

Does your mother know?

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Do your parents know where you are at night? According to 36 per cent of 15 year old boys and nearly a quarter of 15 year old girls the answer to that question, at least once a month, is no.

This is the finding from Understanding Society, a long term study of 40,000 UK households, which asked more than 2,000 10-15 year olds how frequently they stayed out past 9.00pm without their [parents](#) knowing where they were. The study, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), also found that staying out late without telling your parents is unrelated to factors such as family income, the number of children in the family or being in a step-family, but is related to the quality of the emotional relationship the child has with their parents and whether they live in a city or in the country.

Staying out late in adolescence is an accepted sign of growing independence, but this study finds that there is a [small minority](#) of 15 year olds – seven per cent of boys and five per cent of girls - who regularly stay out late without their parents knowing where they are. It is within this group that the association with problem behaviours such as smoking and drinking is found. Regularly staying out late is linked with visiting pubs or bars more often; with frequency of alcohol consumption; with smoking, and with cannabis use. These associations are visible for both boys and girls, though they are more pronounced for girls in relation to smoking and drinking.

- 64 per cent of 15 year old girls who stay out frequently past

9.00pm without their parent's knowledge consumed alcohol more than once in the last month, compared with only 25 per cent of girls who hadn't stayed out in the past month;

- 18 per cent of 15 year old girls who have not stayed out past 9pm smoke. This rises to 51 per cent among girls who stay out frequently
- Five times more boys who frequently stay out late without their parents knowing where they are report ever having used cannabis, compared to boys who do not stay out late

Dr Maria Iacovou from the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, who analysed the data, says: "Staying out late does not cause [young people](#) to smoke and drink, but regularly staying out late without telling their parents where they are is symptomatic of a young person with underlying problems. This is revealed by the fact that 19 per cent of boys regularly staying out late have behaviour problems and 26 per cent of [girls](#) in this group score highly for hyperactivity. We also see a third of young women in this group with self-esteem problems."

When the researchers looked at the home life of the young people they found that being in a step family, the number of family members living at home or family income does not increase the likelihood of them regularly staying out past 9.00pm without telling their parents where they are. What is important are family relationships, with children who hardly ever talk about important matters with their mothers and often quarrel with them more likely to stay out late.

Living in social housing or with a single mother also increases the probability of young people staying out without informing their parents of their whereabouts. There are differences by nationality and ethnicity: there are no meaningful differences between white and African/Caribbean youngsters, but Scottish teenagers are more likely,

and those from Asian backgrounds are less likely, to stay out late.

There are also differences by the size of the community in which young people live: those living in hamlets and villages are less likely than those in towns and cities to go out at night without their parents knowing where they are. Young people who travel to school by independent means (on foot, bicycle, bus or train) are more likely than those who are taken to school by car to stay out at night.

Dr Iacovou added: "This study shows that that the factors associated with staying out late without your parents knowing where you are, are complex and cannot simply be attributed to 'bad parenting'. Geographical location plays a part too and may relate to local entertainment opportunities. Other factors such as the mode of travel to school probably relate to independence on the part of young people and trust on the part of their parents; while others, most notably family relationships, demonstrate that social and emotional deprivation also plays a role."

More information: The findings above are taken from the article 'Does Your Mother Know? Staying out late and risky behaviours among 10-15 year olds'.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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