

Making the Right Connections: Promoting positive mental health among BC youth

Focus on immigrant youth

In 2008, over 29,000 BC youth in Grades 7 through 12 completed the fourth BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS). The AHS is a paper and pencil questionnaire that provides a current and accurate picture of the health of BC youth. The 2008 AHS was completed in 1,760 classrooms in 50 of BC's 59 school districts. Following the release of the results (*A Picture of Health*), focus groups and workshops were conducted, giving youth the opportunity to respond to the results.

Using data from the AHS and the youth focus groups and workshops, McCreary created a report entitled *Making the right connections* (2011). This report offers a detailed look at the mental health of BC youth, and the role of various protective factors in promoting positive mental health. This fact sheet summarizes the findings contained in the report for youth born outside of Canada.



British Columbia is home to youth who originate from many different parts of the world. Eighteen percent of students were born outside of Canada, 6% had lived in Canada between 2 and 5 years, and 3% had lived here for less than 2 years. Almost half (47%) of all BC students spoke a language other than English at home, at least some of the time.

Being an immigrant to Canada appeared to be both a risk and protective factor in relation to mental health. Youth born outside Canada reported comparable rates of stress, despair, self-harm and suicide as youth born in Canada, except females born in Canada were more likely to report self-harm than their foreign-born peers (22% vs. 18%) and were also more likely to report having a mental or emotional health condition (4% vs. 2%).

Female students born inside and outside of Canada reported comparable rates of school safety and positive body image, but male immigrants were less likely than Canadian-born males to always feel safe at school (39% vs. 44%) or to be very satisfied with how they looked (16% vs. 20%).

In terms of educational aspirations, 84% of foreign-born youth planned to graduate college or university compared to 76% of those born in Canada. Among Canadian-born youth, females were more likely than males to expect to continue their education (80% vs. 72%) but there was no such gender difference among immigrant students.

Promoting positive mental health among immigrant youth

Support networks

Supportive and caring relationships are important in developing positive mental health. Immigrant youth who had an adult inside their family to talk to when they had a problem were less likely to have considered suicide in the past year than those who did not have this support. Males born outside of Canada were also less likely to report thoughts of suicide when they had an adult outside of their family to talk to.

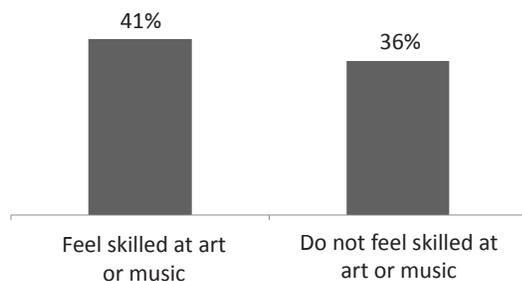
This summary profile of the mental health of immigrant youth is one of 8 fact sheets that accompany the report, *Making the right connections* (2011), all of which can be downloaded at www.mcs.bc.ca.

Youth who experienced challenges in their lives were often more likely than youth overall to seek out support from a variety of professional sources. Although other youth often did not find that support useful, this was not the case for immigrant youth. For example, over half (51%) of immigrant youth who sought help from social workers reported they had found them helpful (compared to 36% of Canadian-born youth). Immigrant youth who had lived in Canada less than 2 years also reached out to professional support to a greater degree than Canadian-born youth. For example, 56% asked teachers for help compared to 43% of those born in Canada.

Extracurricular activities

Less than half of immigrant youth played weekly organized sports (49%) compared to 62% of those born in Canada. Immigrant youth were also less likely than Canadian-born youth to play informal sports (59% vs. 71%) but were more likely to take part in fine arts, drama and dance or aerobics classes, and to be involved in a club. There were many positive mental health benefits associated with involvement in extracurricular activities. For example, 90% of immigrant males who took part in weekly organized sports reported good or excellent health, compared to 79% of their peers who participated less frequently. Weekly involvement in dance/aerobics was also associated with higher self-esteem among immigrant females.

Feel safe at school by feeling skilled in art or music (among immigrant females)



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Skills and competencies

Feeling skilled in art or music was associated with high self-esteem for immigrant youth in a way not seen in the general population, and artistic skills also corresponded to a greater sense of school safety for females (41% vs. 36% of immigrant females not skilled in this area), which was also not seen in the overall population.

Youth engagement

Being involved in meaningful activities was among the more important protective factors for good/excellent self-rated health for youth generally, and was an important factor for immigrant males. For example, immigrant males involved in meaningful activities were more likely to report good or excellent health than their peers not born in Canada who were not involved in meaningful activities (90% vs. 72%).

Family and school connectedness

Family and school connectedness were the two most consistent protective factors associated with positive mental health. School connectedness was also an important factor with respect to feeling skilled at sports for female immigrants.

Youth's response to the data

Immigrant youth suggested that as BC becomes more multicultural, and there is increased tolerance towards different cultures, new Canadians feel safer and this leads to them experiencing more positive mental health. However, immigrant youth also thought that the more connected youth were to their culture of origin, the more likely they were to be victimized and discriminated against, and the less accepting of other cultures they themselves were.

Youth suggested helping immigrant youth integrate into Canadian culture by having events where they could meet students from different cultures, and learn about different aspects of Canadian culture (including learning about Aboriginal and LGBTQ culture).