

SMOKING HABITS OF DELINQUENT BOYS

BY

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Several studies have indicated the extent of cigarette smoking amongst schoolchildren. (Bothwell, 1959; Cartwright, Thomson, and others, 1960; Jefferys and Westaway, 1961; Public Health Department, London School of Hygiene, 1959). They show that smoking often begins at the age of 10 years or less, and that from that age there is a steady increase with age in the number of children who smoke regularly. The smoking habits of delinquents are noticeably different from those of other children, in that they seem to smoke far more and to establish regular smoking habits at a much earlier age. In view of this observation, that excessive smoking is an important part of the pattern of delinquent behaviour, and of the evidence that several serious diseases affect smokers more often than non-smokers (Royal College of Physicians, 1962), an inquiry was carried out to assess the extent of smoking amongst delinquent boys, with the object of determining how they differ from the normal population, and in the hope that such information will be of use in determining the policy of approved schools towards smoking.

This study was made in a classifying school, where routine assessment of the boys is undertaken, so that they are sent to the approved school which will best meet their individual needs. Sixty boys whose ages ranged from 11 to 17 years were asked how many cigarettes they smoked each day. They were representative of the range of delinquent boys in their social background, intelligence, and personality, and none had been to an approved school before.

SMOKING IN RELATION TO AGE

The results of this inquiry are represented in Table I and Fig. 1.

A number of children in the lower age range smoke quite regularly. The average number of cigarettes smoked each day increases steeply with age, producing a significant correlation. The largest increase

TABLE I
CIGARETTE SMOKING RELATED TO AGE

Age (yrs)	No. of Cases	Average No. of Cigarettes Smoked per Day
11-12	2	1.00
12-13	3	4.20
13-14	4	4.20
14-15	12	5.76
15-16	12	12.92
16-17	24	12.26
17-18	3	15.00

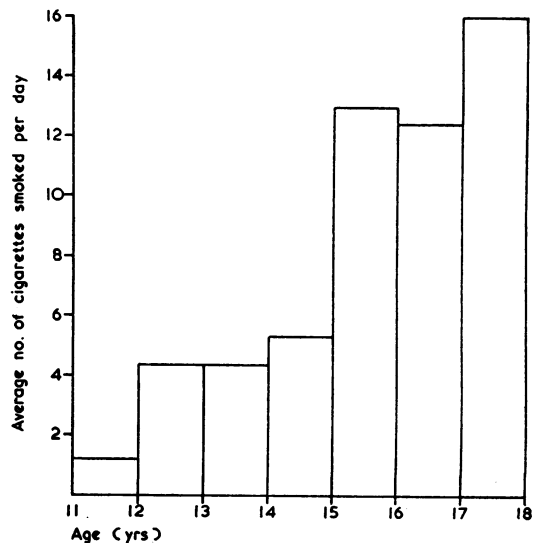


FIG. 1.—Average number of cigarettes smoked per day by adolescent boys, by age.

of all occurs at the age of 15 years and it is a commonplace to find boys of that age who smoke 30 to 40 cigarettes a day.

SMOKING HABITS OF DELINQUENTS IN RELATION TO THE NORMAL POPULATION

The Tobacco Manufacturers' Standing Committee have published a number of national surveys

containing information on the smoking habits of children (Todd, 1959, 1962), from which it can be shown that, in the age group 12 to 17 years, 63·8 per cent. of boys in the normal population are non-smokers, whereas this is the case with only 13·3 per cent. of delinquents. Table II and Fig. 2 demonstrate the enormous difference between the smoking habits of delinquents and those of the normal population.

TABLE II
SMOKING HABITS OF DELINQUENTS AND OF THE NORMAL POPULATION

Age (yrs)	Average No. of Cigarettes Smoked per Day	
	Normal Population	Delinquents
11-12	0·02	1·00
12-13	0·03	4·20
13-14	0·12	4·20
14-15	0·27	5·76
15-16	1·03	12·92

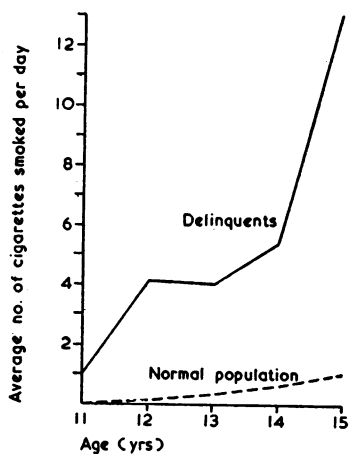


FIG. 2.—Average number of cigarettes smoked per day by delinquent and normal boys aged 11 to 15 years.

SMOKING HABITS OF DELINQUENTS IN RELATION TO INTELLIGENCE

The study group of the Public Health Department of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (1959) showed that in the general population the more intelligent children smoke less than their fellows. Fig. 3 and Table III show this to be true of delinquents also, the smoking habits of delinquents being significantly correlated with their level of intelligence, 39 boys with intelligence quotients below 100 smoking thirteen cigarettes a day, and 21 more intelligent boys (I.Q. above 110) averaging four a day.

TABLE III
SMOKING RELATED TO INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Quotient	No. of Cases	Mean Age (yrs)	Average No. of Cigarettes Smoked per Day
70-80	5	14·2	8·70
80-90	8	15·6	16·10
90-100	26	15·0	13·16
100-110	17	15·1	3·80
110-120	2	15·0	0·35
120-130	1	14·7	15·00
130-140	1	15·2	1·00

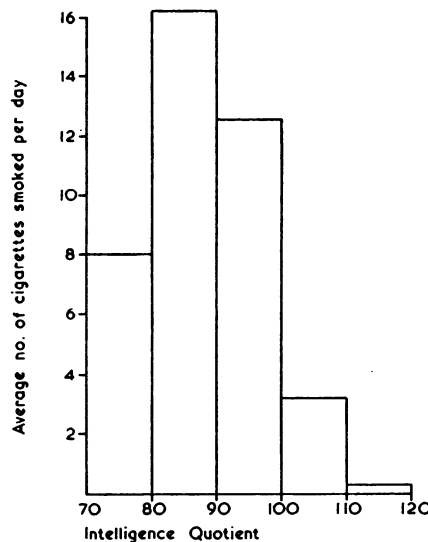


FIG. 3.—Average number of cigarettes smoked per day, by intelligence rating, I.Q. 70-120.

CONCLUSIONS

Delinquents smoke far more cigarettes than ordinary schoolchildren. The reasons for this excessive smoking are not clear. It may be that smoking is associated with a personality pattern which gives rise to delinquent behaviour, or that both result from the boys' social environment. Alternatively smoking may take the form of a compensatory activity, providing a means of self-assertion and a semblance of adulthood.

Smoking is related to intelligence. The less intelligent boys finding difficulty in competitive existence may well compensate by heavy smoking, but this finding could well be tied to the difference in smoking habits among social levels of different intelligence.

Whatever the reasons for smoking, its range and extent among delinquents is such as to cause alarm. Because of the social and psychological benefits, and because many delinquents who have been smoking heavily for a number of years would experience

difficulty and hardship if they were required to stop, some approved schools permit unrestrained smoking in boys of all ages, but perhaps it is now time to review this policy in view of the danger to their health.

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