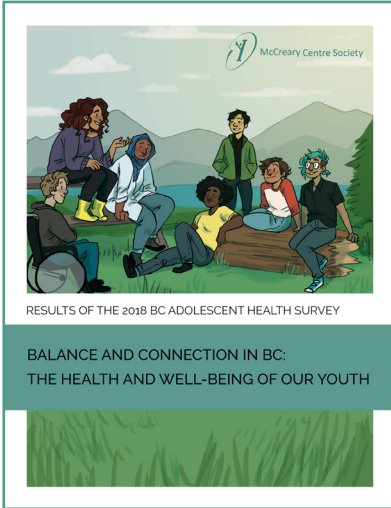


BC YOUTH WITH PREGNANCY INVOLVEMENT

A 2018 BC ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY FACT SHEET



This fact sheet uses data from McCreary Centre Society's BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The most recent BC AHS was completed in 2018 by over 38,000 youth aged 12–19. To learn more about the survey and view other fact sheets and reports, please visit mcs.bc.ca.

Any percentage that is marked with an asterisk (*) should be interpreted with caution, as the standard error was higher than others but is still within the releasable range.

Quotes from youth with pregnancy involvement experience are included throughout the fact sheet.

In Canada, teenage pregnancy has steadily decreased. However, experiencing pregnancy at a young age has been linked to living in poverty and to experiencing challenges with physical and mental health, educational attainment, employment, social isolation, and substance use (Krueger et al., 2011; Wong et al., 2020). Support networks and particularly having a supportive parent and partner have been found to be important protective factors for the health and well-being of youth involved in a pregnancy (Pires et al., 2013).

This fact sheet discusses the health of BC youth who have been involved in a pregnancy, and shares examples of protective factors which can promote more positive health and well-being. Results were similar between youth of all genders who had been involved in a pregnancy, unless noted.

Background

"I've been pregnant but lost the baby. It kills me to this day."

"I had a miscarriage the 1 time I got pregnant."

"I may be pregnant, but can't get an appointment."

"I've heard the baby's heart beat."

In 2018, 1% of youth in BC reported they had been involved in a pregnancy (i.e., had been pregnant or had gotten someone pregnant). This was a slight decrease from 2013. An additional 1% of youth were unsure of whether they had been involved in a pregnancy or were currently pregnant.

"I am a disappointment to my parents that I no longer live with."

Most youth who had been involved in a pregnancy lived with at least one of their parents (84% vs. 96% without pregnancy involvement). However, 4% lived alone (vs. <1%).

The majority of youth involved in a pregnancy had been born in Canada, and 23% had been born abroad, including 15% who had been in Canada less than five years. Around 1 in 7 (15%) youth who had been involved in a pregnancy spoke a language other than English at home most of the time.

Some youth were more likely to have been involved in a pregnancy. These included:

- Youth aged 15 or older (1% vs. <1% aged 14 or younger).
- Sexual minority youth (2% vs. 1% of straight youth).
- Youth who had been in government care (4% vs. 1% who had never been in care).
- Youth whose friends would not be upset with them if they got pregnant or got someone pregnant (2% vs. 1% of those whose friends would disapprove).

Health and well-being

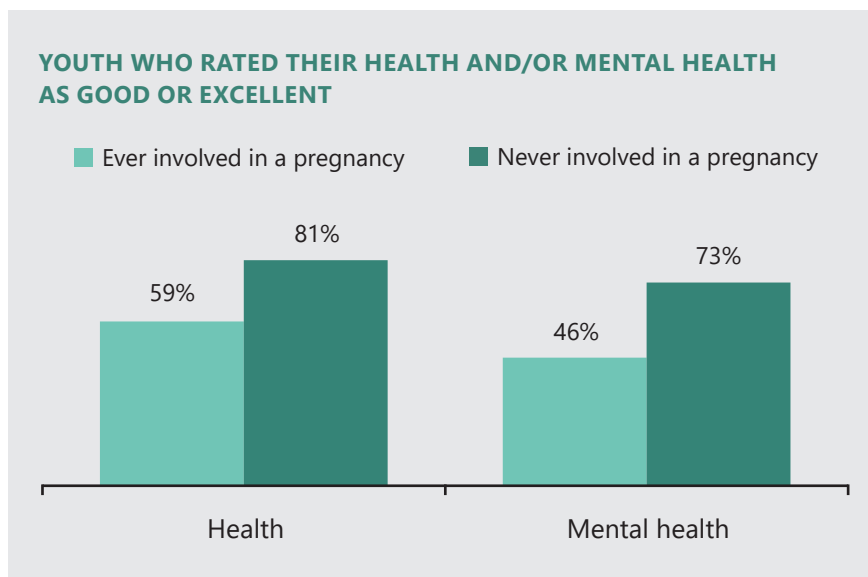
"I'm a pretty healthy person but sometimes I eat a lot of junk food."

Youth who had been involved in a pregnancy were less likely to report positive health and mental health than their peers who had not experienced a pregnancy. For example, they were more likely to indicate they had at least one mental health condition including depression (46% vs. 15%), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 17% vs. 2%), an anxiety disorder (44% vs. 18%), and a substance use addiction (27% vs. 2%).

Access to health care and mental health services

"I don't believe [health care services] ask much about pregnancy ... Doctors and nurses can help people become educated on safe sex and be open to talking with no judgement to teens about those sorts of things. There's a lot of accidents that happen because teens are too scared to talk about it."

"I went to my local youth clinic for the first-time last month and they were very kind and helpful."



In the past year, youth who had been involved in a pregnancy most commonly received health care from a family doctor (60%) and a walk-in clinic (39%). Compared to their peers never involved in a pregnancy, youth with pregnancy involvement were more likely to have received health care from an emergency room (31% vs. 16%), a counsellor or psychologist (26% vs. 11%), a nurse (17% vs. 9%), a youth clinic (16% vs. 4%), and a school wellness centre (5% vs. 2%) in the past year.

Almost a third (32%) of youth who had been involved in a pregnancy reported that they had needed mental health services in the past year but had not accessed them (vs. 18% who had not been involved in a pregnancy). The most common reasons they had not accessed these services included not wanting their parents to know (56%*; youth could mark more than one response), thinking or hoping the problem would go away (56%), and being afraid of what the doctor would say or do (51%*). Also, 36% of youth involved in a pregnancy did not seek out these services because they had a negative experience in the past (vs. 14% of those never involved in a pregnancy).

Among youth who reported they had needed medical help in the past year because they were physically sick or hurt, those who had been involved in a pregnancy were almost twice as likely to have not received the care they needed (36% vs. 19% of those who had not been involved in a pregnancy).

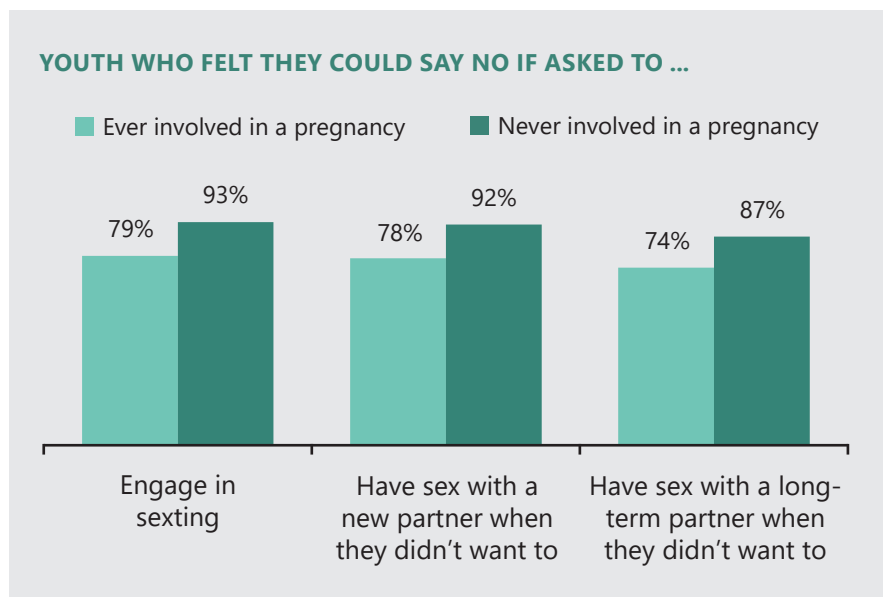
Sexual health

Among youth who had ever had sexual intercourse, those who had been involved in a pregnancy were less likely to have made an effort to prevent pregnancy (16% vs. 3% of those never involved in a pregnancy), and were more likely to have:

- Been the younger of an illegal age pairing the first time they had sex (17% vs. 3% never involved in a pregnancy).
- Used substances the last time they had sex (42% vs. 21%).

- Had sex with three or more partners in the past year (51% vs. 19%).
- Had a sexually transmitted infection (e.g., chlamydia, gonorrhea; 13% vs. 2%).

Most youth who had been involved in a pregnancy felt they could say no if they were asked to engage in unwanted sexual activity. However, they were less likely to feel they had these refusal skills than youth who had never been involved in a pregnancy.



"I would like to learn more about sex! And not just about reproductive systems. It's important to learn about sexual interaction, conversations, and the 'uncomfortable' things we aren't taught."

"We need a better sex-ed unit, we should be taught at a younger age so we don't get pregnant. Birth control should be easy to access."

"Had sex a couple times, only used a condom once."

Substance use

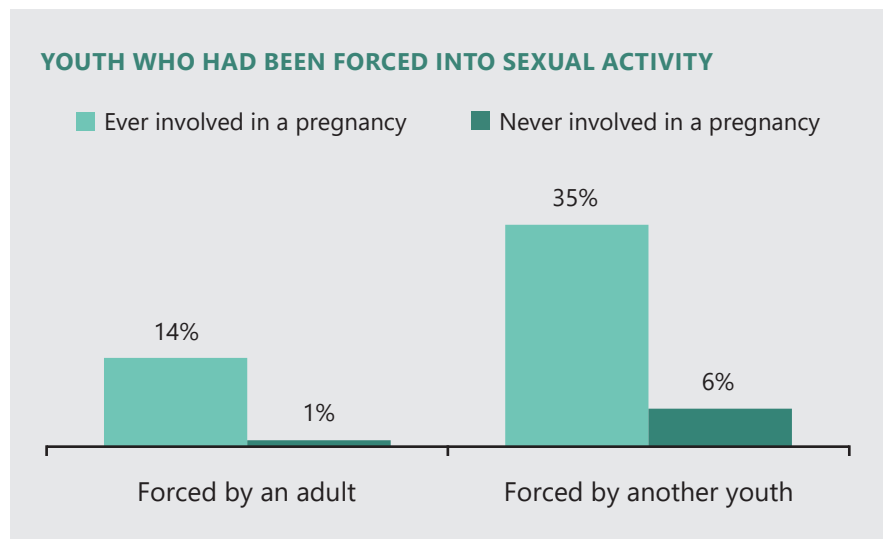
Youth who had been involved in a pregnancy were more likely to have tried alcohol (88% vs. 44% of those never involved in a pregnancy), tobacco (74% vs. 18%), cannabis (81% vs. 25%), and a range of other substances including cocaine (33% vs. 2%), ecstasy/MDMA (30% vs. 3%), and inhalants (18% vs. 2%).

Youth who had been involved in a pregnancy were also more likely to have started using substances at a younger age and to be daily users. For example, among youth who had tried alcohol, 41% of those who had been involved in a pregnancy were under 13 years of age when they had their first drink (vs. 22% of those never involved in a pregnancy) and 5% had drunk alcohol daily in the past month (vs. <1%).

Victimization

Compared to youth who had never been involved in a pregnancy, those who had been were more likely to have experienced victimization and abuse. More than 4 in 10 (43%) had been physically abused (vs. 14% of those never involved in a pregnancy) and 60% had been sexually abused (vs. 11%). Males who had got someone pregnant were over ten times as likely to have experienced sexual abuse as males who had not been involved in a pregnancy (43% vs. 4%), and over three quarters of females involved in a pregnancy had been sexually abused (vs. 17% of females never involved in a pregnancy).

Youth who had been involved in a pregnancy also experienced high rates of intimate partner violence. For example, among youth who had dated in the past year, 37% had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt within a dating relationship (vs. 7% of those never involved in a pregnancy).



Poverty and deprivation

The 2018 BC AHS asked youth if they had 10 items that were identified by BC youth as most important for them to have to feel they belonged. For 8 out of 10 items, youth who had been involved in a pregnancy were more likely than their peers to report they did not have the particular item but wished they had it.

Around a third (32%) of youth who had been involved in a pregnancy went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home, which was more than three times the rate among youth never involved in a pregnancy (9%). Also, 6% of those involved in a pregnancy went to bed hungry often or always for this reason (vs. 1%).

Over half of youth (59%) involved in a pregnancy were working at a paid job during the school year (vs. 33% of those never involved in a pregnancy).

YOUTH WHO FELT DEPRIVED OF ...

	Ever involved in a pregnancy	Never involved in a pregnancy
Money to spend on themselves	17%	10%
Lunch for school/money for lunch	15%	4%
Money for school supplies, trips, and extracurricular activities	12%	4%
Space of their own to hang out in	11%	6%
Equipment/clothes for extracurricular activities	11%	3%
Access to transportation	8%	3%
A quiet place to sleep	7%	2%
Smartphone	6%	6%
Clothes to fit in	6%	2%
Access to Internet	2%	1%

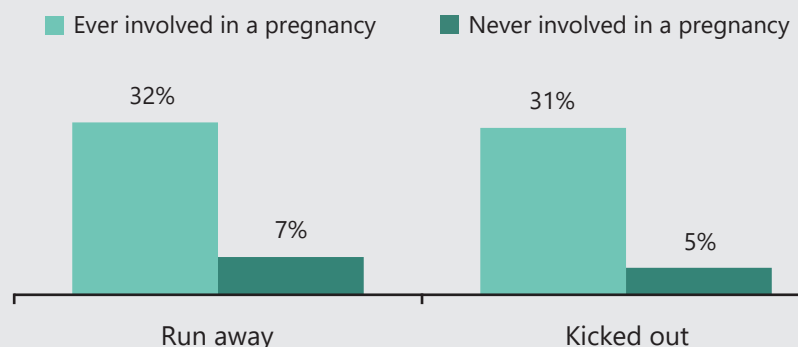
Note: The difference between youth ever involved in a pregnancy and never involved in a pregnancy was not statistically significant for 'Smartphone' and 'Access to Internet'.

Unstable home environment

Compared to youth who had not experienced a pregnancy, those with pregnancy involvement were more likely to have moved (39% vs. 24%), run away from home, or been kicked out or in the past year. They were also more likely to have moved at least three times in the past year (13% vs. 5%).

Almost three quarters (74%) of youth involved in a pregnancy often or always felt safe in their home, which was lower than the rate among youth who had not been involved in a pregnancy (94%).

YOUTH WHO HAD RUN AWAY FROM HOME AND/OR HAD BEEN KICKED OUT IN THE PAST YEAR



SUPPORTING YOUTH INVOLVED IN A PREGNANCY

"I have an amazing best friend ... they are the only person who can make me feel okay using so little words."

Supportive family

"My friends and family all support me."

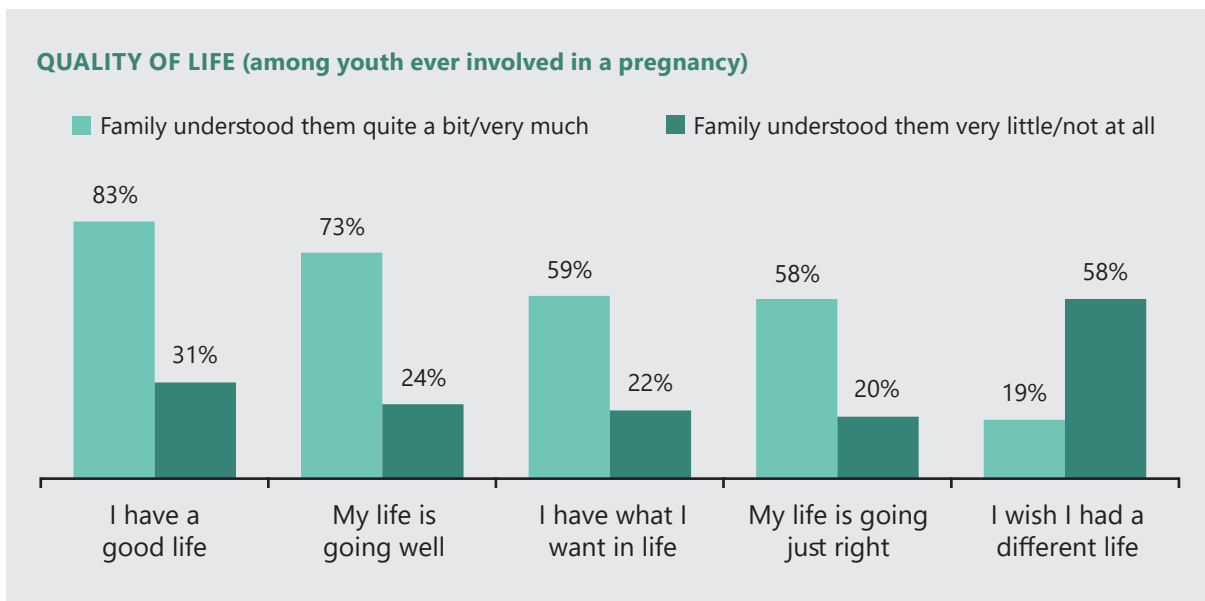
Youth involved in a pregnancy who had a supportive family were more likely to rate their health and mental health positively. For example, 72% of those whose family paid attention to them quite a bit or very much reported their health as good or excellent, compared to 45% who did not feel their family paid attention to them. They were also more likely to get needed medical care when they were sick or hurt (78% who felt their family paid attention to them vs. 52%* who did not feel this way), and to plan to continue their education beyond high school (82% vs. 45%).

Similarly, youth who felt their family respected them were more likely to report they had a good life (75% vs. 24% of those who did not feel their family respected them).

Supportive adults

Similar to youth never involved in a pregnancy, 62% of those involved in a pregnancy had an adult who really cared about them in their community. Youth who had such an adult in their life were more likely to feel connected to their community (36% vs. 14% who did not have such an adult); feel good about themselves (45% vs. 26%); and rate their health (67% vs. 44%) and mental health (51% vs. 37%) as good or excellent.

Additionally, youth who could identify an adult who they could talk to if they were having a serious problem reported more positive mental health and were less likely to experience extreme stress (56% vs. 71%) and extreme despair (38% vs. 59%) in the past month.



Supportive school environment

"I just want a bright future, but my grades are poor."

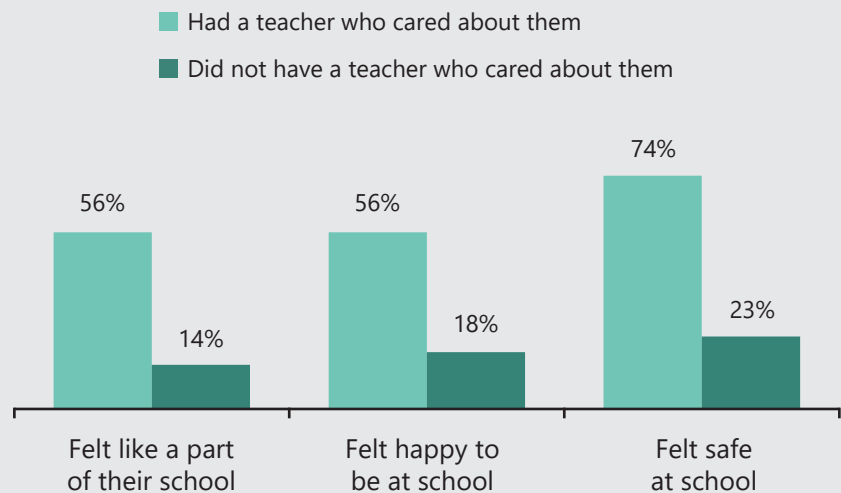
Youth who had been involved in a pregnancy were less likely than those who had never been involved to feel connected to their school (37% vs. 60%), feel happy at school (36% vs. 60%), safe at school (48% vs. 73%), staff treated them fairly (51% vs. 71%), and that teachers cared about them (45% vs. 66%).

Youth with pregnancy involvement experience were also more likely to have missed school in the past month (91% vs. 73% who had not been involved in a pregnancy), including because they skipped (66% vs. 26%), slept in (44% vs. 21%), were experiencing mental health challenges (43% vs. 15%), had family responsibilities (32% vs. 14%), did not have transportation (19% vs. 4%), had to work (19% vs. 4%), and because of bullying (17% vs. 3%).

Despite these challenges, most youth who had been involved in a pregnancy planned to finish high school (80%), and 68% planned to attend post-secondary (vs. 84% of those never involved in a pregnancy). Students with pregnancy involvement experience were more likely to plan to attend post-secondary if they felt their teacher cared about them (79% vs. 54%* who did not feel their teacher cared).

A caring teacher was also associated with more positive health and well-being and reduced feelings of stress and despair among youth with pregnancy involvement. For example, they were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (52% vs. 36%* without a teacher who cared) and to feel they had a good life (70% vs. 31%).

FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL (among youth ever involved in a pregnancy)



Summary

This fact sheet has shown some of the challenges experienced by youth who have been involved in a pregnancy, and has highlighted the importance of them receiving non-judgemental and caring support within their family, school, and community.

Resources

Options for Sexual Health offers sexual and reproductive health care. For more information, visit optionsforsexualhealth.org/.

The **Young Parent Program** is funding offered by the BC government under the Affordable Child Care Benefit. For more information, visit gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children/child-care-funding/young-parent-program.

BC Council for Families' **Professionals Serving Young Parents** has resources for young parents available at bccf.ca/program/program-3/.

Family Smart offers resources and peer support for parents and families at familysmart.ca/.

Youth in BC is a space to find resources for youth and to chat online with a crisis responder. Visit youthinbc.com/ if you need someone to talk to (noon–1 AM).

Foundry offers online and in-person health and wellness support for youth ages 12–24 at foundrybc.ca/.

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