

# Harassment & Discrimination

## AMONG BC YOUTH

Adolescence can be a particularly difficult time for youth who suffer any form of discrimination or harassment, and particularly for those who endure teasing and taunting on a daily basis.

### Discrimination

Twenty-nine percent of BC youth report they have experienced some kind of discrimination.

Twelve percent of youth had been discriminated against or treated unfairly because of their race or skin colour (14% of males and 11% of females). This was a slight rise from 1998 when 10% of youth reported experiencing such racism. Youth in Grade 12 were almost twice as likely as youth in Grade 7 to report being discriminated against on the grounds of race or skin colour (8% and 14%).

The numbers of youth who report being discriminated against or treated unfairly, based on their physical appearance dropped from one in four in 1998 to one in

five in 2003. Youth in Grade 8 and 9 report discrimination based on their looks most often (23%). Youth who were born outside of Canada were more likely to report discrimination than youth born in Canada (35% vs. 19% for males and 41% vs. 16% for females). The longer new Canadians live in BC, the more likely they are to experience racism.

Four percent of youth had been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, unchanged since 1998. Males were more likely to experience this than females (55% vs. 45%). However, among youth who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, 46% of males and 30% of females report experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

#### Discriminated Against in Past Year Because of...

|                            | Males | Females |
|----------------------------|-------|---------|
| <b>Race or skin colour</b> |       |         |
| 1998                       | 11%   | 8%      |
| 2003                       | 14%   | 11%     |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b>  |       |         |
| 1998                       | 3%    | 4%      |
| 2003                       | 4%    | 3%      |
| <b>Physical appearance</b> |       |         |
| 1998                       | 22%   | 28%     |
| 2003                       | 18%   | 22%     |

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.



## Harassment

Although approximately one in three youth (30% of males and 39% of females) report being teased to an extent that they felt bad or extremely uncomfortable, this is a considerable improvement from 1998 when over half (56%) had reported being badly teased.

Teasing declined with age. Females in Grade 8 were most likely to experience teasing and females in Grade 12 least likely (43% and 32%).

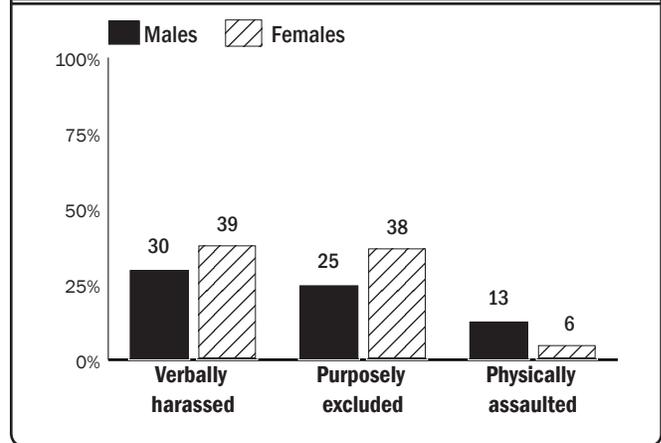
More subtle forms of discrimination and harassment are also present in BC schools. Thirty-eight percent of females and 25% of males report they had been purposefully excluded from their group of friends or had been completely ignored by them in the past 12 months on at least one occasion.

More than half of females (53%) also experienced verbal sexual harassment in the previous 12 months at school compared to 36% of males, similar results to 1998.

While females were more likely to be the victim of verbal harassment, males were more likely to report physical attacks and assaults: 13% of males and 6% of females reported having been physically attacked or assaulted in the past year. This was a slight reduction from 1998 for males. As in 1998, approximately 4% of males and less than 2% of females had been attacked or assaulted on at least two occasions in the past 12 months. The rate of physical attacks or assaults decreased by Grade 11.

Certain groups are more likely to be targeted for harassment and assault in school than others. Students who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual are significantly more likely to experience all the various forms of harassment than their peers of the same age, gender, and ethnic background. While 24% of heterosexual Aboriginal males reported being purposefully excluded, 44% of gay or bisexual Aboriginal males reported the same. Similarly, twice as many European-heritage gay or bisexual males reported being physically assaulted than their heterosexual peers (52% vs 25%). Among females, 32% of heterosexual Asian females reported serious teasing, but 41% of lesbian and bisexual Asian females reported serious teasing. More European-heritage lesbian and bisexual females reported verbal sexual harassment than their heterosexual peers (75% vs 56%).

**Harassment, Exclusion, and Assault by Another Youth at School in Past Year**



## Effects of harassment and discrimination

Youth were asked about a number of different forms of harassment (including teasing and assault). Those who report experiencing a greater variety of harassment and discrimination are more likely to report substance use, higher levels of substance use, and more problems as a result of substance use. This may be an attempt to cope with the distress caused by being targeted for harassment and discrimination.

The stigma of harassment and discrimination can impact all areas of a youth's life. Youth who are harassed feel less safe at school or on the way to school. Youth who are not harassed or discriminated against are more likely to like school, plan to continue their education post secondary school and are least likely to cut classes or skip school.