

English summary

Background: Several Danish and international studies have shown that there is a correlation between lifestyle and stagnant life expectancy of a population and many of the diseases occurring after long time exposure - for instance diseases of cardiovascular diseases and cancer - see the life expectancy reports (1994). As lifestyle habits are generally established in early years it is particularly important to study what determines young people's lifestyle.

In recent years studies of health behaviour among young people have shown that there is a close connection between their lifestyle and their social background, integration in school and their relation to friends.

Other studies have furthermore found that young people's lifestyle is mainly determined by various forms of young life and attachment to various subcultures which, among other things, is determined by the socioeconomic affiliations of the young people. Finally, some studies have shown that their lifestyle is often determined by existing norms among friends as part of general group processes which must be conformed to by the individual in order to be accepted.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the lifestyle habits among students at youth educations in Frederiksborg County and to throw light on social relations affecting the lifestyle in order to clarify the possibilities of influencing them. Lifestyle is exemplified by the students' cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, use of drugs, and participation in sports activities in their spare time.

Method and material: The lifestyle and the significance of social relations of the students are examined on the basis of four steps:

1. Description of lifestyle among the students in question and comparison with other population groups.
2. Clarification of bivariate correlations between lifestyle and personally related social factors of the students. The personally related social factors comprise sociodemographic background factors and variables indicating the students' well-being and integration in relation to school and the education as well as in relation to friends in and outside school.
3. Multivariate analyses as to which of the above personally related social factors are most influential and to which degree they can explain the lifestyle of the young people.
4. Chi²-test and multi-level analyses of the significance of the students' affiliation with various social groups on their lifestyle. It is the aim to study the effects of the social context and social norms in these group relations - on the students' lifestyle. The social group relations comprise geographical location of the home, type of school, the school, the grade, and the class.

The present thesis is based on data collected during a questionnaire survey in 1994/95 concerning health and lifestyle among all students enrolled in youth educations in Frederiksborg County. The response rate in the survey was 87% and it comprises a total of 6444 students from 331 classes - see Nielsen (1996). The database comprises the equivalent of 70% of the young people in the age-groups in question in Frederiksborg County.

Results: The descriptive results show that generally speaking, the lifestyle of students enrolled in youth educations in Frederiksborg County corresponds to the lifestyle among

16-19-year-olds studied in Danish health surveys. Moreover the results show that the proportion of Danes smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and taking drugs increases with age, while there are fewer 16-19-year-olds who participate in sports activities in their spare time compared to pupils in elementary school and the adult population as a whole.

Multivariate analyses show that the students' lifestyle is primarily determined by social background factors and integration among friends outside school, whereas well-being and integration in relation to school-mates, school, and education in general is not of any particular significance.

The results as to the significance of affiliation to social groups show that there is great variation in the individual classes and between individual schools. For instance results concerning smoking show that there are classes where only about 10% smoke, whereas the proportion is up to about 90% in other classes. Also, there are schools where the proportion of smokers is 34%, whereas it is 64% in other schools. Such variations are remarkable and are not found among other social groups, which demonstrates that particularly the class but also very much the school affect the smoking habits of the students.

Bivariate analysis results furthermore show that the various social levels and their significance for the smoking habits of young people are to some extent hierarchical. It is first and foremost the closest social affiliations which affect the smoking habits. All things considered, the class has more influence than the school, which in turn has more influence than the type of school, which in turn has more influence than the geographical location of the home, whereas the grade does not seem to influence the smoking habits of young people.

The above is also supported by results of Multi-level analyses showing that the individually related social background factors and integration among friends cannot fully explain the substantial variation between the proportion of smokers in the classes. The class - or the social context and social norms in the class - therefore has greater effect on the smoking habits of the young students than all the personal related factors put together. The class and/or school are equally significant to the alcohol consumption and use of drugs, and sports habits of the students.

Discussion: Thus, the individually related social background factors and integration among friends outside school cannot fully explain the great variation in lifestyle in the various classes - and to some extent at the various schools. Neither can variations between the proportions of smokers distributed in each class from school start alone explain the substantial class variations and consequently the lifestyle in the individual classes. As the results indicate a kind of schooling or levelling of the lifestyle variation among individual schools apparently take place, whereas the variation among the lifestyle in individual classes seems to increase in the course of the education. The most likely explanation seems to be that the lifestyle habits of young people is first of all influenced by the social context - or social norms - in the class itself and partly at the schools.

Concluding, the total results show that when planning effective interventions it should probably first of all be directed towards the youth group (the class) as a whole, secondly towards the school. As the results also indicate, the most effective intervention should be made as early as possible among first year classes - before, as a unit, they have time to form social norms of lifestyle in the individual classes.