show a clear cause and effect. In this and previous reports, we show that young women who use social media the most or who spend the most time using screens report poorer wellbeing and more risky behaviours, but we don't know what their wellbeing would be like without the contact that social media make possible.

## School



Percentage aged 12-15y intending to continue full-time education, 2002-2017

The proportion of older pupils intending to continue in full-time education has declined since 2013.

## Discussion

The good news about young people's substance use is rather offset by the concerns about their emotional wellbeing.

### References

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