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## ***Youth researchers find gender inequalities in mental health among BC Youth***

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Results of the BC Adolescent Health Survey, filled out by students in grade 7-12 across the province show that girls report poorer mental health than boys across the board.

A study, completed by a team of youth researchers has found that compared to boys, girls aged 12-19 are three times more likely to attempt suicide. They are also more likely to report experiencing extreme stress, extreme despair, and are less likely to report self-confidence, or feel competent.

Nineteen year old Raymond who worked as a youth researcher on the project commented on the findings *"The numbers are shocking but it is even more shocking to think about what they represent. It makes me wonder what we can do."*

The study also identified a number of protective factors such as exercise and sports involvement, and important relationships at school, at home and in the community that can support young people to have more positive mental health. For example, youth who felt connected to their community were not only more likely to report positive mental health than those who did not feel connected, they were also less likely to miss out on needed mental health services.

Having a supportive adult to turn to was important for young people's mental health. Even if they did not have someone in their family but had an adult outside the family to turn they had had a lower risk of feeling extreme despair and a greater likelihood of reporting good/excellent mental health, feeling happy, and feeling calm and at peace in the past month.

Raymond added *"As a youth who has had almost no support from parents as they are oversea, this finding resonates with me from the heart. I have had teachers and youth workers who supported me and now I really understand how much that meant for me. They supported and guided me to become a better person and I strive to support others in my future career."*

The youth researchers who created the report hope it will be used to look at how schools and others can support students to have positive mental health, and make mental health services and programming more accessible to young people. It is also hoped that the report will be used to help youth and adults have a conversation about mental health.

*McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research 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.*

**To speak to a  
McCreary staff or  
youth researcher**

**Contact:  
Annie Smith  
Executive Director**

**3552 E. Hastings St.  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5K 2A7**

**Tel: 604-291-1996  
ext 225**

**Cell: 604-728-9494**

**[annie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:annie@mcs.bc.ca)**

**[www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)**

## **BACKGROUND**

This report is the work of 28 young people aged 15-24 who because of their own experiences and interests wanted to promote awareness of mental illness among students in school in BC, and of the supports that promote positive mental health for youth.

To create the report, we learned qualitative and quantitative data analyses, report writing and dissemination, supported by staff at McCreary Centre Society. We used data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (completed by almost 30,000 youth aged 12-19 in 56 of the 59 BC school districts) to answer the research questions we felt were important to understanding mental health among youth in school.

### **A SELECTION OF KEY FINDINGS**

Males were more likely than females to feel good about themselves, to feel happy most of the time, and to feel calm and at peace. Females were more likely than males to report extreme stress, extreme despair, self-harm, and to consider or attempt suicide.

Youth born abroad reported better mental health than youth born in Canada. Also, the longer that immigrant youth lived in Canada, the less likely they were to report positive mental health.

Youth who had not used alcohol, marijuana or other substances reported better mental health than those who had used these substances.

Some youth used substances to self-medicate. For example, youth who had depression or anxiety were more likely to use marijuana than those without these conditions. Also, 21% of youth reported that the last time they used substances was because they were stressed.

Youth who were bullied in person or online were more likely to report negative mental health, and the more different types of bullying they experienced the more likely they were to self-harm.

Youth with a cellphone were more likely than those without one to feel safe in their neighbourhood, to have close friends in their school or neighbourhood and to have a local adult in their neighbourhood or community who cared about them. However, those with a phone were more likely to have met someone on the internet who made them feel unsafe and to have been cyberbullied.

Exercise and sports involvement were linked to positive mental health. Male and female students who felt they were good at sports were more likely than their peers to report feeling self-confident, happy, and calm.

17% of females and 5% of males felt they needed mental health services in the past 12 months but did not access them. The top 3 reasons for missing out on care were not wanting their parents to know, thinking or hoping the problem would go away, and being afraid of what the doctor would say or do.

Families can be a source of support for youth dealing with mental health challenges. For example, youth who ate dinner with their family most evenings reported more positive mental health than those who ate with their family less often. Also, youth who had an adult they could turn to in their family reported more positive mental health.

Males were more likely than females to feel there was a supportive adult inside their family (76% vs. 70%), while females were more likely than males to feel there was a supportive adult outside their family (34% vs. 30%).

Cultural connectedness was important to mental health. For example, youth who spoke a language other than English at home were more likely to report good or excellent mental health than those who spoke only English.

Youth who felt like a part of their school did not struggle with accessing needed mental health services as much as youth who did not feel like a part of school. As levels of feeling safe at school increased, the likelihood of youth reporting good or excellent mental health also increased.

The more close friends youth had the less likely they were to experience extreme despair and the more likely they were to report good or excellent mental health. Also if youth reported that they had friends with healthy attitudes towards risk behaviours they were more likely to report positive mental health and less likely to report extreme stress.

The report will be launched at Creekside Community Centre, Vancouver on February 15<sup>th</sup> at 5.30pm.

A copy of ***Unspoken thoughts, hidden facts*** is available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

If you would like a group of youth researchers to come and present their findings, or conduct a workshop with youth, please contact [mccreary@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:mccreary@mcs.bc.ca)

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