



Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey



Youth who seek help from social workers

A BC Adolescent Health Survey 2008 Fact Sheet



This fact sheet focuses on youth who sought help from a social worker. It uses data from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) which asked youth whether they had asked a number of professionals for help in the year preceding the survey. These professionals included teachers, school counsellors, other school staff, youth workers, doctors or nurses, religious leaders, and social workers.

Youth who sought help

Overall, 13% of youth sought a social worker's help in the year before taking the survey. Youth who sought help from a social worker often also sought help from other professionals. For instance, among those who sought help from a social worker, 69% reported seeing six other types of professionals (such as teachers, youth workers). On the other hand, if youth sought help from only one professional in the past year, that person was rarely a social worker (1%).

Some youth were more likely than others to seek help from social workers. Males were more likely than females to have sought help (15% vs. 10%). One in five Aboriginal youth sought help from social workers. In addition, youth who had experienced challenging life circumstances (such as being in government care or having a history of abuse) were more likely to seek help from social workers.

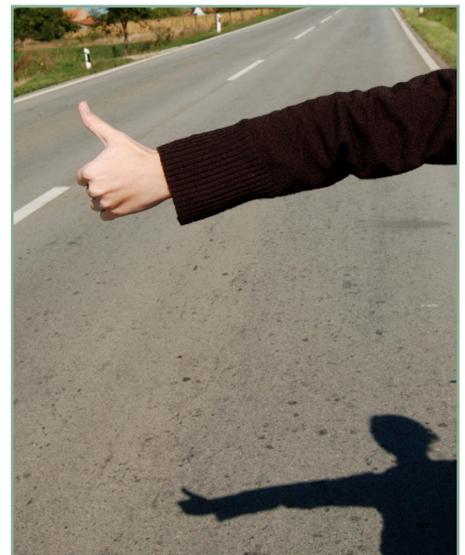
Percentage of youth who sought help by background

Ever had experience of government care	38%
Lived in Canada for less than 2 years	26%
Unsure of sexual orientation	26%
Chronic health condition or disability	19%
Lived in rural area	14%

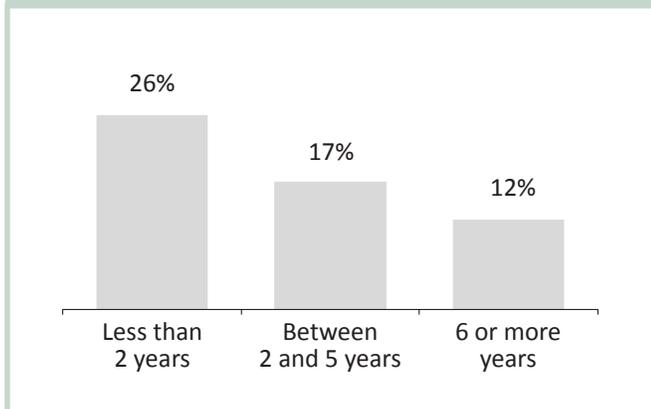


Percentage of youth who sought help among those with various experiences

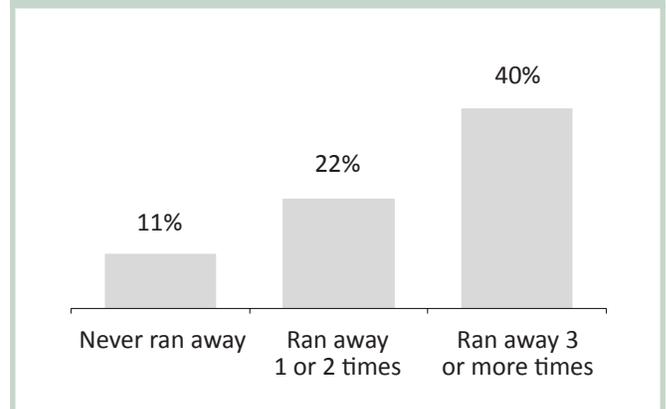
Ran away from home 3 or more times in past year	40%
Often or always went to bed hungry because not enough food at home	34%
Been sexually abused	22%
Discriminated against due to sexual orientation in past year	21%
Discriminated against due to ethnicity in past year	20%
Been physically abused	18%
Did not have an adult in their family to talk to about serious problem	16%



Sought help from social worker in past year by length of time lived in Canada



Sought help from social worker by history of running away from home in past year



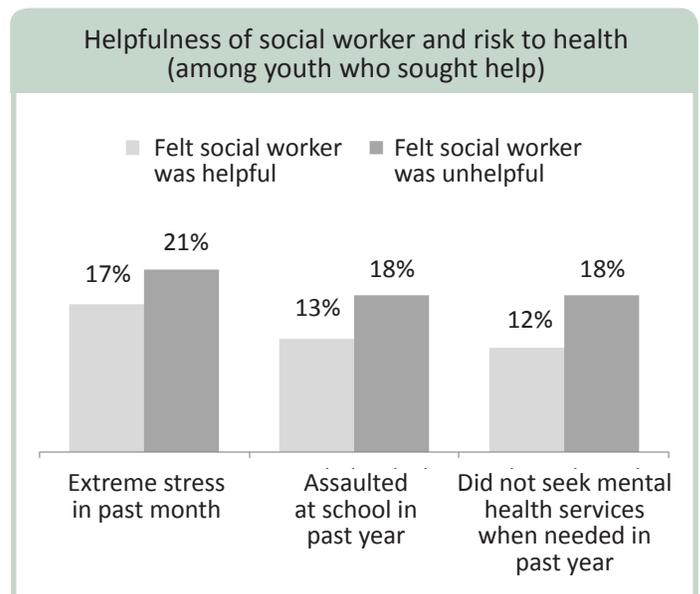
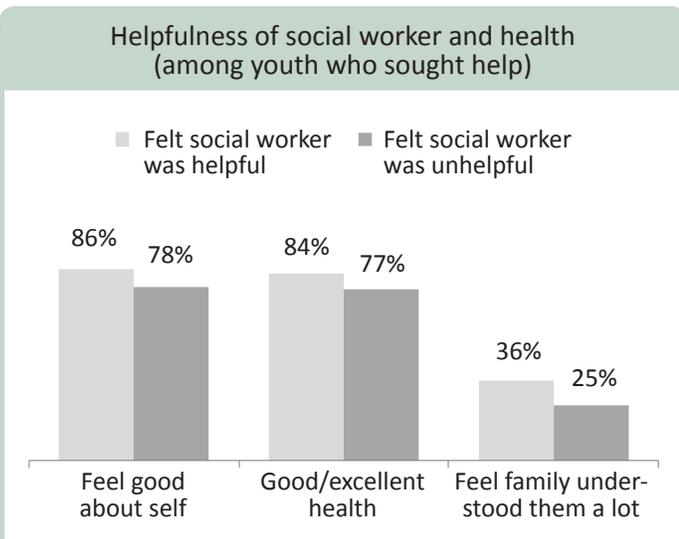


Youth who found a social worker helpful

Among youth who sought help from a social worker in the past year, 38% of males and females found this to be helpful. Some youth (e.g., recent immigrants) who were more likely to seek help were also more likely to find social workers helpful.

Among youth who sought help from a social worker in the past year, those who found their social workers helpful (as opposed to unhelpful) were:

- More likely to feel good about themselves, report good or excellent overall health, feel they had a lot of input into the activities in their lives, enjoy school, and say their family understood them.
- Less likely to report extreme stress or despair in the past month and suicidal ideation or self-harm behaviour in the past year; as well as less likely to have foregone needed medical or mental health care in the past year, and to engage in binge drinking or marijuana use on six or more days in the past month.





More likely to seek help and more likely to find social worker helpful	More likely to seek help but less likely to find social worker helpful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent immigrants • Youth with government care experience • Youth who were unsure of their sexual orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGB youth • Youth with no adult to talk to in family about serious problem



Conclusion

The BC AHS was not specifically designed to provide an in-depth look at youth’s relationships with social workers. However, it does provide some useful information about the accessibility and helpfulness of social workers.

Not surprisingly, results from the BC AHS showed that some youth were more likely than others to seek help from social workers such as those who had run away from home, those living in poverty, and those with government care experience. Although ratings of social worker helpfulness varied, when youth felt social workers were helpful, it was linked with positive health.

Other research in the social work field suggests that many youth are unclear about the role of a social worker, preventing them from accessing them for supports or services. Other McCreary studies have asked youth about the qualities of social workers and other professionals that they find helpful. The qualities which are consistently noted by youth as increasing the likelihood they will access and feel supported by professionals include workers who take time to develop a professional and collaborative relationship with youth; are culturally competent and sensitive to client identities, such as their culture or sexual orientation; and are non-judgmental.

Data for this fact sheet comes from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS), a 146-item survey completed by nearly 30,000 students in Grades 7 to 12 in schools across BC. In all, 50 of 59 school districts took part in the survey. Over 100,000 BC students have completed the survey since the first one was conducted in 1992. The fifth BC AHS was administered in Spring 2013.

The AHS is 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.

This fact sheet was created by UBC School of Social Work student Alexis Baker.


McCreary Centre Society

3552 Hastings Street East
 Vancouver, BC V5K 2A7
www.mcs.bc.ca