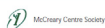




Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey



Mental health and substance use

A BC Adolescent Health Survey 2008 Fact Sheet



This fact sheet was produced with information from the fourth BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) conducted by the McCreary Centre Society.

Over 29,000 BC public school students in Grades 7-12 completed the survey between February and June 2008. Previous surveys were conducted in 1992, 1998 and 2003. The next AHS will be conducted in 2013.

A fact sheet about the methodology for the survey is available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

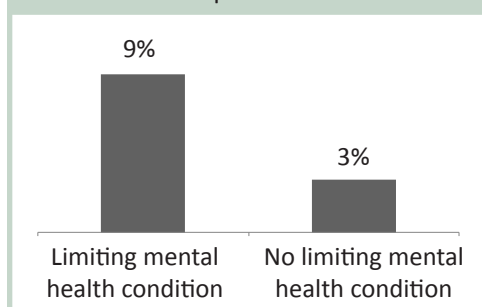
Most young people grow up in BC without experiencing mental health challenges or problematic substance use. Among the 29,440 youth in Grades 7 through 12 who completed the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey, 3% (2% of males and 4% of females) reported that they were suffering from a mental or emotional health condition severe enough to prevent them from doing activities their peers could do.

Youth who did report such a mental health condition were more likely to report that they used substances and that their drug or alcohol use had become so problematic that they needed help (11% vs. 2% of youth without a limiting mental health condition).

Experiencing mental health challenges and substance use

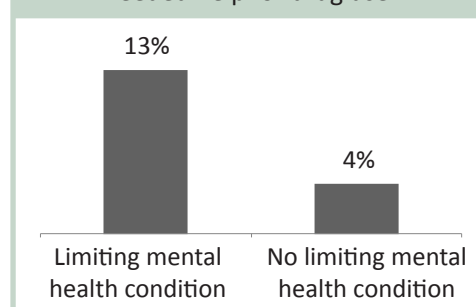
In 2008, young people who reported having a limiting mental health condition were more likely to be regular substance users and to use at risky levels than their peers without such a condition. For example, among youth who had tried alcohol, 15% who had a limiting mental health condition had binge drank at least 6 times in the past month, compared to 8% of those without such a condition. Similarly among youth who had tried marijuana, 38% of those with a limiting mental health condition had used marijuana on at least six days in the past month, compared to 23% of those without this type of condition.

Needed help for alcohol use[^]



[^] Among youth who had tried alcohol.

Needed help for drug use[^]



[^] Among youth who had used drugs.



The use of substances other than alcohol or marijuana is rare among youth in BC. However, the more severe a young person's mental health challenges, the more likely they were to have used other substances. For example, around half of youth who reported that their mental health condition was so severe that other people could identify it when they met them had used ecstasy, compared to 17% whose condition was not noticeable.

The link between mental health, substance use and other challenges

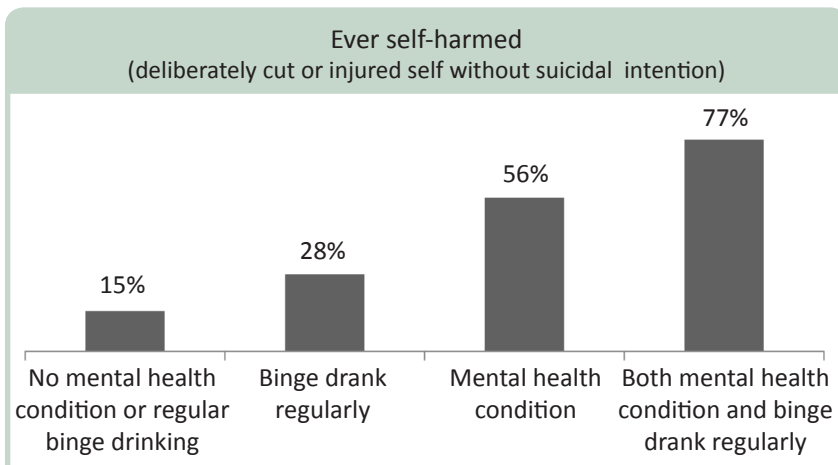
Youth who reported either regular or risky substance use, or a limiting mental health condition, were more likely to report other health risks such as skipping school, self-harm or seriously considering suicide than their peers without these challenges in their lives. If youth reported both substance use and mental health challenges, these differences were even greater. For example, about two thirds of youth who regularly binge drank and had a mental health condition had seriously considered suicide in the past year, compared to 51% who reported a mental health condition exclusively, and 10% who reported neither challenge.

Supporting youth with mental health challenges and substance use problems

A stable home life was protective for young people with mental health and substance use problems. For example, youth reported lower rates of self-harm if they were able to stay in the same home over the previous 12 months than if they ran away or moved from one home to another.

Peers can also play an important role. If youth with mental health and substance use issues reported that their friends had healthy attitudes to risky behaviours (such as getting arrested), they showed better health-promoting behaviours. For example, they were less likely to have skipped school in the past month than if their friends had less pro-social attitudes.

When youth with mental health and substance use issues needed help, the people they were most likely to approach were their friends (95% had asked their friends for help in the past year). This rate was similar to the rate among youth without these issues present in their lives.





However, there were differences between which professionals youth approached for help. Generally, youth in BC were more likely to approach a teacher, or a doctor or nurse, than any other professional, whereas youth with a limiting mental health condition and problematic substance use were most likely to approach a school counsellor. More than three quarters (78%) of youth across the province had asked a doctor or nurse for help in the past year compared to half of those with substance use and mental health issues.

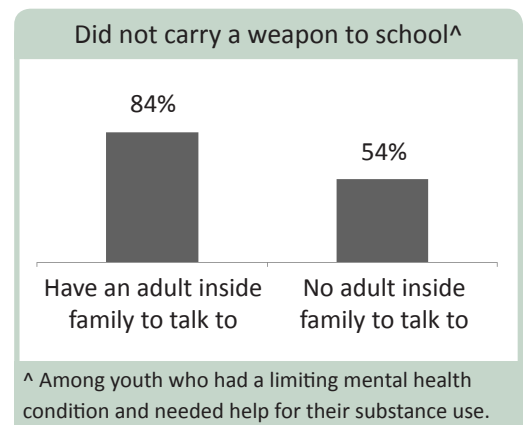
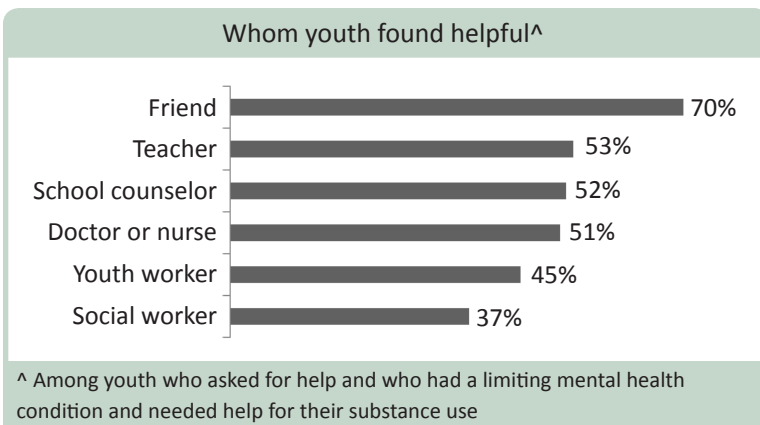
Youth with mental health and substance use problems were more likely to report that their friends were helpful than any of the adults they had approached, although not to the same extent as other youth. (70% of youth with substance use and mental health issues found the friends they approached to be supportive, compared to 94% of the general BC youth population.)

Around half of youth with substance use and mental health issues who approached a doctor, nurse, teacher or school counsellor found this experience helpful, and less than half found youth workers and social workers helpful. These rates were all lower than for youth in general.

Although youth with mental health and substance use issues were less likely to seek help from professionals and less likely to find it helpful, when they did find the experience helpful they reported better health outcomes than those who did not find the experience helpful, including higher self-esteem and lower rates of suicidality and self-harm.

Beyond accessing help from professionals, youth with mental health and substance use problems who reported that they had access to a supportive adult inside or outside their family reported better health and better health-promoting behaviours. For example, they were less likely to carry a weapon to school and more likely to report good or excellent general health than their peers without a supportive adult.

Engaging in any sports or exercise was beneficial to young people experiencing mental health and substance use issues. Playing informal sports (such as biking, hiking, or road hockey) at least weekly was particularly strongly linked to reporting good or excellent health and to reduced risky behaviours (such as weapon carrying).

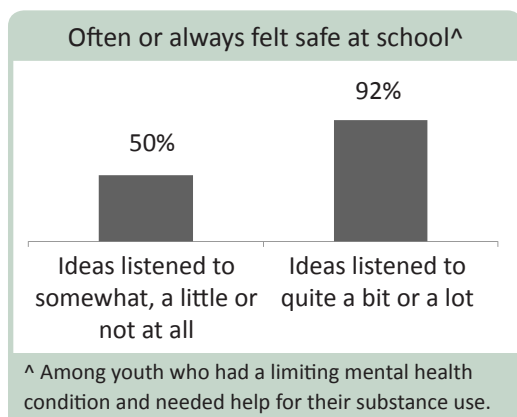




Only 18% of youth who had a limiting mental health condition and needed help for their substance use felt that their ideas were listened to in the activities they were involved in, compared to 51% of youth who did not have these problems. However, there were benefits if they did feel engaged and valued.

Young people were asked if they could identify anything they were good at. Youth with a limiting mental health condition and problematic substance use were less likely to report having a skill than youth without these issues. For example, 85% of youth across BC were able to name one positive thing that they were good at, compared to 73% of those with mental health and substance use issues. However, if youth could identify something positive that they were good at (e.g., sports, school subjects, music, art) they reported better health outcomes.

Finally, two strong protective factors that reduced the likelihood that young people would experience mental health or substance use problems were school and family connectedness. Feeling connected to school and family was also linked to improved outcomes among those who had identified that they had problems in either or both of these areas.



Summary

Youth with identified mental health issues and problematic substance use report fewer health risk behaviours and better health outcomes if they:

- Have a stable home life
- Have supportive adults in their lives
- Have supportive and pro-social friends
- Are engaged in positive leisure pursuits
- Have a sense of competence
- Feel valued and engaged in their activities
- Feel connected to their family and school

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of young people in the province.

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