



MEDIA RELEASE | May 2011

Making the right connections – new McCreary report into youth mental health in BC

Survey shows how youth mental health can continue to improve in BC

The McCreary Centre Society has released its latest report using data from the 2008 Adolescent Health Survey. The report shows that the majority of Grade 7-12 students in BC report positive mental health and low rates of mental health challenges (such as despair, self-harm or suicidal thoughts). They generally have high self-esteem, educational aspirations for the future, and rate their health as good or excellent.

One particular positive trend indicates that youth report lower rates of considering and attempting suicide compared to their peers at any time since 1992. However, it was not all good news, as over half (56%) of youth who reported that they experienced a mental or emotional health condition had not accessed the mental health services that they felt they needed in the past year.

Youth who could identify a positive skill that they possessed and those who felt supported by the adults in their lives reported better mental health than their peers without these protective factors.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of the McCreary Centre Society, said of the report “The findings clearly show us that when young people are in trouble they will reach out and ask their family, teachers, social workers and doctors for help – and if they get this help, they report much healthier outcomes than if they do not feel supported. It is not a complicated or expensive intervention to make sure we make time for young people when they approach us and ask for help.

“The fact that young people also report better mental health when they can report they are good at something, and when they feel engaged and valued in the activities they take part in also gives us a clear message. We need to make sure that the most vulnerable students in our province who lack the resources to be engaged in expensive extracurricular activities get the opportunity to join in and excel at something, whether it is sports, clubs or the arts.”

The report also found that the more connected youth felt to family or school, and the more positive their peer relationships the more likely they were to indicate positive mental health.

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of B.C. youth through research, education and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

Contact

*Annie Smith
Executive Director*

*3552 Hastings Street
East
Vancouver, B.C. V5K
2A7*

*Tel: 604-291-1996
ext 225*

Cell: 604 719 1474

Fax: 604-291-7308

*Email:
annie@mcs.bc.ca*

www.mcs.bc.ca

BACKGROUNDER

This report presents findings from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS). The BC Adolescent Health Survey provides the most comprehensive picture of the physical and emotional health of BC youth. The survey was administered by Public Health Nurses in 50 of BC's 59 school districts, and included 147 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and emotional health, risky behaviours and health promoting practices.

This is the fourth BC Adolescent Health Survey 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 have been conducted in 1992, 1998 and 2003.

In addition to the results from the survey, the report includes the views of 617 young people from communities across the province who took part in focus groups to offer their suggestions for improving youth mental health in the province.

The results of this report will be used by government agencies, schools and communities to plan and assess youth programs and services. It provides comprehensive information on the mental health picture of young people in BC, as well as essential information about health trends, and about risk and protective factors for positive mental health.

Key findings

Most youth in British Columbia report positive mental health and low rates of mental health challenges. They have high self-esteem, educational aspirations for the future, and rate their health as good or excellent, but also have not self-harmed or had suicidal thoughts or attempts in the past year.

Youth reported lower rates of considering and attempting suicide compared to their peers five years previously. However, mental health challenges continue to have an effect on youth health and health risk behaviours in BC. For example, youth who self-harmed were less likely to engage in injury prevention behaviour such as seat belt use and wearing a helmet when cycling.

Some youth face obstacles to achieving positive mental health. These youth include those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, youth who live in poverty or have an unstable home life, those who have been physically or sexually abused and youth who are living with a chronic illness or disability.

Feeling supported is linked to better mental health outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth. Having an adult they can confide in about their problems is important. Furthermore, youth who felt supported by professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses and youth workers reported better mental health than those who had unsuccessfully approached these adults for help.

Youth who could identify having skills or competencies were more likely than other youth to report good or excellent health, higher self-esteem, post-secondary educational aspirations, feeling safe at school, and a positive body image.

Different skills and competencies played a role for different groups of youth. For example, art and music were all associated with higher self-esteem for immigrant youth in a way not seen in the overall sample of students.

Of all the skills and competencies that youth identified, the strongest links to positive mental health were seen among those who reported being good at a sport or having school-based skills such as being good at math or reading.

When other protective factors were taken into account, family connectedness and school connectedness were the most consistently associated with positive mental health. For example, the more connected youth felt to family or school, the more likely they were to report excellent general health and higher self-esteem, and the less likely they were to have considered suicide.

Feeling engaged and valued within their extracurricular activities was another important protective factor associated with good or excellent health. Having input into their activities also emerged as being protective against suicidal ideation for several vulnerable groups, including females who had been physically or sexually abused, and males who had been harassed or who had a health condition or disability.

When youth were asked to comment on the data, they consistently reported that to achieve positive mental health they needed access to supportive adults and peer mentors, as well as opportunities to engage in activities that promoted their physical health.

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of B.C. youth through research, education and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

Contact

Annie Smith , Executive Director

3552 Hastings Street East

Vancouver, B.C. V5K 2A7

Tel: 604-291-1996 ext 225 Cell: 604 719 1474 Fax: 604-291-7308

Email: annie@mcs.bc.ca

The report can be downloaded at www.mcs.bc.ca. Also available are 8 summary profiles of the mental health of different groups of youth and a 'by youth for youth' fact sheet

Webinar presentations of the results are scheduled for 10th and 12th May. To attend please contact duncan@mcs.bc.ca