

CHAPTER 7

Personal Safety and Violence

Young people are increasingly exposed to violence in the form of verbal and physical assaults in their homes, their schools, and their communities (Hastings & Kelley, 1997). A National Crime Survey reported violent victimization rates for young persons, twelve to nineteen years of age, to be twice those of adults (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996).

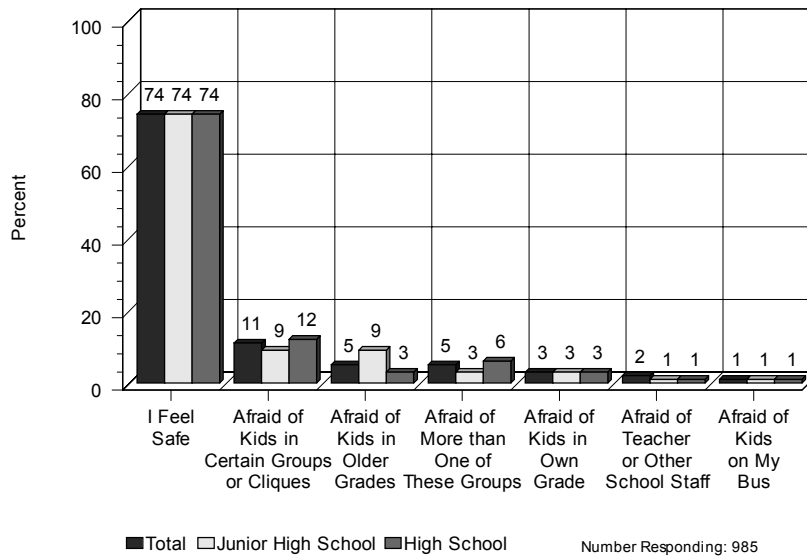
Youth victims show more problem behaviors and emotions, such as post-traumatic stress disorders, feelings of sadness, and school difficulties (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995). Increasing violence is one of the factors in what James Garbarino (1995), Director of the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University has termed the “socially toxic environment” of today’s youth.

What did the local youth tell us about their experiences of personal safety and violence?

School Safety

Figure 7-1 shows that almost three quarters (74%) of the students reported they felt safe with others at school. Junior high students reported more fear of older students than did high school students (9% vs. 3%). Of all the possible choices, fear of students in certain groups or cliques was chosen by the greatest percentage of both junior high and high school students (9%, 12% respectively).

Figure 7-1: How Safe Teens Feel in School
(By School Level)



Note: Due to rounding, some graphs may not total 100%.

Sexual Harassment

Local youth were asked whether or not they had been a victim of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment was defined as “*unwelcome sexual name calling, comments, jokes, gestures, looks or physical contact such as touching, grabbing, or pinching that create a hostile or abusive environment*”. Figure 7-2 shows the responses by school level. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of youth reported never being a victim of sexual harassment. Figure 7-3 shows the responses by gender. Almost twice as many females as males reported sexual harassment (males, 21%; females 40%).

Figure 7-2: Teens Who Have Ever Been Sexually Harassed (By School Level)

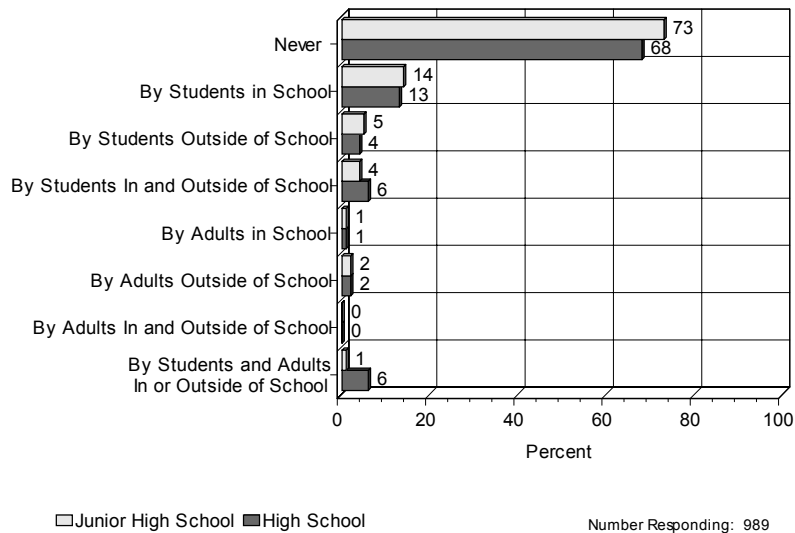
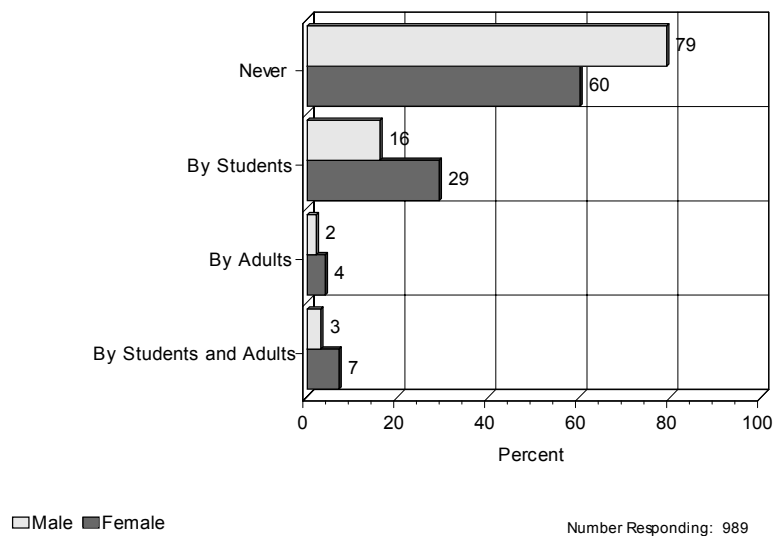


Figure 7-3: Teens Who Have Ever Been Sexually Harassed (By Gender)



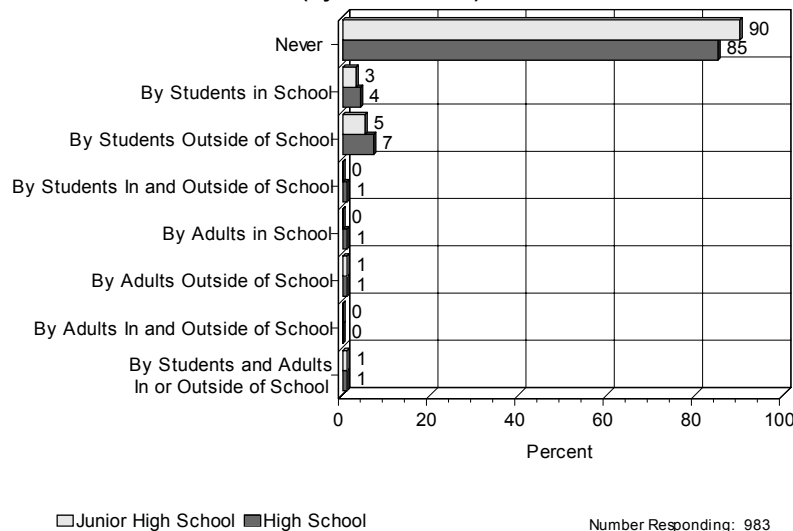
Sexual Violence: Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a problem which occurs across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Anderson, Martin, Mullen, Romans & Herbison, 1993; Berenson, San Miguel & Wilkinson, 1992; Cosentino, 1989; Priest, 1992; Roosa & Tein, 1997). The actual prevalence of sexual abuse nationwide is unknown. Nonetheless, it is generally assumed the problem is far greater than one would expect and far greater than statistics presently reveal. There were 1,319 allegations of child sexual abuse in New Hampshire in 1997 (B. Bloom, Department of Children, Youth and Families, personal communication, January 1, 2000).

Youth who are victims of prolonged sexual abuse usually develop low self esteem, feelings of worthlessness, and an unhealthy perspective on sexuality. They may become withdrawn and potentially suicidal (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997a). Studies show a link between sexual abuse and early onset of voluntary intercourse among females (Butler & Burton, 1990; Roosa & Tein, 1997). However, high levels of parental monitoring and support from at least one parent decreases the risk that sexually abused adolescents will develop problem behaviors (Luster & Small, 1997).

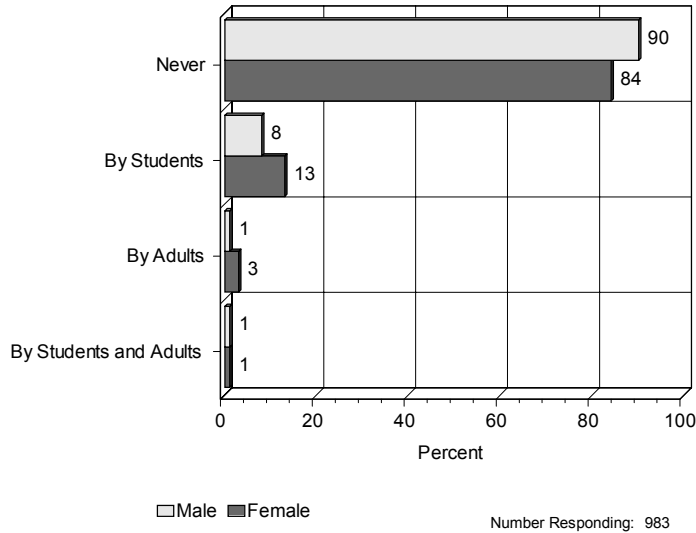
Local youth were asked if they had ever been made to do something sexual that they didn't want to do. This included touching, kissing, and/or sexual intercourse. Eighty-seven percent (87%) reported that this had never happened to them (junior high school, 90%; high school, 85%; males, 90%; females, 84%). Figure 7-4 shows the responses by school level.

Figure 7-4: Teens Who Have Ever Been Made to Do Something Sexual (By School Level)



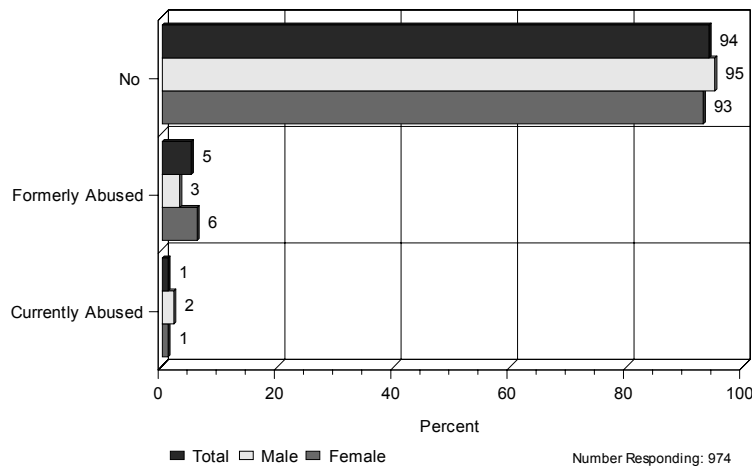
When all student choices were combined and all adult choices were combined, both males and females reported the greatest percentage of forced sexual activity came from other students (males, 8%; females 13%). Figure 7-5 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-5: Teens Who Have Ever Been Made to Do Something Sexual (By Gender)



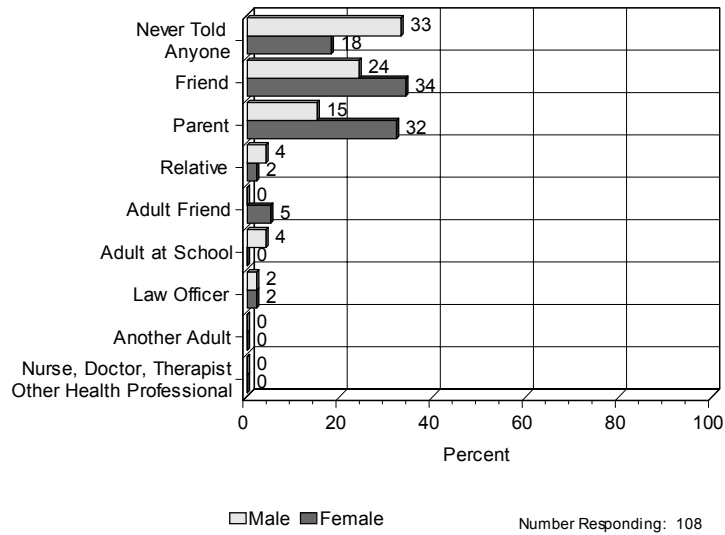
When asked specifically about sexual abuse by an adult, ninety-four percent (94%) of local youth said that they had not been sexually abused by an adult. Six percent (6%) of females (32 students) and 3% of males (13 students) reported that they had been sexually abused in the past, but the abuse had stopped. One percent (1%) or 14 students reported that they are currently being sexually abused (males, 2%; females, 1%). Figure 7-6 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-6: Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused by an Adult (By Gender)



When asked the question “If you’ve ever been sexually abused, have you ever told anyone?”, eighty-nine percent (89%) indicated that they had never been sexually abused. Of the 108 students who were sexually abused, almost twice as many males as females did not tell anyone (males, 33%; females, 18%). The most likely person whom students told of the abuse was a friend their own age for both males and females (males, 24%; females, 34%). Figure 7-7 shows the responses by gender.

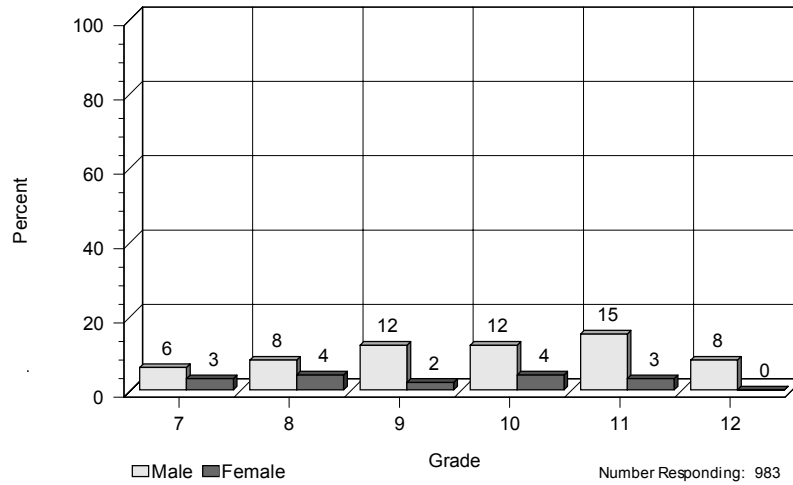
Figure 7-7: Who Teens Told About Sexual Abuse
 (Of Those Who Were Sexually Abused, by Gender)



Forced Sexual Activity by Teens

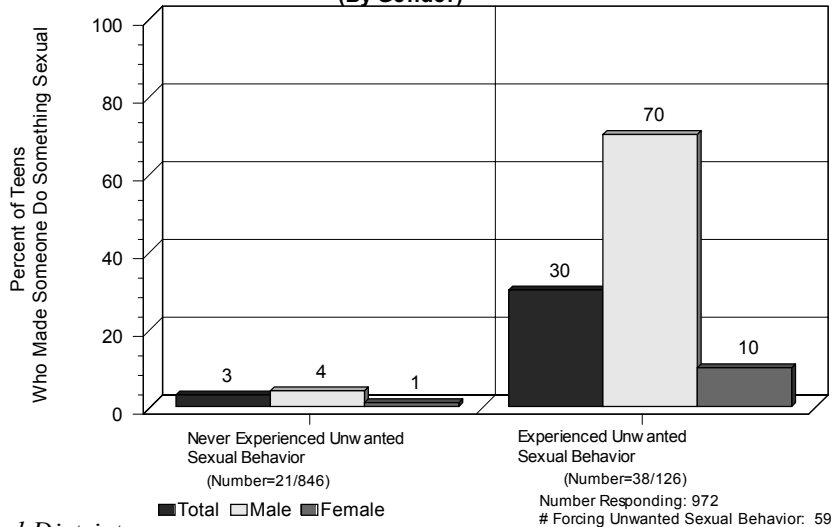
The TAP survey asked students “*Have you ever made someone do something sexual that they didn’t want to do?*” Six percent (6%) of all students agreed that they had done this (males, 10%; females, 2%). Figure 7-8 shows the responses by grade and gender.

Figure 7-8: Teens Who Forced Someone To Do Something Sexual (by Grade and Gender)



Research has suggested that sexually victimized youth can show their trauma through depression, withdrawal, aggression, or antisocial acts (Conti & Schuerman, 1987; Dubowitz, Black, Harrington, & Verschoore, 1993). Furthermore, boys tend to respond by acting more aggressively, via fighting or sexual victimization, while girls more often respond with depression. Figure 7-9 shows the link between experiencing unwanted sexual behavior and forcing unwanted sexual behavior on others. Thirty percent (30%) of teens who have been sexually victimized (126 students) have forced others to do something sexual (males, 70%; females, 10%). Because the results of the TAP survey provide descriptive information, no cause and effect relationship can be inferred. We cannot say that one behavior caused another, only that there is a relationship between the two.

Figure 7-9: Relationship Between Teens Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Behavior and Forcing Sexual Behavior on Others (By Gender)



Physical Violence toward Teens

Local youth were asked “*Have you ever witnessed someone being beaten or physically abused?*”. Thirty-six percent (36%) have witnessed this (males, 41%; females, 31%). Of all the students who had witnessed someone being beaten or physically abused, “*Yes, in my school*” was chosen by the largest percentage of students regardless of school level or gender. Figure 7-10 shows the responses by school level; Figure 7-11 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-10: Teens Who Have Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By School Level)

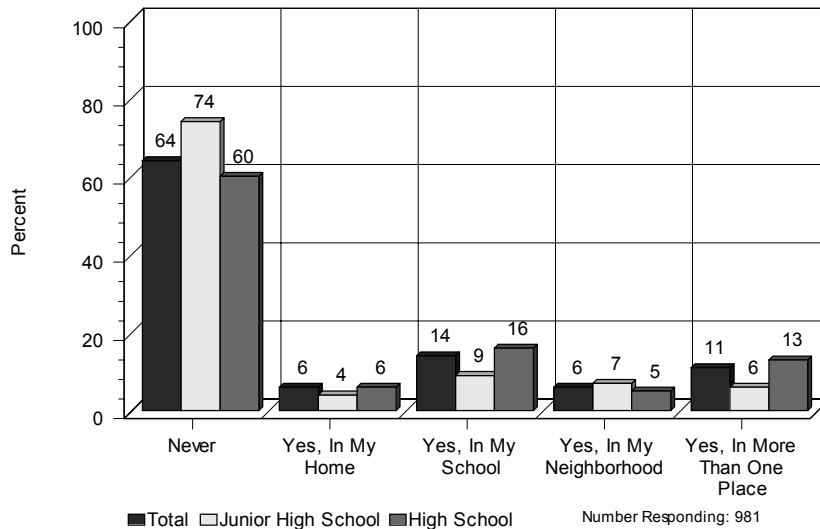
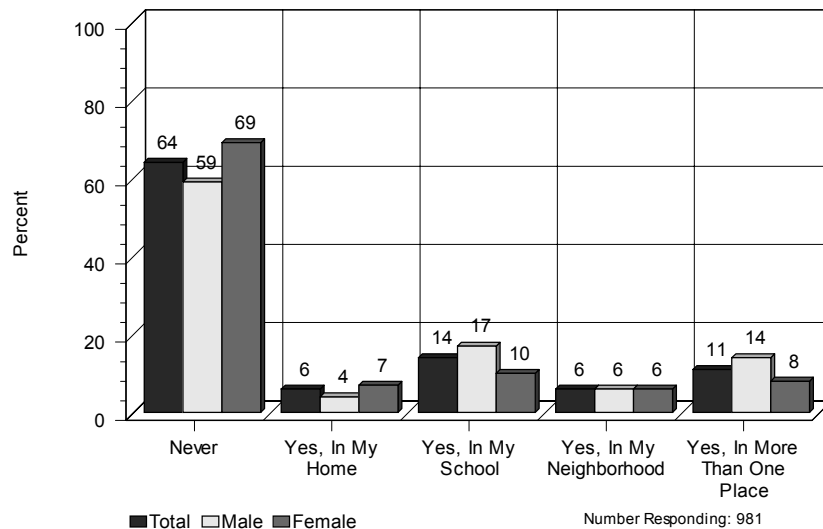
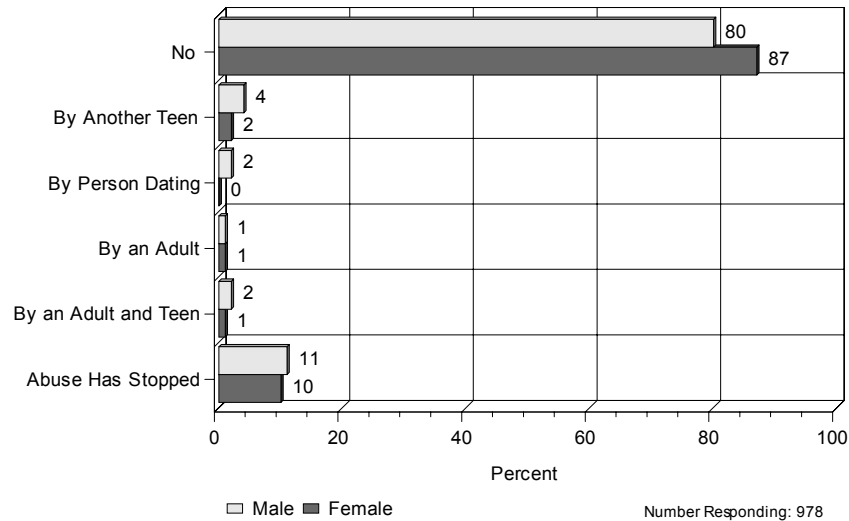


Figure 7-11: Teens Who Have Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By Gender)



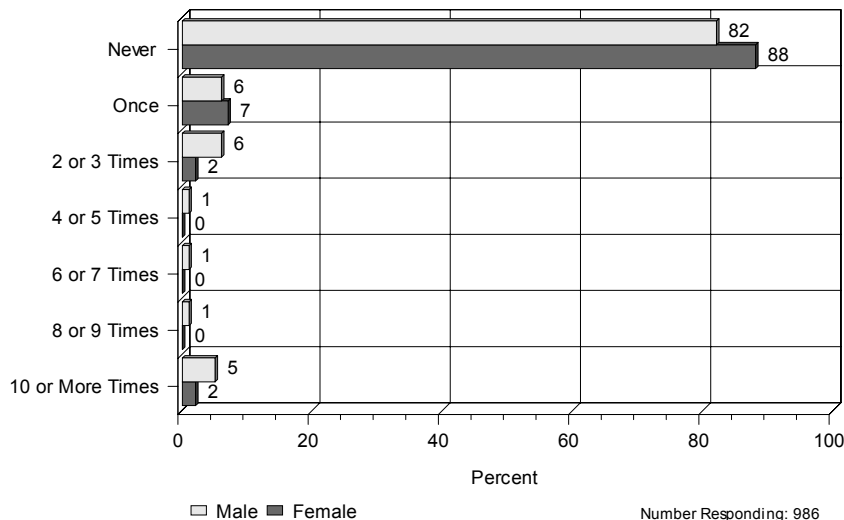
Local teens were asked “*Have you ever been physically abused (for example, beat up, hit with an object, kicked, or some other form of physical force?)*”. Eighty-four percent (84%) indicated that they had not (males, 80%; females, 87%). Of those who had experienced physical abuse, the most likely perpetrator was another teen (males, 4%; females, 2%). Ten percent (10%) responded that they had been physically abused, but that the abuse has stopped (males, 11%; females, 10%). Figure 7-12 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-12: Teens Who Have Been Physically Abused (By Gender)



More specific information was gained by asking teens, “*How many times have you been hit, pushed, or beaten by a girlfriend, boyfriend or date?*”. Eighty-five percent (85%) responded that this had never happened (males, 82%; females, 88%). Eighteen percent (18%) of males and 12% of females reported physical abuse by a girlfriend, boyfriend or date. Figure 7-13 shows the responses by gender.

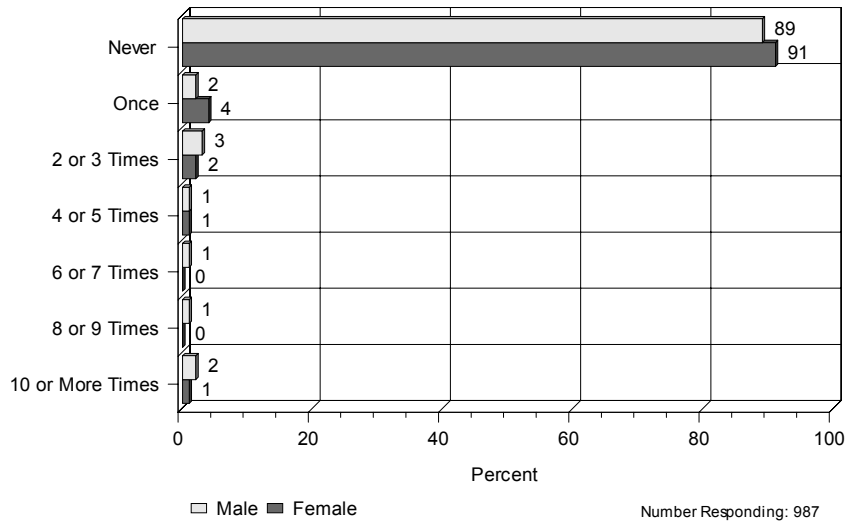
Figure 7-13: Teens Who Have Been Hit, Pushed, or Beaten by Girl/Boyfriend (By Gender)



Physical Violence by Teens

When asked “How often have *you* hit, pushed, or beaten a girlfriend or a boyfriend?” ten percent (10%) responded that they had (males, 11%; females, 9%). Figure 7-13 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-14: Teens Who Have Hit, Pushed, or Beaten Girl/Boyfriend (By Gender)



Research suggests that just witnessing violence can have a negative impact on youth (Pynoos & Nader, 1990). Experiencing physical violence has been related to teen aggression and antisocial behavior (Ammerman & Hersen, 1992; Eckenrode, Laird & Doris, 1993; Bensley, Van Eenwky, Spiker, & Schoder, 1999). We examined the link of these two teen experiences with whether a teen hit, pushed or beat a girlfriend or boyfriend.

Figure 7-15 shows that those who witness violence are three times as likely to hit, push or beat a girlfriend or boyfriend. Figure 7-16 shows that those who experience physical violence are four times as likely to hit, push or beat a girlfriend or boyfriend. Because the results of the TAP survey provide descriptive information, no cause and effect relationship can be inferred. We cannot say that one behavior caused another, only that there is a relationship between the two.

Figure 7-15: Relationship Between Teens Witnessing Physical Violence and Hitting, Pushing, or Beating Girl/Boyfriend (By Gender)

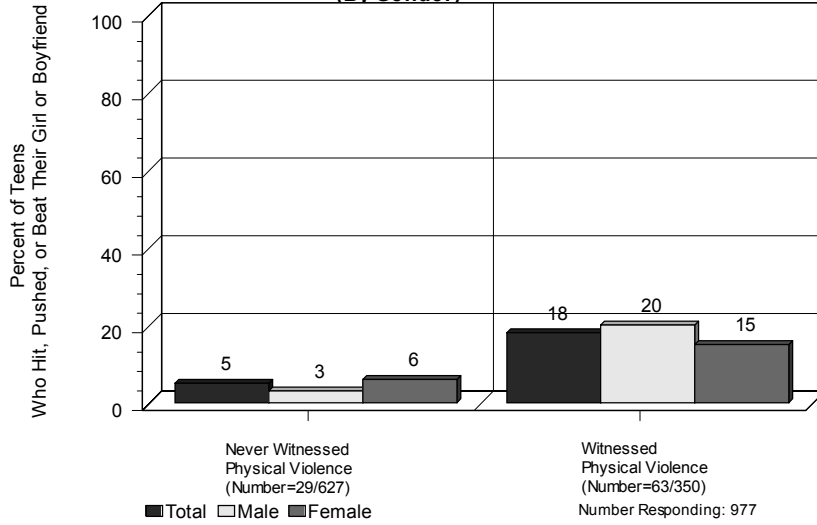
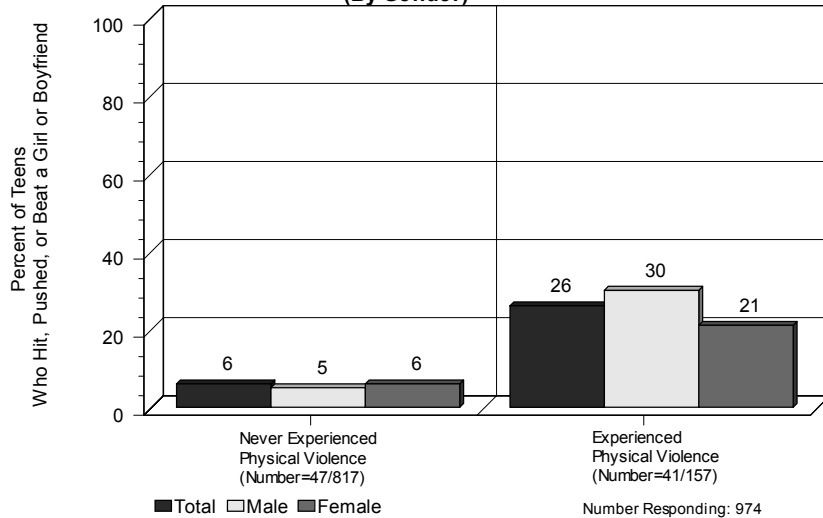


Figure 7-16: Relationship Between Teens Experiencing Physical Violence and Hitting, Pushing, or Beating Girl/Boyfriend (By Gender)



Weapons on School Property

We asked local youth “During the **past month**, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property?”. In the month preceding the survey, 9% of local youth reported they carried a weapon onto school property. Figure 7-17 shows that twice as many high school students than junior high students reported this (junior high school, 5%; high school, 10%). Two junior high students (1%) and twenty-two high school students (3%) reported carrying a weapon onto school property on 6 or more days.

Figure 7-17: Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property
(In the Past Month by School Level)

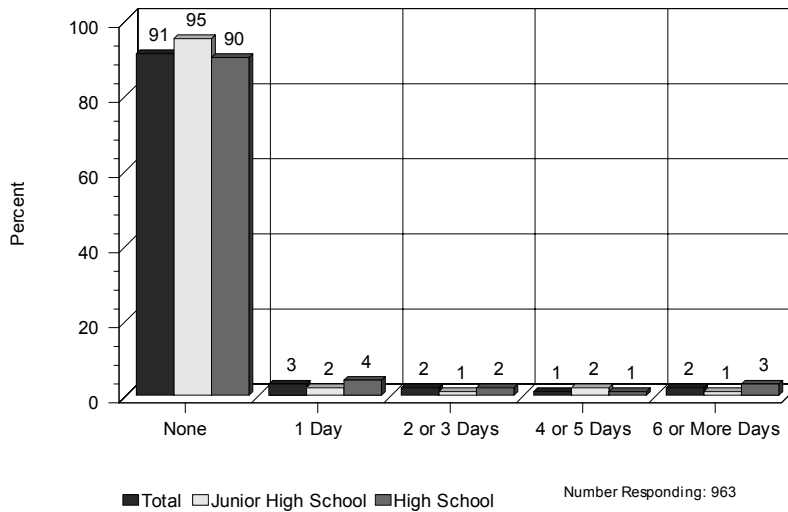
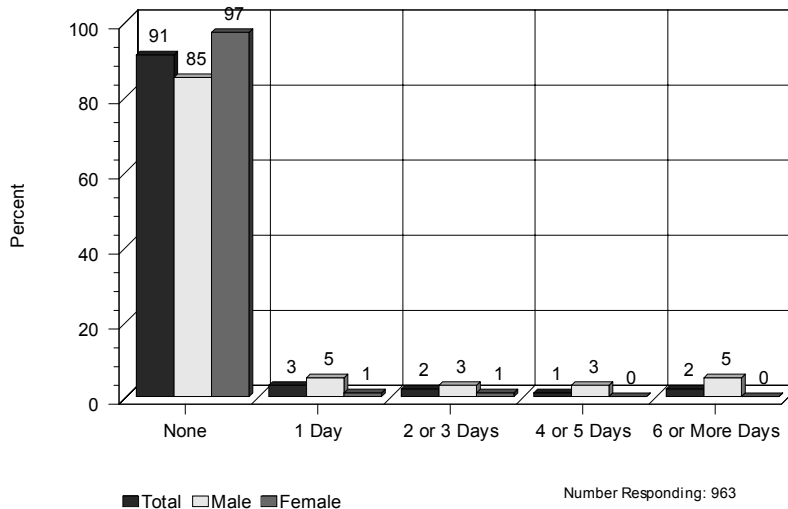


Figure 7-18 shows the number of days males and females carried weapons onto school property. Five percent (5%) of the males carried a weapon onto school property at some time in the past month; 3% of the females did.

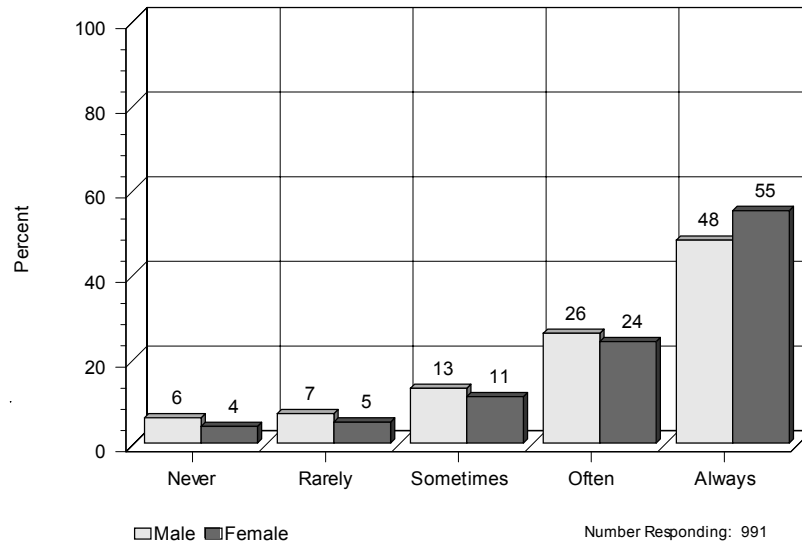
Figure 7-18: Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property
(In the Past Month by Gender)



Seatbelt Use

Students were asked, “How often do you wear a seatbelt when driving or riding in a motor vehicle?”. Over half of the students (52%) responded that they “always” did. Figure 7-19 shows the responses by gender.

**Figure 7-19: How Often Teens Wear Seatbelts
(By Gender)**



Presentation Of Comparable Data

In this section, Conway data are compared with other data. The two surveys used for comparison are the *1999 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS)*, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and *Tapping Into Teen Concerns, Perceptions and Behavior: 1998/99 Multi-Community Report* published by the Teen Assessment Project (TAP).

The *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey* monitors six categories of priority health-risk behaviors among youth and adults — behaviors that contribute to unintentional and intentional injuries; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). It is administered every other year and includes a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC as well as state, territorial, and local school-based surveys conducted by education and health agencies. Although the goal is to obtain representative samples, due to a lower than expected response rate, the results of the survey for New Hampshire should not be generalized to other students in the state.

The Teen Assessment Project report is a state-wide report based on five school districts surveyed from April 1998 through December 1999 (Teen Assessment Project, 2000). A strong case can be made that these results are indicative of the behaviors, opinions, attitudes and beliefs of New Hampshire teens. These data represent 9105 teens from five different counties around the state – Merrimack, Hillsborough, Rockingham, Strafford, and Grafton. Geographically, these counties cover much of the state, excluding the northern tip. New Hampshire is a demographically homogeneous state particularly in terms of racial and ethnic make-up, and the school districts consist of students from both rural and urban communities. Due to the nature of this project, however, the survey process is not random. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to the population of New Hampshire teens.

**Table 7-1: School Safety Comparison
(Grades 9-12 only)**

Behavior	YRBS National 2000 %	YRBS¹ N.H. 2000 % (ranking)	TAP² Multi- Community 2000 %	TAP Conway 2002 %
YRBS: During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or a club?	6.9	7.5 (14 th of 33)	-	-
TAP: During the past month, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property?	-	-	10	9

¹ Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey--CDC, 2000. The ranking represents NH’s placement within the states that participated in the YRBS survey. Ranking is based on weighted and unweighted data combined.

² Teen Assessment Project, 2000.

Note: Because of wording differences, the results of YRBS and TAP are not directly comparable.