

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

Focus on youth who had been teased or harassed

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 who had been teased or harassed at school in the past year.



In the AHS, 37% of females and 28% of males reported that they had been teased or verbally harassed at school or on the way to or from school in the past year. Being teased is often dismissed as a part of growing up, yet other studies have shown that victims of teasing can exhibit a wide range of health problems. In this study, victims of teasing reported issues such as lower rates of good or excellent health (79% vs. 87% among youth not teased in the past year) and higher rates of self-harm (27% vs. 12%), suicidal ideation (20% vs. 8%) and suicide attempts (10% vs. 3%).

Not surprisingly, teased youth were less likely to report feeling safe at school than their peers who had not been teased (28% felt safe vs. 48%). For females (but not males) being teased was associated with a reduced likelihood of planning to continue their education beyond high school (79% of teased females planned to graduate college or university vs. 82% who had not been teased).

Promoting positive mental health among youth who had been teased or harassed

Support networks

Supportive and caring relationships are important to positive mental health. For teased youth, having an adult inside their family to talk to was one of the most important factors associated with a lower likelihood of suicidal ideation. Thirteen percent of teased youth who had an adult in their family to talk to about problems had considered suicide in the past year, compared to 35% of those who did not have that resource.

Having an adult outside the family to talk to about serious problems was also protective against suicidal ideation for teased students, and was associated with higher self-esteem.

This summary profile of the mental health of youth who had been teased or harassed 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.

Skills and competencies

For youth who were teased or harassed at school, sports skills were protective in all of the positive mental health areas considered in this study (including self-esteem, good general health and educational aspirations). Having school based skills such as being good at reading or math were also linked to many aspects of positive mental health. However, school-based skills were not associated with greater school safety for teased males in the way that they were for youth in general.

Having a musical talent was associated with feelings of school safety for harassed males and higher self-esteem for harassed females in a way not seen in the general population. Positive relationship skills, such as feeling skilled at listening, was also linked to reduced reports of self-harm or suicidal ideation, and increased feelings of safety at school among teased females.

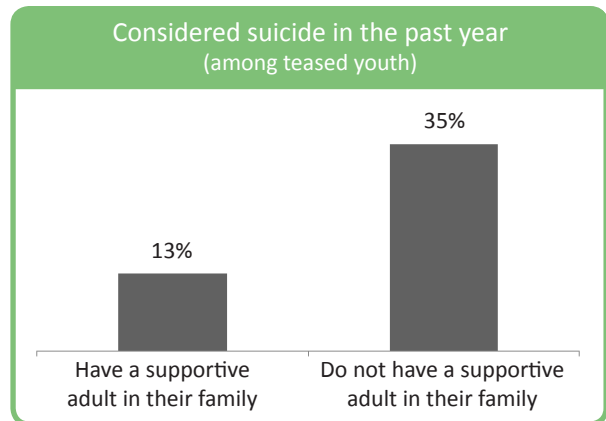
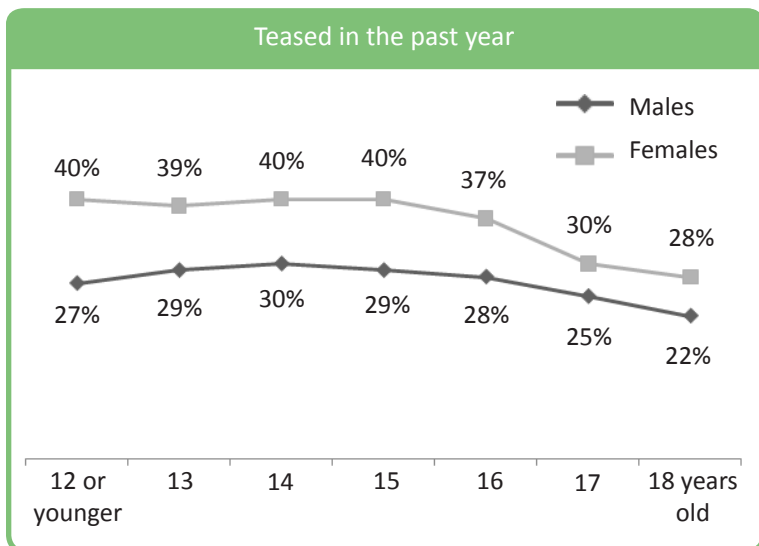
Family and peer relationships

For teased youth, family connectedness was one of the most important protective factors for positive mental health, including reporting good or excellent general health, post secondary educational aspirations and high self-esteem. Having peers with pro-social attitudes was also particularly protective against suicidal ideation for females and for post-secondary aspirations for both males and females.

Youth's response to the data

Youth reported that those who were teased, and their peers who witnessed it, often did not report the experience for fear of being further targeted, leading to feelings of decreased safety and increased stress. Teasing was identified as a bigger issue in elementary school, because there was greater pressure to conform and less diversity. As youth got older they also identified more sophisticated ways to bully their peers, such as social exclusion.

Youth made a number of suggestions about how to reduce teasing and harassment at school, including addressing teasing before it escalates, having adults patrolling school grounds during lunch time, raising awareness of the effects of teasing and bullying, and promoting self-esteem so that youth feel less inclined to tease others. There should also be more opportunities for communication between youth and teachers so that youth feel more comfortable approaching them about teasing. Finally, teasing should be targeted in elementary school before it leads to other forms of victimization in high school.



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