



Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2000

Summary of key findings

Edited by

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A survey carried out on behalf of the Department of Health by the National Centre for Social Research & the National Foundation for Educational Research

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Smoking, drinking & drug use among young people in England in 2000 - Summary

This booklet is a summary of the report *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England in 2000* and is also available on the Department of Health website along with the main report. An anonymised dataset will be lodged with the Data Archive at the University of Essex. Reports and data files from earlier surveys in the series are similarly available.

Contents

Background and targets

Sample design

Prevalence of cigarette smoking

Dependency by length of time as a smoker

Family attitudes to smoking

How regular smokers get their cigarettes

Purchasing cigarettes from shops

Prevalence of drinking alcohol in the last week

Alcohol consumption by type of drink

Trends in volume of alcohol consumed in last week

Usual drinking behaviour

Awareness of drugs, access to drugs and prevalence of drug use

Proportion using cannabis and Class A drugs in last year

Health education

Social and educational characteristics

Relationships between smoking, drinking and drug use

Comparison between England and Scotland

Recent publications

Contact points

[Next](#)

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Background and targets

The Department of Health commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to conduct the 2000 survey of smoking, drinking and drug use among secondary school pupils in England. This survey is the latest in a series established in 1982 and provides national estimates of the proportion of young people aged under 11-15 who smoke, drink alcohol and/or take illegal drugs. An equivalent survey was also conducted in Scotland.

From 1982 to 1998, surveys were conducted biennially (with an additional survey in 1993). Initially, the survey covered cigarette smoking prevalence and smoking behaviour. In 1988 the focus was widened to include alcohol consumption. In 1998 questions about illegal drugs were introduced and since then the survey has been carried out annually. Core questions on smoking, drinking and drug use are asked every year, with alternate surveys focusing in more detail either on smoking and drinking, as in 2000, or on illegal drugs, as in 1999. This long established series of surveys acts as an official measure of progress towards targets for reducing smoking and drug use among young people.

The current target for reducing children's smoking was set in *Smoking Kills, A White Paper on Tobacco*¹ and is measured against a 1996 baseline for 11-15 year olds. The target is:

- To reduce smoking among children from 13% to 9% or less by the year 2010, with a fall to 11% by the year 2005.

The government's 10 year strategy on drug use² contains targets for reducing drug use among young people. The other key performance indicators measured in part by this survey (against a 1999 baseline for 11-15 year olds) are:

- To reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of Class A drugs by 25 per cent by 2005 and by 50 per cent by 2008..
- To reduce the availability of Class A drugs by 25 per cent by 2005 and by 50 per cent by 2008.

1 Smoking Kills, A White Paper on Tobacco (Cm 4177: Stationery Office, 1998)

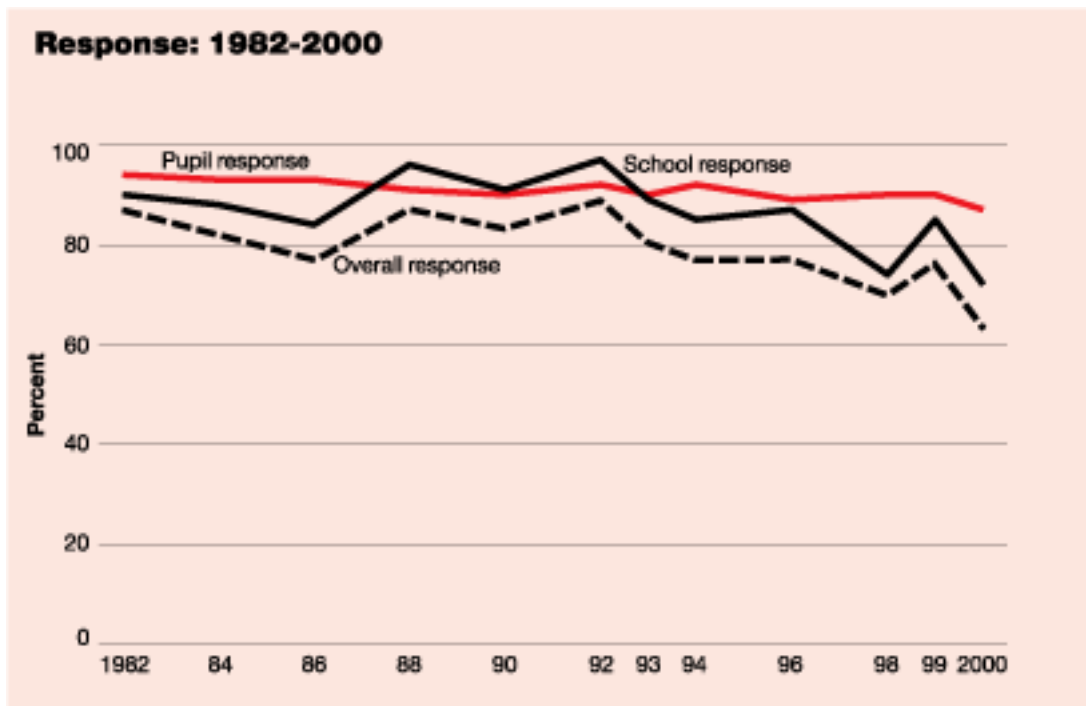
2 Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain. The Government's 10-year Strategy for Tackling Drug Misuse. (Cm 3945. London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

Sample design

The survey was conducted in schools by asking pre-selected groups of pupils to complete a confidential questionnaire and smoking diary. Both the schools and pupils were selected randomly in a way designed to give every eligible child in England the same chance of inclusion in the study.

The survey population (that is, the coverage of the survey) is pupils in school years 7-11 in England. Therefore, those taking part are mainly aged 11-15. Schools with any pupils in this age range are eligible for selection, with the exception of special schools. All other types, namely comprehensive, secondary modern, grammar and private schools, are included. Coverage was similar in Scotland, although among years S1-S4, which are mainly 12-15 year olds. More detail about the survey design can be found in the main report.

In total, 225 schools agreed to take part in the survey out of the 313 selected, a response rate of 72%. Fieldwork was conducted in the autumn term of 2000. Approximately 35 pupils per school were selected from across all classes in years 7 to 11 to take part. The response from selected pupils in participating schools was substantially higher, with 87% completing a questionnaire to yield a total of 7089 completed questionnaires. The product of these rates produces an overall response of 63%.



Prevalence of cigarette smoking

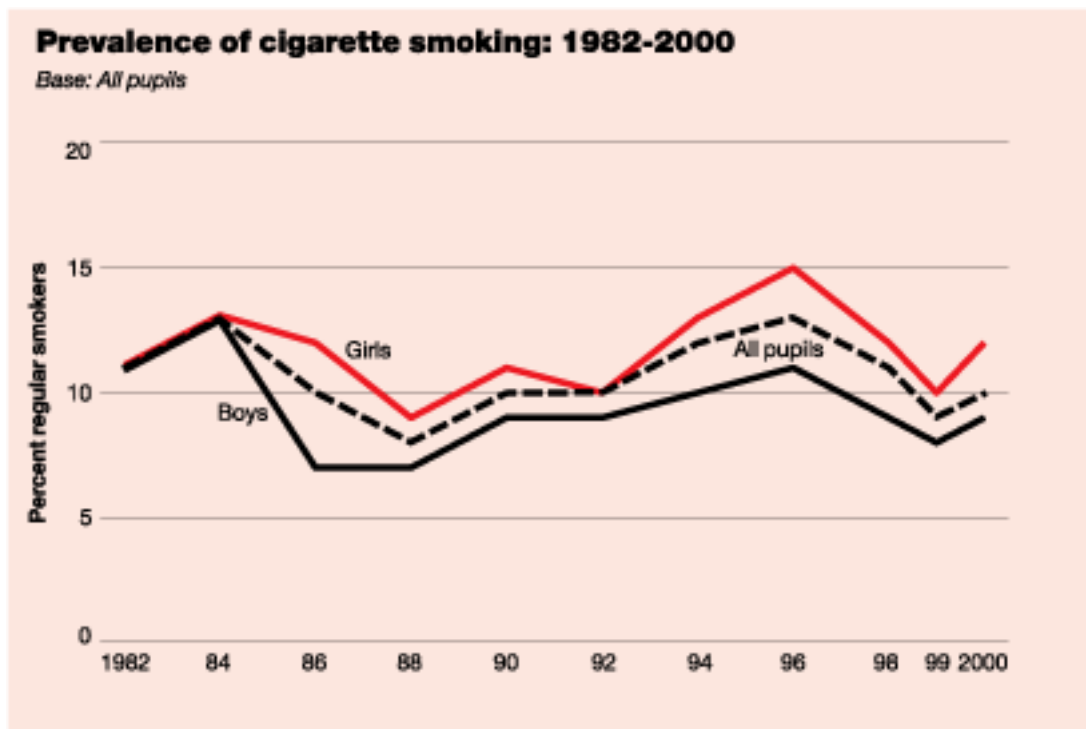
In 2000, 10% of pupils aged 11-15 were regular cigarette smokers (defined as usually smoking at least one cigarette a week). This proportion had decreased from 13% in 1996 to 9% in 1999. The marginal increase in 2000 (from 9% to 10%) was not sufficient to mark a clear reversal of this trend, though it does suggest a steadier fall since 1996 than did the 1999 figure.

Although 10% of pupils were regular smokers, 17% of pupils had smoked at least one cigarette in the previous week.

Prevalence of smoking was strongly related to age. Only 1% of 11 year olds were regular smokers compared with 23% of 15 year olds.

In the early 1980s, boys and girls were equally likely to smoke. Since then girls have been consistently more likely to smoke than boys. In 2000, 12% of girls were regular smokers, compared with 9% of boys. This gender difference was not present among 11 and 12 year olds, but first appeared at age 13, and was maintained at 14 and 15.

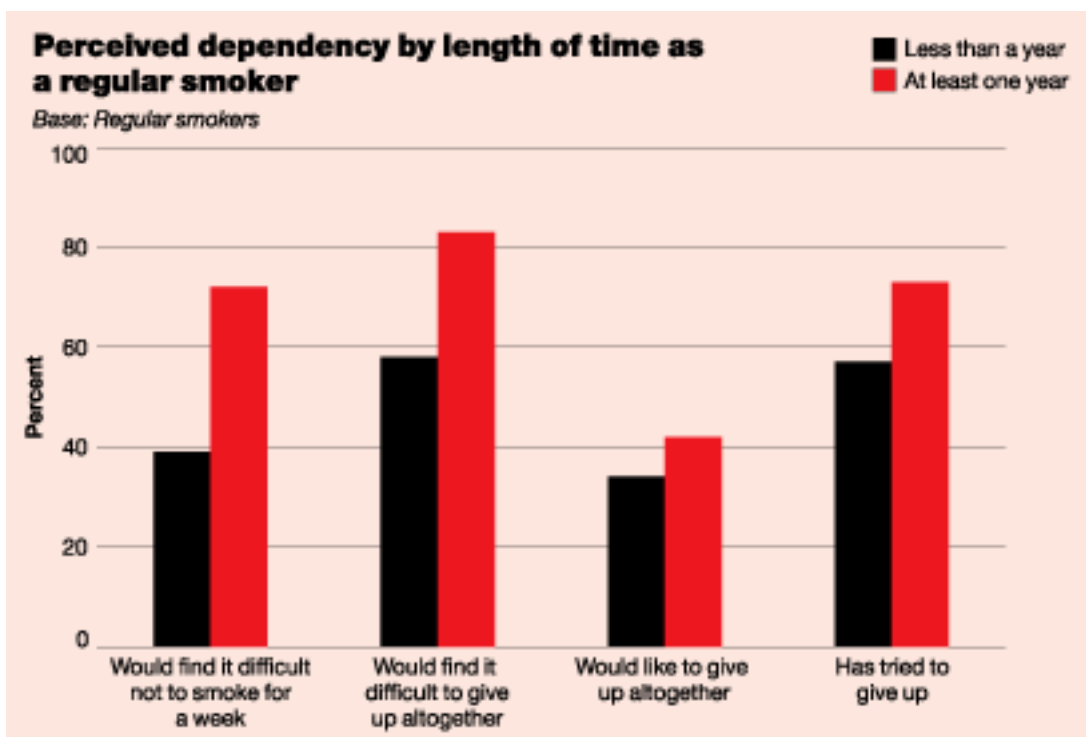
Although girls were more likely to smoke, boys who were regular smokers had smoked more cigarettes in the last week than girls who were regular smokers (an average of 50 compared with 44 for girls). The number of cigarettes smoked by regular smokers has remained quite stable over the entire period since 1982.



Dependency by length of time as a smoker

Pupils' own assessment of their dependence on smoking was related to the length of time that they had smoked. Pupils who had been regular smokers for more than a year were markedly more likely to indicate that they were dependent on cigarettes. For example, 72% of these pupils said that they would find it difficult not to smoke for a week and 83% that they would find it difficult to give up smoking altogether. The respective figures for those who had smoked regularly for less than one year were 39% and 58%.

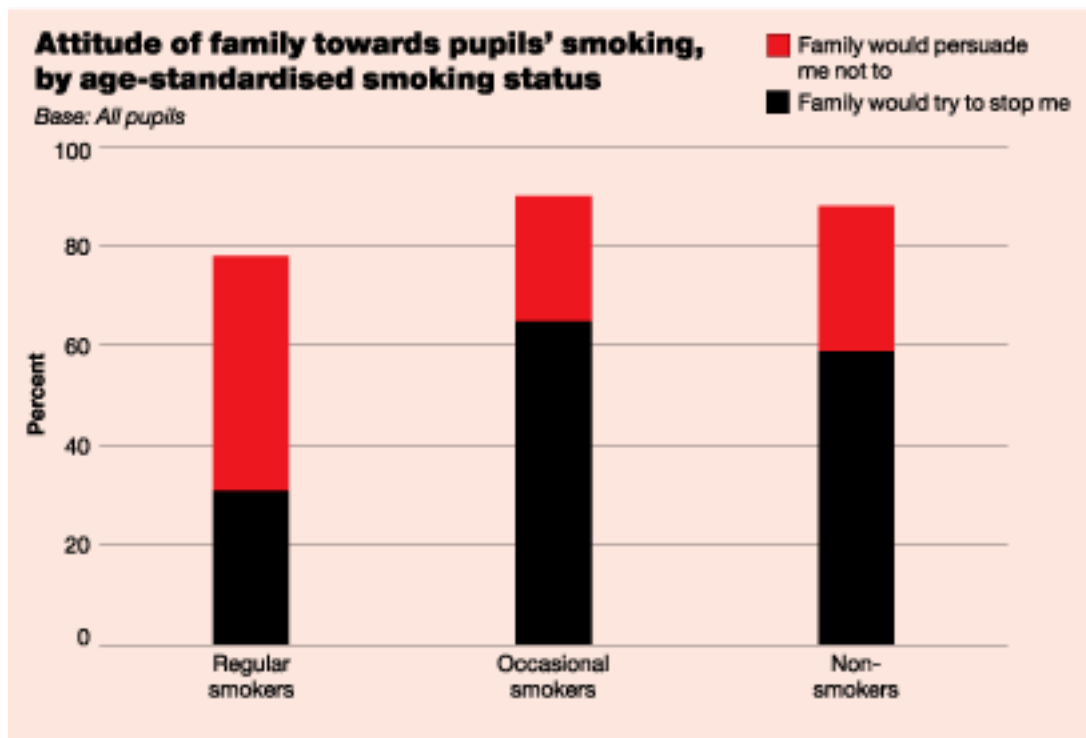
Although largely agreed on the difficulty of giving up smoking, longer-term smokers were quite evenly split about whether or not they wished to do so. Forty-two per cent of those who had been regular smokers for more than a year indicated that they would like to give up altogether. Fewer (34%) of those who had been regular smokers for less time said that they wished to give up.



Family attitudes to smoking

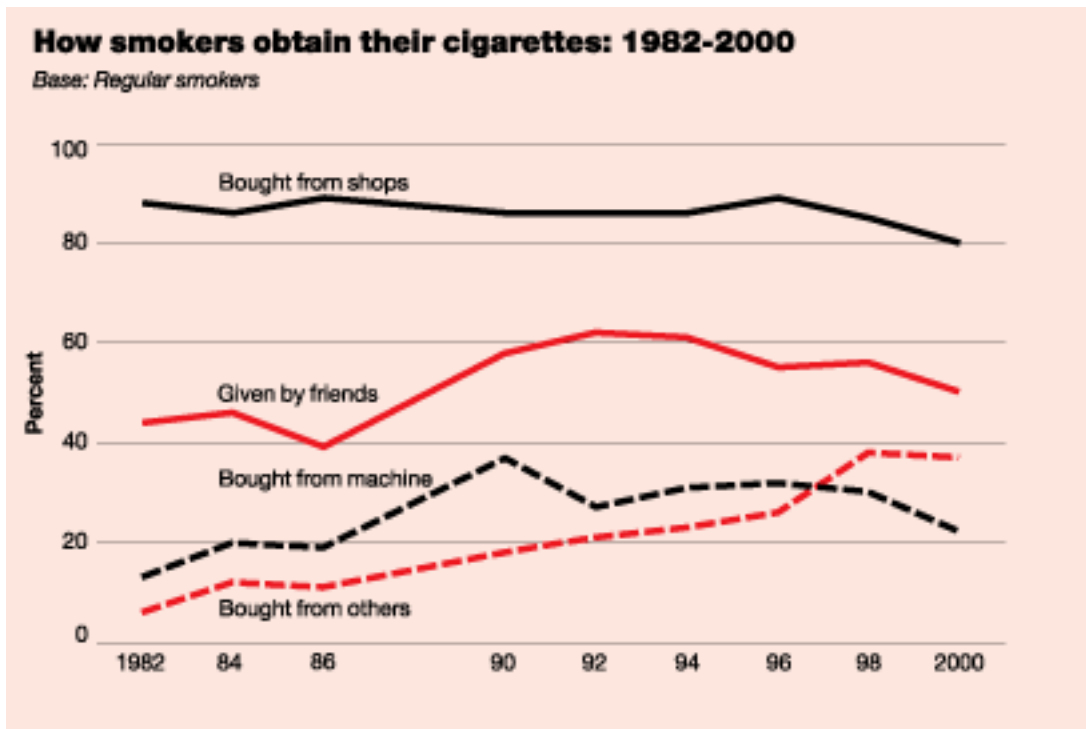
The great majority of pupils perceived that their families had negative attitudes towards smoking; 88% of pupils said that their parents would either stop them smoking or try to persuade them not to smoke. These perceived family attitudes were closely related to the smoking status of the pupil. Pupils who did not smoke generally felt that if they started smoking, their parents would stop them (65%) rather than try to persuade them to give up (25%). In contrast, regular smokers were less likely to say that their parents would stop them from smoking (21%), and more likely to say their parents would try to persuade them to give up (54%).

Previous research had suggested that parental attitudes were also related to children's age. That is, parents would be more likely to stop younger children smoking, whereas parents of older children would prefer the less firm option of persuading them not to smoke. However, an analysis of family attitudes by age and smoking status together showed that in this survey differences in parental attitudes were primarily explained by smoking status and that age made little difference. It is not clear, though, whether perceived parental attitudes affected smoking behaviour or, conversely, whether attitudes were sometimes adjusted when smoking became a reality.



How regular smokers get their cigarettes

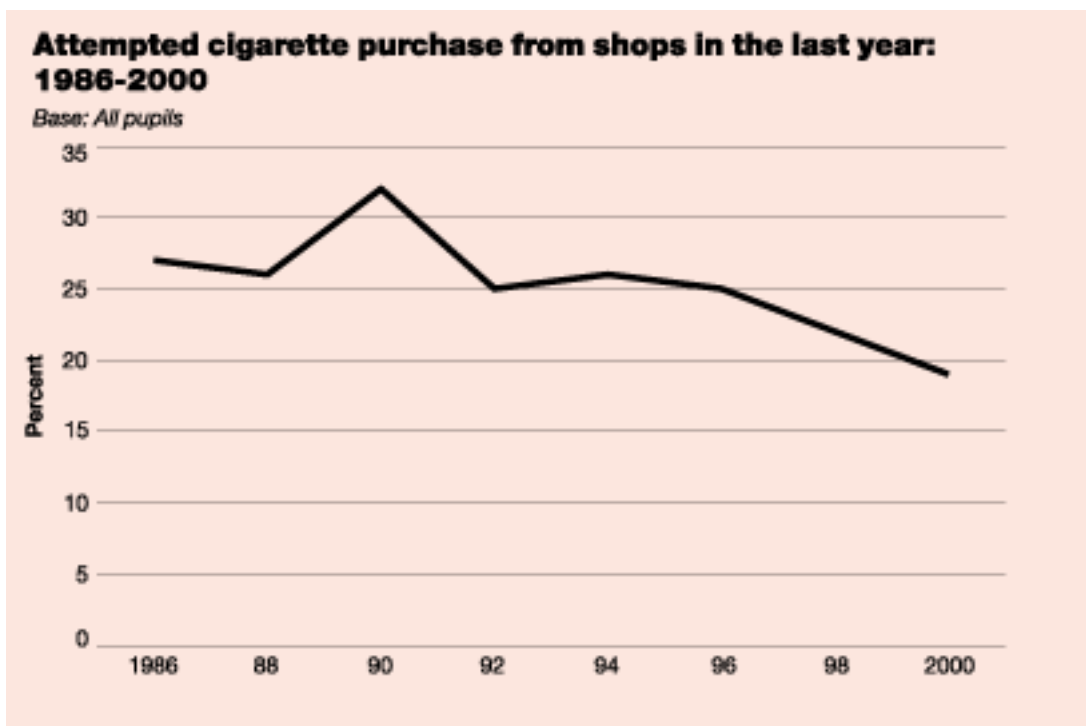
A large majority of regular smokers usually bought cigarettes from shops, with 80% mentioning this source in 2000. This percentage was consistently higher (85%- 89%) from 1982 to 1998, but it is not yet possible to be sure that purchasing of cigarettes by pupils from shops is on a downward trend. Since 1982, the proportions of regular smokers obtaining cigarettes from other sources have broadly increased. In 2000, 22% of regular smokers mentioned vending machines as a source of cigarettes, 37% bought cigarettes from other people, and 50% were given cigarettes by friends. The questionnaire addresses sources of cigarettes rather than volume, so these results indicate that pupils are using a wider range of sources to obtain cigarettes without implying an increase in cigarette consumption.



Purchasing cigarettes from shops

Although the proportion of regular smokers buying cigarettes from shops declined only after 1998, there is evidence of a longer term decline in purchasing from shops among all pupils. The proportion of all pupils who had tried to buy cigarettes from a shop in the last year fell from 27% in 1986 (when the question was introduced) to 19% in 2000. There was also an increase in the proportion of this group who had been refused the purchase of cigarettes on at least one occasion in the last year (45% in 2000, up from 31% in 1986).

The average number of cigarettes bought by pupils at their last purchase has been decreasing. Among those who bought cigarettes, the proportions buying packs of twenty cigarettes fell from 54% in 1988 to 32% in 2000, with a corresponding rise in purchasing of packs of ten cigarettes from 38% to 60%. However, there has been no decline over this period in the total number of cigarettes smoked by current smokers

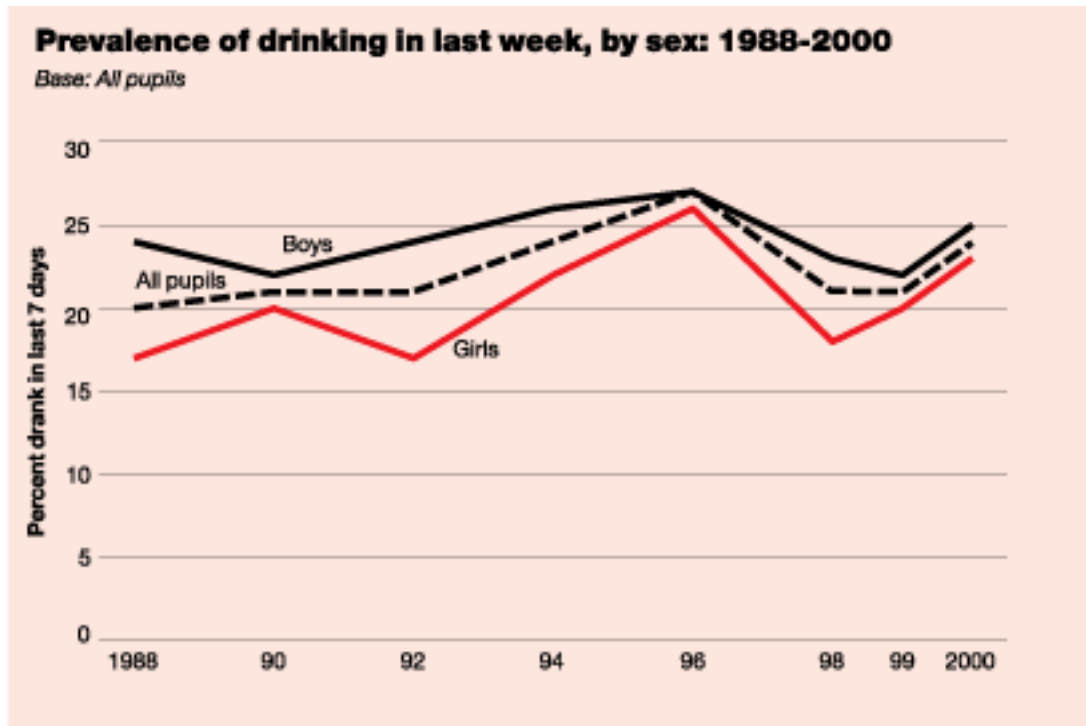


Prevalence of drinking alcohol in the last week

Twenty four per cent of pupils had had an alcoholic drink in the previous week. This proportion has fluctuated between 20% and 27% since the question was introduced in 1988, but with no sustained increase or decrease over time.

In most previous surveys boys had been more likely than girls to have drunk in the last week. In 2000, there was no significant difference overall in the proportions of boys (25%) and girls (23%) who drank, although a few more 15 year old boys than girls had had a drink in the last week (51% compared with 45%).

As with cigarette smoking, drinking was strongly related to age. Only 5% of 11 year olds had drunk alcohol in the last week compared with 48% of 15 year olds.



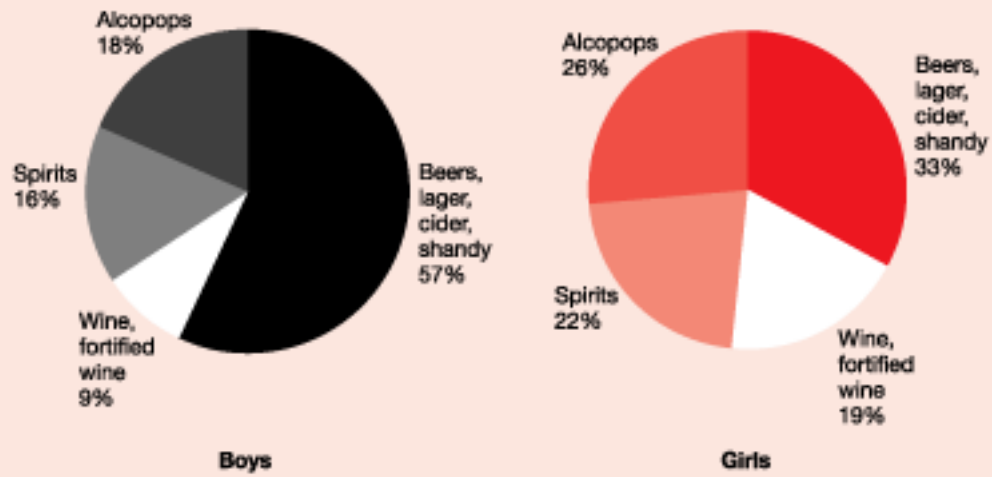
Alcohol consumption by type of drink

Over the past decade, two types of drink have gained substantial popularity among young drinkers. The proportion having drunk spirits within the previous week has increased from 35% in 1990 to 59% in 2000. Alcopops, introduced onto the market in 1995, were drunk by 62% of drinkers in 2000. The introduction of alcopops has broadened the range of drinks consumed by drinkers, but does not seem to have affected the overall proportion of pupils who drink. In 2000, fewer pupils (20%) had drunk shandy than had their counterparts in 1990 (31%). The proportions drinking other types of drinks, including beer/lager/cider (75% in 2000) and wine (44%), have remained fairly stable.

Beer, lager, cider and shandy account for approximately half the amount drunk by boys, and a third of the amount drunk by girls, among whom alcopops accounted for a quarter, spirits a fifth and wine (or fortified wine) a further fifth of the alcohol drunk

Alcohol consumption of each type of drink as a percentage of the total, by sex

Base: All pupils who drank last week



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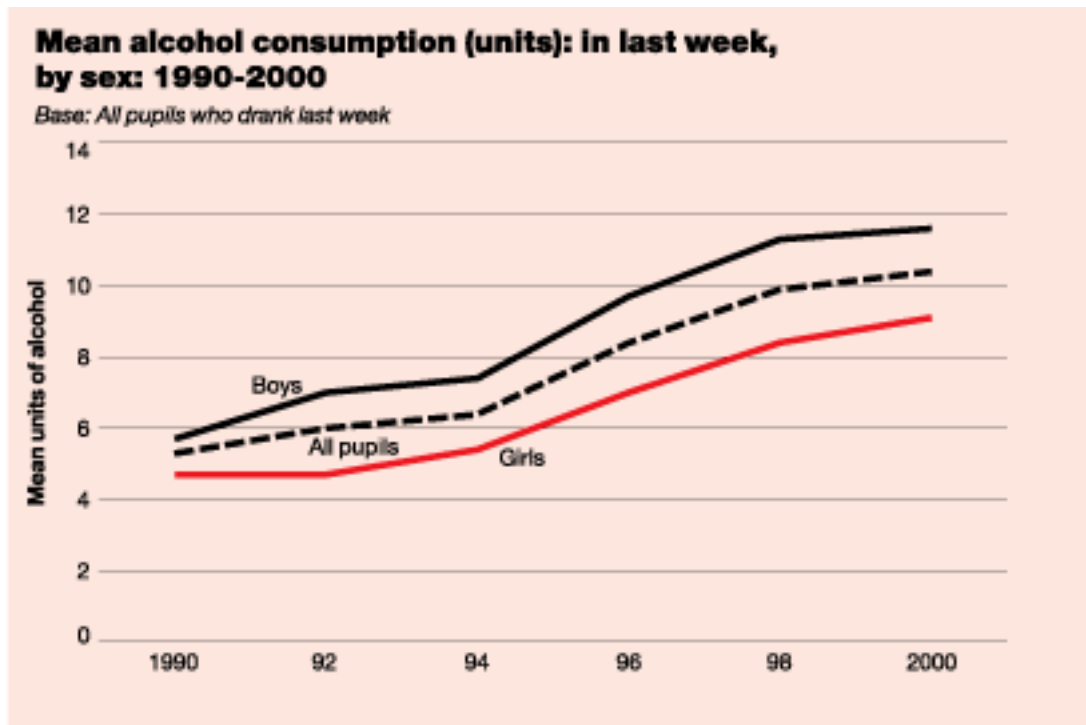
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Trends in volume of alcohol consumed in last week

Although the proportion of pupils who drank in the previous week has fluctuated rather than increased over time, there has been a clear increase in the amount of alcohol consumed by those who drank. Estimated average consumption in the previous week rose from 5.3 units in 1990 to 10.4 units in 2000. The increase in consumption was concentrated on spirits, beer (along with lager and cider) and alcopops (which were first asked about in 1996). The amount of other types of drink consumed remained fairly constant.

The increase in alcohol consumed in the previous week by drinkers was seen among both boys (5.7 units in 1990, 11.6 in 2000) and girls (4.7 units in 1990, 9.1 in 2000).



Usual drinking behaviour

Forty percent of pupils had never had a whole alcoholic drink, although this figure was much higher among 11 year olds (76%) than 15 year olds (14%). By the age of 14, a large majority of pupils have had an alcoholic drink.

The proportion of pupils who usually drink at least once a week has fluctuated between 16% and 20% since the question was first asked in 1996, but with no consistent increase or decrease over time.

One half (49%) of pupils who have ever had a drink never buy alcohol, a figure which has remained at around this level since the question was first asked in 1996. Purchasing from off-licences (17% in 2000) or shops/supermarkets (9%) has become markedly less common over this period, whereas increasing numbers have been purchasing from friends or relatives (17% in 2000).

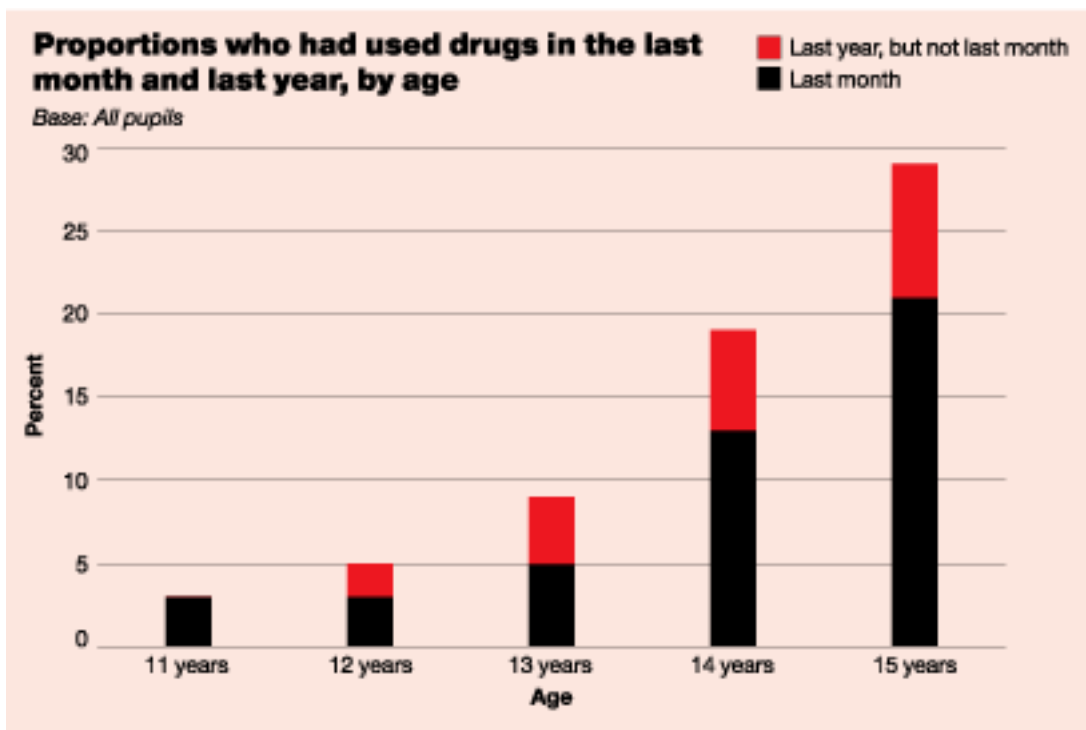
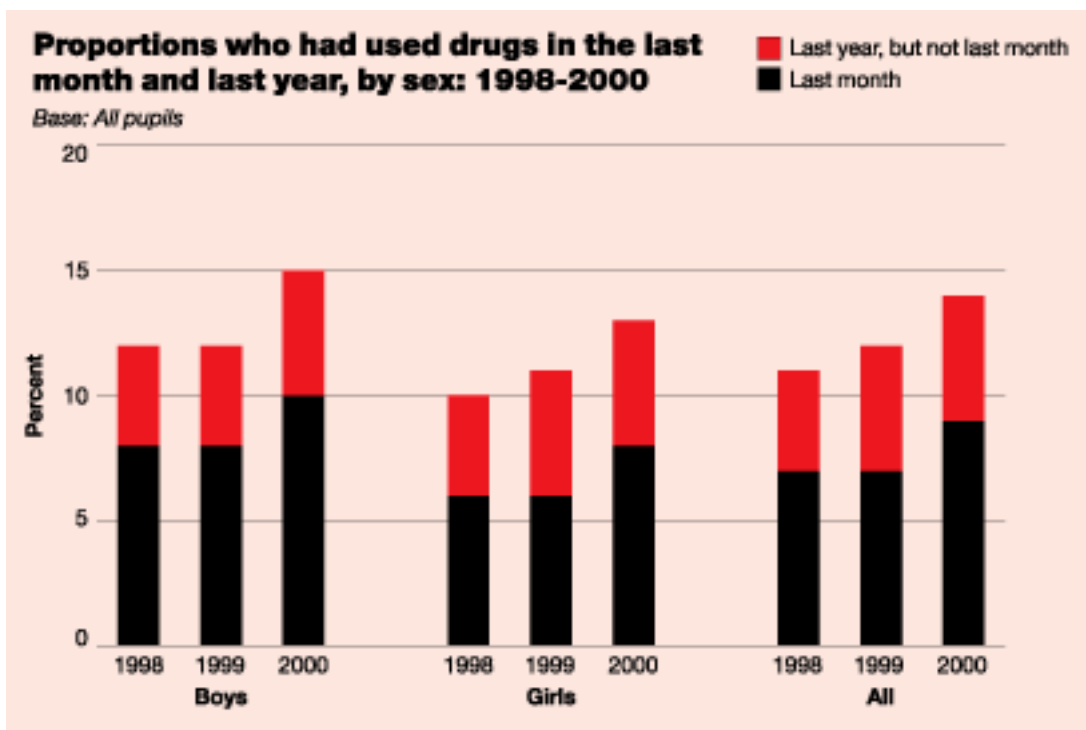


Awareness of drugs, access to drugs and prevalence of drug use

Pupils had high levels of awareness of illegal drugs. In 2000, the proportions who had heard of cannabis (88%), cocaine (86%) and heroin (85%) approached nearly nine in ten. Even among 11 year olds, as many as three-quarters had heard of each of these drugs, though awareness of other drugs such as ecstasy was much lower among younger pupils than it was among 15 year olds.

Over one-third (36%) of pupils had at some point been offered at least one drug. Twenty-eight per cent had been offered cannabis, 17% a 'stimulant' (a group of drugs which includes cocaine or ecstasy) and 6% heroin. There was a sharp increase with age in the numbers of young people exposed to drugs in this way. Sixty-one per cent of pupils had been offered drugs by the age of 15, compared with only 15% who had had this experience by the age of 11.

Around one pupil in six (16%) reported that they had ever used one or more drugs and 14% had done so in the last year. Both figures represent fewer than half the number who had been offered drugs. Among 15 year olds, 32% of pupils had ever used drugs, 29% had used drugs in the last year and 21% had used drugs in the last month.



Proportions using cannabis and Class A drugs in last year

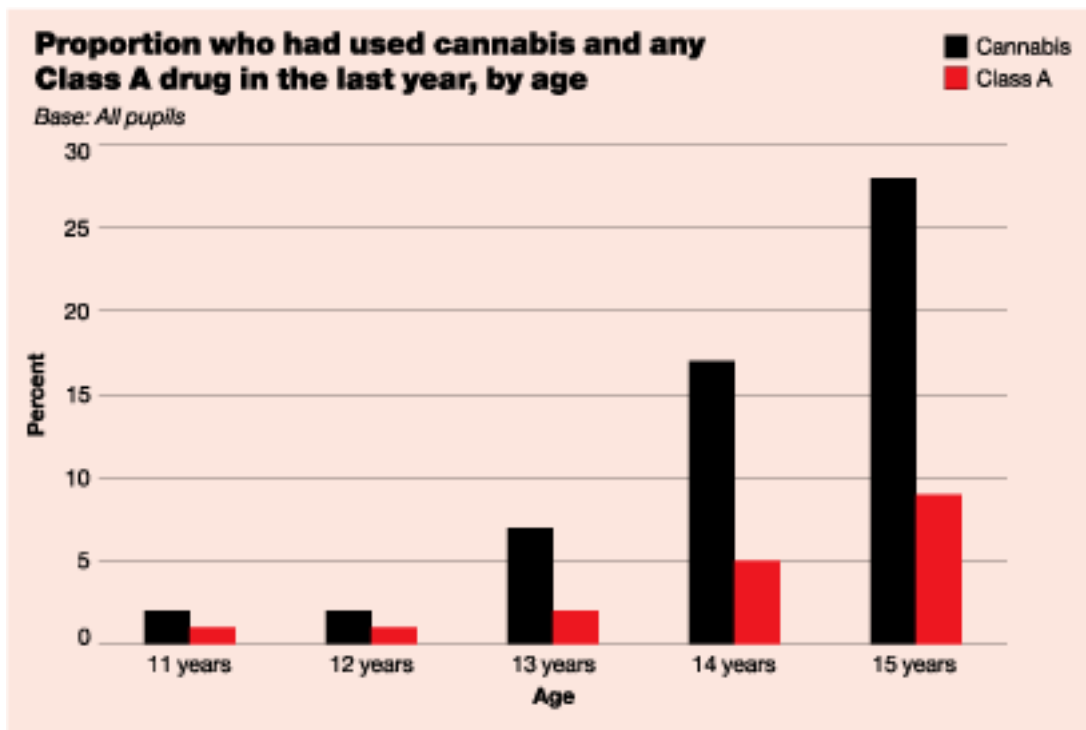
Cannabis was by far the most widely used drug. Twelve per cent reported use of this drug in the preceding year. Every other individual drug had been used in the last year by no more than 3%, with a total of 4% using any Class A drug³ in this period. By age 15 three in ten had used at least one drug in the last twelve months, nearly all of whom had used cannabis. Nine per cent had used at least one Class A drug, though the drugs that cause the most harm (cocaine and heroin) had respectively been used in the last year by only 2% and 1% of 15 year olds.

The 2000 figures for drug use were marginally above those recorded in the previous two years.

3 In this survey Class A drugs were defined as ecstasy, cocaine, crack, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms or methadone. It was not possible to tell whether amphetamines were taken orally or injected and

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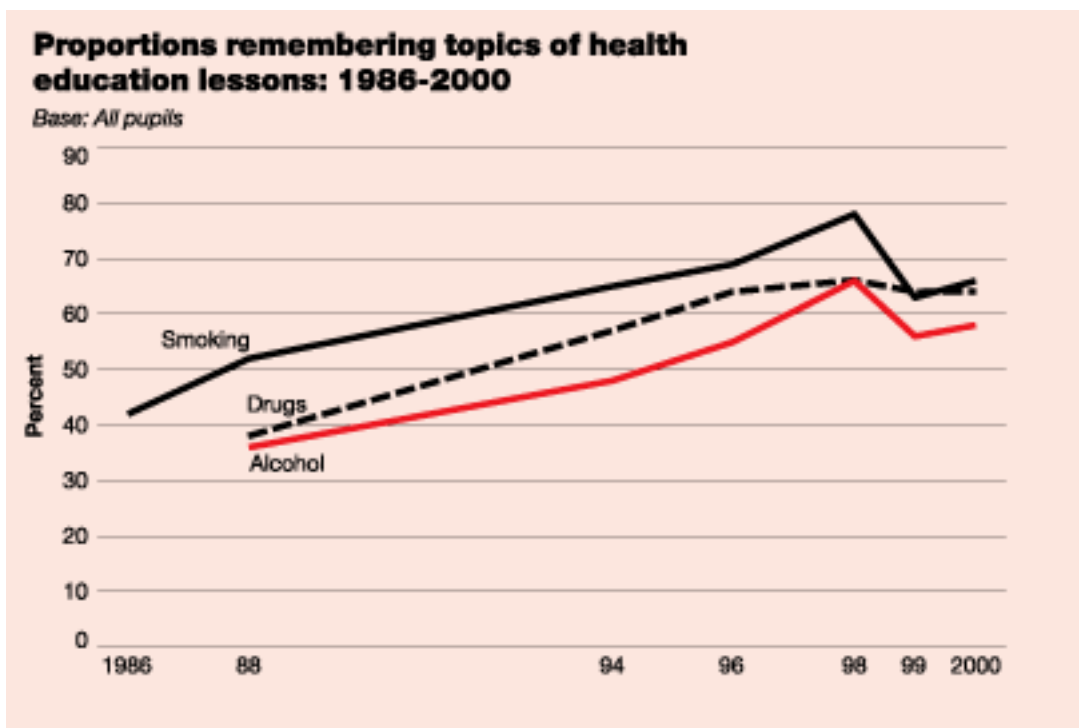
amphetamines were not included in the definition of Class A drugs. Note that this is not an exhaustive list of Class A drugs.



Health education

The proportion of pupils who remembered having lessons on smoking in the last 12 months had increased from 42% in 1986 to a peak of 78% in 1998 and in 2000 stood at 66%. Recall of lessons about alcohol followed a similar pattern, with 36% of pupils remembering a lesson about alcohol in 1988, 66% in 1998 and 58% in 2000. Lessons about drugs were remembered by 38% of pupils in 1986; this increased to 64% in 1996 and thereafter has remained at around this level.

There are two opposing views about giving pupils lessons on smoking, drinking or drug use. One view is that talking about these issues encourages experimentation, while the other is that ignorance of the issues means pupils experiment because they do not understand the potential consequences. This survey found no evidence that having lessons on smoking, drinking and drugs either encouraged or discouraged experimentation or use.



Social and educational characteristics

Pupils' social characteristics were related to smoking, drinking and drug use although the strength and direction of the relationships varied for different behaviours. Of the three behaviours, smoking has been shown (from this survey and others) to have the strongest relationship with social and educational characteristics. Prevalence of smoking was higher among those receiving free school meals (the main indicator of disadvantage collected in this survey). Drug use had a weaker relationship, with slightly higher prevalence among those taking free school meals. In contrast, drinking showed no relationship with receipt of free school meals.

The type of school attended had a modest association with levels of smoking and drug use, but was not related to whether pupils drank alcohol. Pupils at the small number of secondary modern schools in the sample were slightly more likely to smoke and use drugs even once their age, sex, ethnicity and receipt of free school meals was taken into account, whilst pupils at private schools were slightly less likely to smoke.

Pupils who had played truant or had been excluded from school were more likely than those who had not to smoke, drink or take drugs, even once age differences had been taken into account.

Relationships between smoking, drinking and drug use

Smoking, drinking and drug use were all highly interrelated behaviours. Pupils who smoked were more likely to drink, and pupils who drank were more likely to smoke. Similarly pupils who either drank or smoked were more likely to take drugs. There was a stronger relationship between smoking and drug taking than there was between smoking and drinking or between drinking and drug use. All three behaviours were strongly linked to age. Nevertheless, these relationships were evident even once the greater age of pupils who smoked, drank or used drugs was taken into account.

Comparison between England and Scotland

The age range of pupils surveyed was different in England and Scotland. Therefore in order to compare the two countries, analysis was restricted to those aged 12-15.

There was no difference in overall prevalence of regular smokers between England and Scotland, although among 15 year olds there were more regular smokers in England than in Scotland. Pupils in England were a little more likely to have drunk alcohol in the last week, but those who did drink consumed less than their counterparts in Scotland. There were no significant differences between England and Scotland in the proportions of pupils who used drugs in the last month or last year.

Recent publications

Boreham R, Shaw A (2001) *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England in 2000*. London, The Stationery Office

Boreham R, Shaw A (2001) *Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in Scotland in 2000*. Edinburgh, The Stationery Office

Goddard E, Higgins V (2000) *Drug use, smoking and drinking among young teenagers in 1999*. London, The Stationery Office.

Goddard E, Higgins V (1999) *Smoking, drinking and drug use among young teenagers in 1998. Volume 1: England*. London, The Stationery Office.

Goddard E, Higgins V (1999) *Smoking, drinking and drug use among young teenagers in 1998. Volume 2: Scotland*. London, The Stationery Office.

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