

Emotional Health

OF BC YOUTH

The majority of BC youth experience good or excellent physical health and seem to cope well with the challenges of growing up and developing greater independence. However, for those youth who do experience severe emotional distress, the picture has not improved over the decade with 6% of youth in 1992 feeling severely emotionally distressed, 7% in 1998, and 8% in 2003.

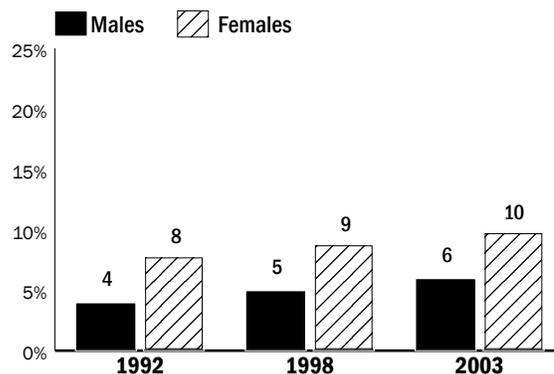
Levels of Distress

All three Adolescent Health Surveys in 1992, 1998, and 2003 asked students a series of questions to measure their level of emotional distress: "During the past 30 days have you felt bothered by nervousness or nerves" and "During the past 30 days have you felt sad, discouraged, hopeless or had so many problems that you wondered if anything was worthwhile." A response of "All the time" is seen as an indicator of serious emotional distress.

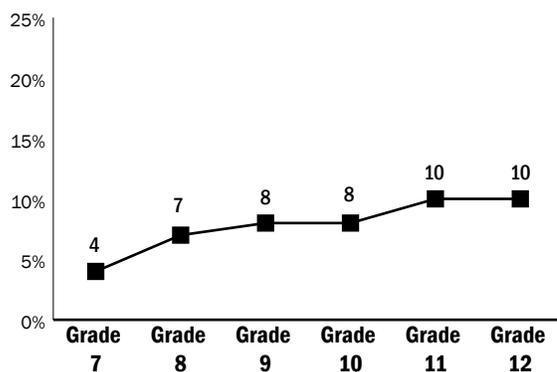
Females are consistently more likely to feel distressed than males (10% vs 6% in 2003, 9% vs 5% in 1998, and 8% vs 4% in 1992). Feeling emotionally distressed seems to increase with age with only 4% of students in Grade 7 feeling extreme emotional distress compared to 10% of Grade 12's.

This is consistent for both males and females, although females showed the greatest rise from 5% in Grade 7 to 12% in Grade 12 whereas males went from 4% in Grade 7 to 8% in Grade 12.

Seriously Distressed by Gender and Age



Seriously Distressed by Grade



This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the BC Adolescent Health Survey (2003), a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout BC. In all, 45 of BC's 59 school districts agreed to take part in the survey. The first Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 1992, and the second in 1998. In total, more than 72,400 BC students have completed the survey over a ten-year period.

The Adolescent Health Surveys were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of BC youth through research, information sharing, and community-based projects that address the unmet health needs of young people.



Factors related to mental health

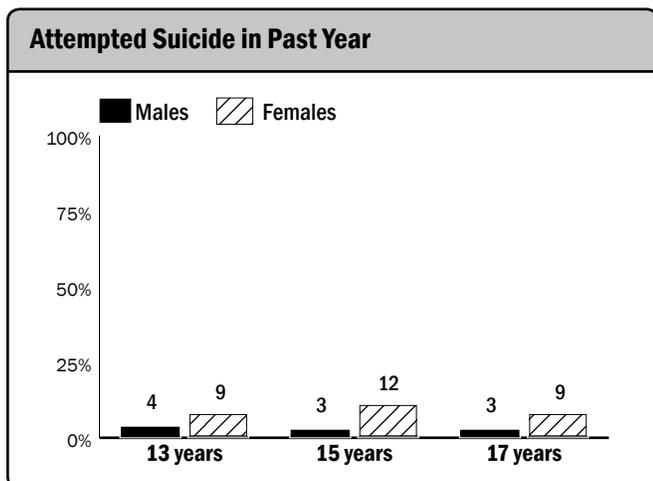
The number of youth who report their overall health as good or excellent has remained constant with each AHS. The relationship between overall health and wellness, and mental health is apparent as youth who rated their health fair or poor were four times more likely to report being seriously distressed in the past month than those reporting good or excellent health.

Males and females who had been physically abused were approximately three times more likely to report being seriously distressed and 2.5 times more likely if they had been sexually abused. The odds of being seriously distressed rose to 7 times more likely for males and 5.5 times more likely for females who had been both physically and sexually abused.

Limiting activity

A small number (3%) of youth identified having an emotional or mental health condition that limits their ability to do things other youth do, the same as in 1998. Although this is

Health and Well Being		
	Males	Females
Self-rated health status:		
Excellent-good	89%	83%
Fair-poor	11%	17%
Severe emotional distress in the past month	6%	10%
Self-reported mental or emotional condition	2%	4%



a relatively low percentage, there are a number of key factors which emerged among these youth. They are more likely than their peers to:

- Be seriously distressed
- Have attempted suicide in the past year
- Have tried marijuana or alcohol
- Be a current smoker
- Have been abused

These youth are less likely to:

- Report good or excellent health
- Feel okay talking to an adult in their family about a serious problem

Suicide

Overall, 16% of students report seriously thinking about suicide in the past year in 2003, up slightly from 14% in 1998, but the same as in 1992. In 2003, about 11% planned a suicide in the past year and 7% said they attempted suicide, the same as in 1998 and 1992. Of youth with a family member who attempted or committed suicide in the past year, 47% considered and 35% attempted suicide themselves compared to 13% of youth who considered and 4% who attempted suicide with no family history of suicide.

Protective factors

The AHS asks students to what extent they feel connected to family and school to assess the impact of these environments on youth well-being. The results confirm that strong connections to family and school have a positive impact on youth health. Youth who feel connected to their family are 99% less likely to attempt suicide and youth who feel connected to school are 98% less likely to attempt suicide than their peers who don't feel connected.

Seeking help from professionals

About half (49%) of youth asked a professional for help with a personal problem. Young people are most likely to seek help from school staff compared to other professionals such as health professionals, social or youth workers, religious leaders or other sources. The number of youth asking school staff for help increases with age, from 28% of 13 year-olds, to 33% of 15 year-olds, and 42% of 17 year-olds. This offers school staff a unique opportunity to make a positive impact on student's emotional health.