

Safety & Violence

AMONG BC YOUTH

Youth violence in BC is on a steady decline, despite media reports that give high profile to the rare occurrences that do happen. Encouragingly, the decade has seen a decrease in both physical fights among youth and in those carrying weapons to school. The Adolescent Health Survey has shown that strong relationships in families and to school can positively impact violence and safety for youth.

Physical fights

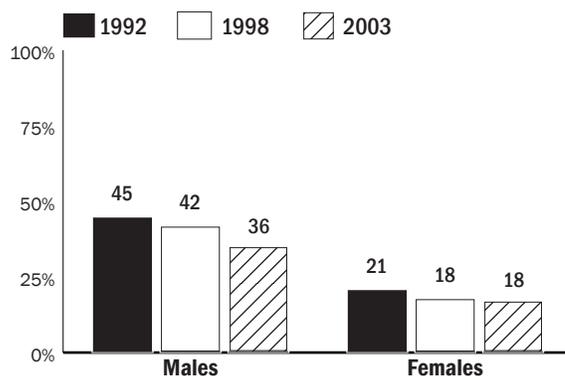
Fewer BC youth report being involved in physical fights than in previous years: 27% of youth in 2003 were involved in a physical fight in the past 12 months, down from 30% in 1998 and 33% in 1992. Fights among males has declined from 45% in 1992 to 36% in 2003, but males are still in twice as many fights as females.

The majority of fights youth report did not result in an injury that needed treatment from a doctor or nurse. However, although fighting has declined, injuries from fighting have not. In 2003, 2% of females were injured as a result of a fight, the same as in 1998 and 1992 whereas 4% of males were injured, down from 6% in 1998 and 1992.

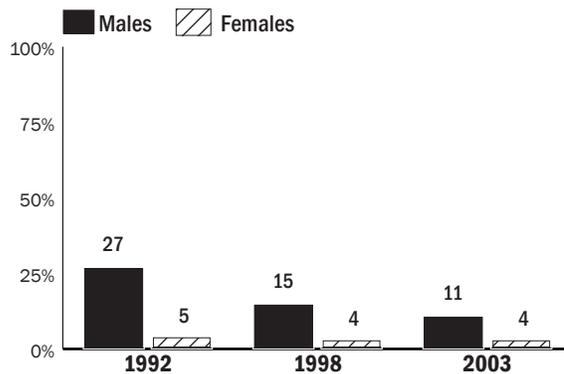
This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the BC Adolescent Health Survey (2003), a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout 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.

Involved in 1 or More Physical Fights in Past Year



Weapon Carrying



Involvement in fights decreases with age. Forty-six percent of Grade 7 males were in a fight compared to 30% of Grade 12 males. A similar trend in females shows 19% of Grade 7 females got in a fight compared to 12% of Grade 12 females.

Weapons

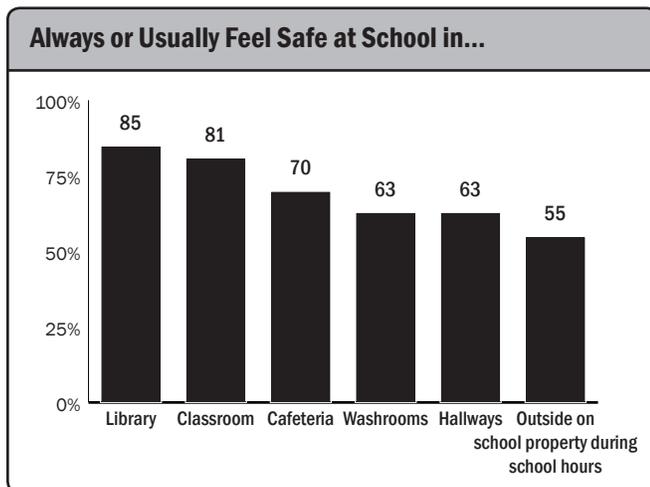
The number of youth who report carrying a weapon to school in the past 30 days has also declined from 16% to 8% between 1992 and 2003. Most of these weapons were knives or razors and less than 1% were guns. Males are more likely to carry a weapon than females, but this has declined over the decade, 11% of males carried a weapon in 2003, down from 15% in 1998 and 27% in 1992.

Females carrying weapons to school has remained constant. Weapon carrying increases as youth get older with 14% of male Grade 12 students admitting to carrying a weapon to school compared to 6% in Grade 7.

Feeling safe

Less than half of youth said they always felt safe at school (41% of males and 39% of females). Feelings of safety are highest in Grade 12 (53%) and Grade 7 (43%), lowest in Grade 8 (30%) and Grade 9 (33%). Youth reported feeling safest in supervised areas such as the library and classrooms and least safe in hallways and outside the school building.

Youth who reported they rarely or never feel safe at school are three times more likely to carry a weapon to school (28%) than youth who often or always feel safe at school (9%).



Internet Safety

While the Internet offers youth many opportunities for socializing and education, it also provides new risks of being bullied or harassed.

About 15% of BC youth had been in contact with a stranger on the Internet who made them feel unsafe. Females (23%) are much more likely than males (7%) to have this type of encounter and of these females, 16% report feeling emotionally distressed. Not surprisingly, the proportion of youth reporting unsafe Internet encounters increases with the amount of time spent on the computer.

Protective factors

Protective factors promote healthy youth development and reduce the risk of harmful behaviours. Strong feelings of connection to family, school, and the community have a positive impact on overall health of youth:

- Youth who are strongly connected to their family are less likely to carry weapons to school (80% less likely among females and 70% less likely among males).
- Students with a supportive adult in the family are half as likely to carry a weapon. Additionally females with a supportive adult outside the family are 30% less likely to carry a weapon.
- Students who are strongly connected to school are 60% less likely to carry a weapon than students who do not feel connected to school.
- Youth, especially younger youth, who feel safe at school report better physical and mental health, and reduced risk-taking behaviour.
- Youth who report that their friends would be upset if they carried a weapon for protection are more than 85% less likely to take a weapon to school.