

behavioral sciences notes

SMOKING

Parents no model

Children do not copy their parents' smoking habits, nor do programs aimed at alerting young people to the dangers of nicotine have much impact, according to a survey of 50,000 Indianapolis pupils aged 11 to 18.

Nearly half of the 5th-graders had tried smoking, the study found, although only 8 percent considered themselves smokers. In the 12th grade, smokers had reached 31 percent.

Parents' smoking habits, however, had almost nothing to do with whether the children smoked. Among smokers, 70 percent had fathers who smoked. But 63 percent of the nonsmokers also had smoking fathers.

By far the most important spur to smoking was friends, reports Dr. Eugene E. Levitt, psychologist at Indiana University School of Medicine who directed the study.

Other results indicate that information programs on health hazards may be a waste of time. Few of the children were unaware that smoking is dangerous to lungs and heart. However, admission of the danger seemed to slightly inhibit the number of cigarettes consumed. Those who disagreed that smoking is bad for the heart used about a pack more a week than the others.

Only a small number of regular smokers—nine percent—believed that smoking is a smart or cool thing to do.

SUICIDE

Mexicans fail to call for help

Suicidal Mexicans apparently do not give the so-called cry for help that is characteristic of Americans and which underlies suicide prevention efforts in this country.

A suicide prevention scheme called The Mexican Association of Aid for the Desperate folded after four months from lack of use. It had a staff of psychiatrists, medical men and social workers on call 24 hours of the day; the public was urged to phone when suicidal depression threatened.

More recently the Bureau of Medical Services in Mexico has launched a campaign urging families to call for aid whenever a member shows signs of suicide. But that program is not working well either, apparently because of the reluctance of families to call attention to themselves.

Nevertheless, a new private group has begun another attempt called the Unit for Prevention of Suicides. It will concentrate on treating those who have made unsuccessful suicide attempts.

Doctors are also urging stricter control over barbiturate sales. Most Mexican suicides result from an overdose of sleeping pills.

SOCIAL RESEARCH

Institute for the future

A major new institute devoted to peering into the future will be established in Middletown, Conn., in September.

Two years in the planning by the National Industrial

Conference Board, the Institute For The Future will work out computer methods for predicting the social and long-range consequences of technological and economic change. In addition, it will establish an urban research laboratory with simulation techniques and act as a central clearing house for social research.

The goal is to make society the "beneficiary instead of the victim of its own technological capacity," says President Frank P. Davidson, an architect of the Peace Corps.

Funded by the Ford Foundation and other private sources, the institute will be available to business, government and universities. Its trustees include major industrial leaders and officials of the National Academy of Sciences.

One of the institute's major tasks will be to improve the application of engineering tools to social science.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Three factors found in Denmark

A 20-year study of Danish children running a high risk of schizophrenia has isolated three predisposing factors to the disease.

All 207 children in the study have schizophrenic mothers. When the work began six years ago, the investigators predicted that 50 percent of the children would become seriously mentally ill and 15 percent (31 children) would become schizophrenic. Eight have now been tentatively diagnosed as schizophrenic out of the 20 that are ill.

As a group the 207 children differ from normal children in three areas.

They are usually products of difficult births, with abnormal placentas in 11.3 percent of the cases.

They have highly unstable autonomic nervous systems and react to stress with abnormal swiftness and amplitude.

They tend to get upset easily and withdraw from excitement. They react passively to the challenges of other children.

The researchers, Dr. Sarnoff Mednick of the University of Michigan, and Danish psychiatrist Dr. Fini Schul-singer, are searching for drugs to control autonomic functions.

POVERTY

Number of poor declines

The total number of poor people in the United States declined by 9 million between 1959 and 1966, according to the Social Security Administration.

At the same time, the proportion of poor people whose earning capacity is limited by age, family responsibilities, racial discrimination or similar factors increased, reports the Administration's Mollie Orshansky.

In 1959 there were 38.9 million people judged to be living below the poverty line; in 1966, the number was 29.7 million.

The number of near-poor, however—those just barely above the poverty threshold—changed hardly at all during the seven years.

Miss Orshansky concludes that new income assistance programs will be needed to lift people with limited earning capacity above poverty.