

A Note on Smoking Among Dublin School Children¹

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IN 1967, although half the adult population of the Irish Republic were known to be smokers,² there was little information on the prevalence of smoking among children, the numbers of regular smokers, the numbers who tried smoking but had given it up, the factors influencing them, and so on. To gather data on some of these points it was decided to survey school children in Dublin. A sample was drawn from the Secondary, Secondary Top and Vocational schools in Dublin and County Dublin. Schools were picked randomly, selection being proportional to their attendance figures, and all the children at the selected schools were surveyed. To eliminate bias, the questionnaire was completed in the presence of one of the research team, the class teacher being absent from the room. The questionnaire was piloted at the end of 1966 in the town of Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, and the main Dublin survey carried out in the Spring of 1967. Preliminary results were published in 1968.³ This paper examines some social and parental factors influencing smoking in school children, and compares the Dublin results with those of a survey in England and Wales, published in 1969 by the British Government Social Survey.⁴

The First Experience of Smoking

Figure 1 illustrates the growth with age in the incidence of smoking experience. The height of any point on the curves indicates the proportion of individuals within the group concerned who reported having had their first smoking experience by the age shown opposite that point on the graph. Several conclusions may be drawn from these results. First, in their early years boys have a much higher rate of smoking experimentation than girls.

1. The Survey on which this paper is based was carried out in collaboration with Angus O'Rourke, M.B., D.P.H., and Noelic O'Sullivan, M.A.

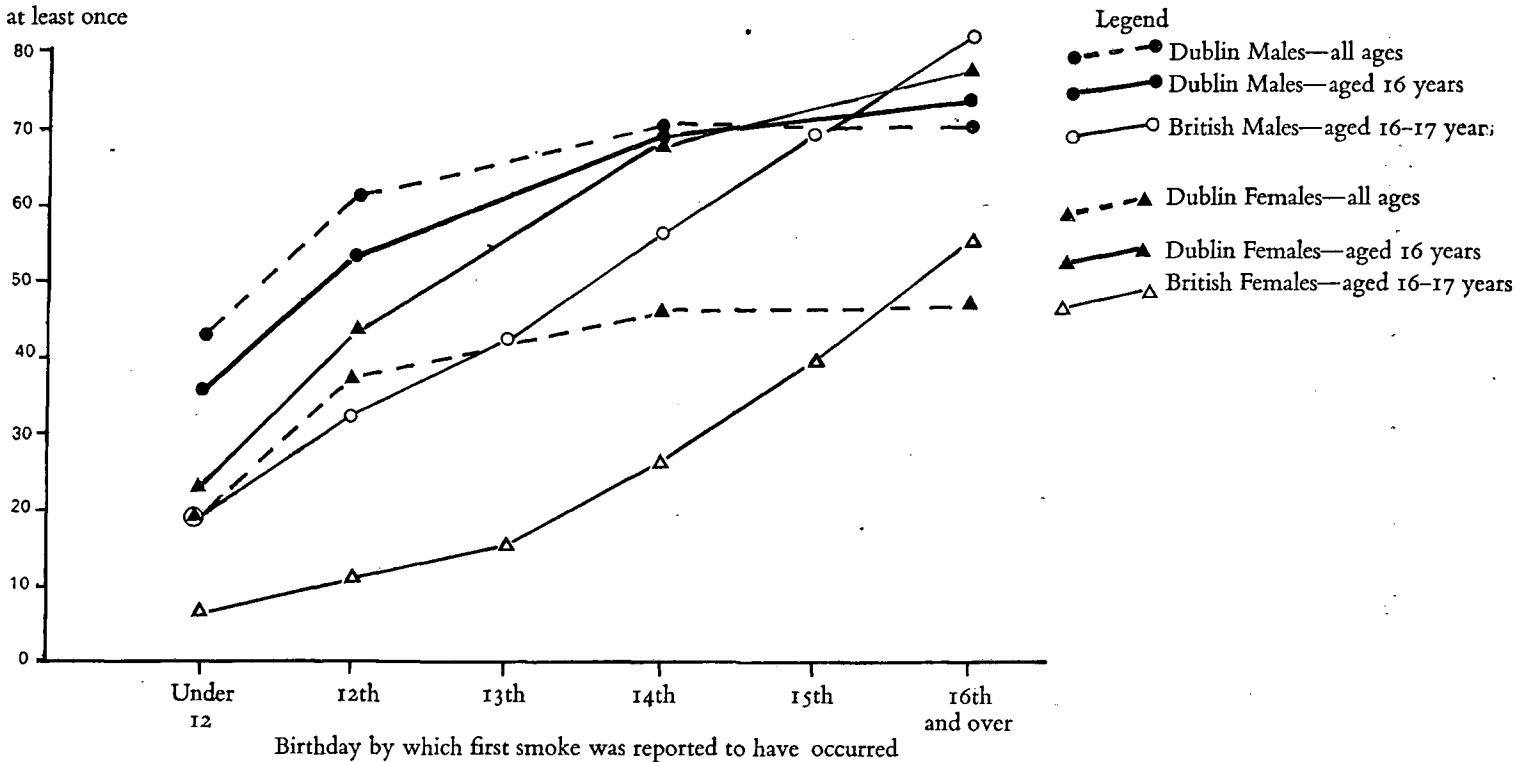
2. *Consumer Smoking Habits Survey*, carried out for Player and Wills (Ireland) Ltd.

3. A Dublin School Smoking Survey, A. O'Rourke, N. O'Sullivan and K. Wilson, *Irish Journal of Medical Science*, 1, 3, 1968.

4. *Attitudes of Adults towards Smoking*, Government Social Survey, H.M.S.O., London, 1969.

FIG. 1. BIRTHDAY BY WHICH FIRST SMOKE WAS REPORTED TO HAVE OCCURRED

Percentage of group
at time of survey
who had smoked
at least once



Secondly, the Dublin sample has a higher proportion of first smokers at each age than their British counterparts (i.e. comparing by sex), except for those aged sixteen years and over. This latter point may be explained by the fact that the British sample includes all sixteen and seventeen year olds, whether at school or not, whereas the Dublin sample is restricted to school-children, who are not very representative of all sixteen and seventeen year olds, especially not of those in employment. Thirdly, comparing the sixteen and seventeen year olds, the higher incidence of first smoking at each age among the Dublin sample, compared with the British, is more pronounced. By the age of sixteen years, over half of the girls have tried smoking. This supports the findings of the British survey that there has been a trend in recent years towards earlier experimentation with smoking on the part of women, quite apart from the other trend towards earlier smoking among children generally. Although these figures may be discouraging to those concerned with health education in schools, they show only first experiments with smoking. How many children go on to become *regular* smokers?

Table 1 (See Appendix) shows the numbers and proportions of children who have ever smoked, currently smoke, never smoked, and have given it up. The younger boys show a small proportion of current smokers; but since the proportion who had ever smoked is high, a large proportion of them must have given it up. This is not unexpected at the experimental stage, whereas older boys are more likely to have fixed their habits. As age increases, the proportion of current smokers, among boys increases from 5.4 per cent. in the under twelve year olds to 44.2 per cent. among those aged sixteen years and over. The trend among those, who gave up smoking shows the inverse, falling from 80 per cent. to 39.5 per cent. Among the girls the same trends are evident, though on a smaller scale. Of the girls aged sixteen and over 16.9 per cent. currently smoke, compared with 44.2 per cent. of the boys of the same age.

In the British survey 38 per cent. of the sixteen to seventeen year old males were regularly smoking. This may be compared with 44.2 per cent. of the Dublin boys. Of the sixteen to seventeen year old British girls, 20 per cent. smoked, compared with 17 per cent. of Dublin girls of this age.

Parental Influences upon smoking behaviour

Table 2 shows the parental attitude to their children's smoking habits. As expected, most parents disapprove of young children smoking. Even among parents of sixteen to seventeen year old boys, only 33 per cent. approve of the habit. But, as we saw in Table 1, such disapproval does not inhibit the growth of smoking, which probably owes much to peer emulation and the desire to feel "grown up." Parental disapproval is more general where their daughters are concerned. Although it is true that approval tends to increase as their children become older, only 19 per cent. of parents regard their sixteen to seventeen year old daughter's smoking habit with approval, although 32.9 per cent. do not condemn smoking by their sixteen to seventeen year old sons.

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between the smoking habits of the parents and those of their children. In both sexes, there is a highly significant association between the smoking habits of parent and child (chi-squared being highly significant in both cases). However, among the boys the relationship is evident whichever parent smokes, whereas among the girls the relationship is not so simple. If we restrict the analysis to situations in which one or both of the parents are smokers, there is no association among the boys; but more girls smoke if both parents smoke than if either one of them does. ($X^2 = 12.2$, $p = 0.5\%$). It is noteworthy that the British survey found that the example of the father had the greatest effect in determining whether or not boys became regular smokers; and that among adolescent girls there appeared to be a relationship between any positive parental smoking pattern and the girls' own smoking habits. But the two surveys agree on the general conclusion; that parental habit influences the incidence of smoking among their children, and that, by refraining from smoking themselves, parents can reduce the probability that their offspring will themselves become regular smokers.

Table 4 illustrates the relationship between parental attitude towards their children's smoking and the parents' own habit. Even parents who smoke themselves do not approve of their children's doing the same.

The Influence of Social Class

Table 5 relates smoking to social class, class grading being that of the father's occupation, classified according to the 1950 Classification of Occupations of the Registrar-General of England and Wales. Among the boys, smoking increases as we descend the scale from the children of professional and managerial class parents (25.8 per cent. of whom are regular smokers), to the children of semi- and unskilled manual workers (36.3 per cent.). The British survey showed the same trend. Among adolescents (sixteen to seventeen years) 15 per cent. of the children of nonmanual workers were regular smokers, compared with approximately 27 per cent of the children of semi- and unskilled parents. Again, while confirming a trend, the Dublin results suggest that smoking in Dublin school children is more prevalent than in Britain. The figures for the girls show no marked social class trend; but even though girls smoke less than boys, the Dublin figures when grouped, are still higher than the British ones for Social Classes One and Two. (20.1 per cent. are regular smokers).

The trend apparent in this Table, a clear one among the boys, probably represents the effect of a whole complex of "subcultural" differences in behaviour and outlook, supplying a link between apparently unrelated variables, father's occupation and children's smoking habits. Relevant factors may include the parent's own smoking habits (more working class adults smoke than those of the middle class), the type of school attended, the proportion of smokers among the informant's school contemporaries (working class children are more likely to attend Vocational Schools, which tend to be situated in working class areas), and other less tangible but pervasive influences which characterise a working class, as opposed

to a middle class, social environment. Among the girl's, although we have seen that they have a higher experimentation rate than their British counterparts, when it comes to *regular* smoking the British girls are more prone to the habit than those of Dublin, 21 per cent. of the former being regular smokers compared with 17 per cent. among the latter. It is of course hazardous to generalise on the basis of a single statistic, but it may be that we see reflected here a difference, as between Britain and Ireland, in the position of women, the British having achieved a greater degree of emancipation.

Summary

There is a high experimentation rate with smoking in Dublin school children, for by the age of sixteen years roughly three-quarters of the boys and a fifth of the girls have smoked. Regular smoking, increasing with age, is found in slightly less than half the boys by the time they reach sixteen. The girls, although showing the same age trend by age, smoke much less frequently. By the age of sixteen years only 17 per cent. are regular smokers and they tend to lag at least a year behind the boys.

Parental attitudes, as a whole, are unfavourable to the acquirement by their children of the smoking habit. Again there is an age and a sex trend, approval being higher for the older age groups and *pari-passu* for the boys. However, parental disapproval does not prevent their children's experimenting with smoking, and is not associated with the parent's own habit. Parental habit does nevertheless influence the incidence of regular smoking in their children; and where neither parent smokes, the habit is less likely to become established.

There is a distinct social class trend in the incidence of smoking among the boys, smoking increasing from Social Classes One and Two to classes Four and Five. A higher proportion of boys smoke in each social grade than in the British counterparts. But there is no social class trend among the girls; and smoking is less prevalent among Dublin than among British girls.

If little can be done to stop *experimentation* among children, efforts might be directed towards increasing the proportion of children who do not go on to establish *regular* smoking. This might be done by propaganda showing the effects of smoking on their immediate health, reduced physical ability in games, etc., rather than the hazards of cancer in later life. Parents might be encouraged to exert a greater positive influence upon their children by refraining from smoking themselves.

This survey has looked at the incidence of smoking. What is now required is an examination of the motives that induce smoking in the first place, and of those encouraging a progression to regular smoking. It is hoped to set up a survey to examine these factors, not only among school children, but in the general population.

TABLE I: *Smoking Habit by Current Age*

<i>Boys</i>	<i>Current Age (years)</i>				
	<i>Under 12</i>	<i>12-13</i>	<i>14-15</i>	<i>16 and over</i>	<i>Total</i>
Current Smokers %	2 5.4	127 17.6	389 33.2	347 44.2	865 31.9
Ever Smoked %	15 40.5	460 64.2	829 70.7	574 73.1	1,878 69.3
Gave up % of ever smoked	12 80.0	334 72.6	440 53.1	227 39.5	1,014 54.0
Never Smoked %	22 59.5	257 36.0	341 29.1	187 23.8	807 29.8
Total %	37 100	717 100	1,172 100	784 100	2,710 100
<i>Girls</i>					
Current Smokers %	0 0	29 5.0	97 11.9	63 16.9	189 10.5
Ever Smoked %	6 25.0	193 33.4	442 54.1	212 56.8	853 47.6
Gave up % of ever	6 100.0	164 85.0	345 78.1	149 70.3	664 77.8
Never Smoked %	18 75.0	385 66.0	375 45.9	161 43.2	939 52.4
Total %	24 100	578 100	817 100	373 100	1,792 100

TABLE 2: Parental Attitude Towards Childrens Smoking
(Current Smokers Only)

Boys	Age				Total
	Under 12	12-13	14-15	16 and over	
Approve	0	6	39	114	159
%	0	4.7	10.0	32.9	18.4
Disapprove	2	94	280	197	573
%	100	74.0	72.0	56.8	66.2
Not Known	0	27	70	36	133
%	0	21.3	18.0	10.3	15.4
Total	2	127	389	347	865
%	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Girls</i>					
Approve	0	0	2	12	14
%		0	2.1	19.0	7.4
Disapprove	0	18	67	36	121
%		62.1	69.1	57.1	64.0
Not Known	0	11	28	15	54
%		37.9	28.8	23.9	28.6
Total	0	29	97	63	189
%		100	100	100	100

TABLE 3: Relationship Between Smoking Habits of Parents and their Childrens*

<i>Smoking Habits of Parents</i>					
<i>Smoking Habit of Children</i>	<i>Both Smoke</i>	<i>Father only Smoker</i>	<i>Mother only Smoker</i>	<i>Neither Smoke</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Boys</i>					
<i>Current Smoker</i>	314	288	103	125	830
%	33.8	33.3	32.0	23.6	31.4
<i>Non Smoker</i>	614	576	219	405	1,814
%	66.2	66.7	68.0	76.4	68.6
<i>All Boys</i>	928	864	322	530	2,644
%	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Girls</i>					
<i>Current Smoker</i>	92	50	16	32	190
%	14.7	8.9	8.4	9.4	11.1
<i>Non Smoker</i>	533	509	175	308	1,525
%	85.3	91.1	91.6	90.6	88.9
<i>All Girls</i>	625	559	191	340	1,715
%	100	100	100	100	100

Boys

$$\chi^2 = 19.004, p = <0.1\%$$

Girls

$$\chi^2 = 13.634, p = <0.5\%$$

*This table excludes 112 cases where parents habit is not known.

TABLE 4: *The Relationship Between Parental Smoking Habits and their Attitudes Towards their Children's Smoking*

Parental Attitude	Parental Smoking Habit									
	Both		Father		Mother		Neither		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Boys</i>										
Approve	65	20.7	52	18.1	18	17.5	24	16.0	159	18.7
Disapprove	206	65.6	193	67.0	65	63.1	86	68.8	570	66.3
Don't Know	43	13.7	43	14.9	20	19.4	19	15.2	125	15.0
All	3.4	100	288	100	103	100	125	100	830	100
<i>Girls</i>										
Approve	11	12.0	1	2.0	0	0	2	6.5	14	7.4
Disapprove	54	58.7	36	72.0	12	75.0	19	61.3	121	64.0
Don't Know	27	29.3	13	26.0	4	25.0	10	32.2	54	28.6
All	92	100	50	100	16	100	31	100	189	100

TABLE 5: *Social Class and Smoking Habits*

<i>Social Class</i>	<i>Boys</i>		<i>Girls</i>	
	<i>Smokers</i>	<i>Non-Smokers</i>	<i>Smokers</i>	<i>Non-Smokers</i>
1 plus 2 %	139 25.8	399 74.2	34 10.6	287 89.4
3A %	341 33.0	691 67.0	48 8.6	513 91.4
3M %	149 30.7	337 69.3	38 10.5	323 89.5
4 plus 5 %	132 36.3	232 63.7	42 13.1	279 86.9
Farmers %	18 30.0	42 70.0	5 9.4	48 90.6
N.S. %	86 37.4	144 62.6	21 12.0	154 88.0
All %	865 31.9	1,845 68.1	188 10.5	1,604 89.5