



Executive Summary

Teen Assessment Project

2000-2001 Multi-Community Report

Concerns about local youth issues prompted community members and personnel in SAUs 1, 7, 9, 20, 26, 29, 38, 47, and 60 encompassing school districts in Conway, the Keene area, Monadnock Regional, Jaffrey/Rindge, Fall Mountain Regional, Gorham, Berlin, Lincoln Woodstock (Lin-wood), Merrimack, and Peterborough to adopt the University of New Hampshire Teen Assessment Project (TAP) Survey and process to foster the positive development of local youth. The goal of TAP is to provide communities with local research-based information that can help them better support local teens and their families. Survey results provide a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action, help secure local funding, stimulate program and policy changes, and lead to change in attitudes and behaviors that build assets/protective factors in families, schools and communities.

Local steering committees coordinated the review and administration of a 160-item survey that asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their worries, concerns, and future aspirations; and their activities, both positive and problematic. The surveys were administered to 7th through 12th grade students in the Conway, Keene area, Monadnock Regional, Fall Mountain Regional, Gorham, Berlin, Lin-wood, and Merrimack school districts. In the Peterborough and Jaffrey/Rindge school districts students in grades 9 through 12 completed the survey. Surveying was done between January 2000 and October 2001. A total of 9,458 surveys were used for these data analyses. This represents approximately 82% of the total enrolled middle and high school students of these school districts. In 2000-2001 there were approximately 42,078 middle school/junior high school students and 60,469 high school youth enrolled in New Hampshire schools.

Overview

Results of the compilation of multi-community surveys reveal that some teens are engaging in behaviors potentially detrimental to their health. The majority of teens (61%) reported that they have at least tried alcohol (middle school, 41%; high school, 71%). However, the majority of youth have NOT used smoking tobacco (56%), marijuana (64%), uppers (87%), hallucinogens (88%), chewing tobacco (90%), inhalants (90%), cocaine (93%), downers (94%), or narcotics (96%). The majority of teens (67%) reported that they had NOT engaged in binge drinking in the past month (middle

school, 82%; high school, 60%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) of youth reported that they had NOT had sexual intercourse (middle school, 84%; high school, 60%). Despite the fact that the majority of youth are not engaging in most of these high risk behaviors, there remains a subgroup of youth who are. For example, on a monthly or more often basis, high school youth are using alcohol (43%), binge drinking (40%), smoking tobacco (26%), using marijuana (24%), and using inhalants (2%) Such substance use and other health risk behaviors put youth at risk for delayed emotional and intellectual growth; developing problems with schools, friends and families; incurring ill health and reduced longevity; accidents; suicide; and unwanted pregnancies (Pedersen & Skrondal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, & Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg, & Kerns, 1993). Given the risks accompanying these behaviors, it is incumbent upon us to attempt an understanding of what we can do to minimize the likelihood of these youth choices.

One possible action is to increase the protective factors for youth. Protective factors ‘protect’ or lessen the likelihood that youth will participate in behaviors that have negative health and social outcomes (Resnick et al., 1997). These protective factors exist at each level of the ecological model: youth, family, school, and community. In these analyses we looked at these levels of the ecological model and found that each one counts. In particular, within the family, the level of parental monitoring is related to teen substance use. As level of parental monitoring increases, level of teen substance use decreases. Youth who know their parents’ values and consequences for teen behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or engaging in sexual intercourse are less likely to be involved in such activities. Parenting style, specifically authoritative or democratic parenting (not too controlling or too permissive) was seen to be related to lower health risk behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual intercourse. The community also has a role to play: neighborhood support and monitoring are protective factors against substance use. A youth’s attachment to school is a protective factor as well. From this information specific actions to enhance the protective factors can be taken by all who surround the youth.

Select Findings

Family Characteristics

- The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for youth is living with two parents (60%). Other common living situations include living with a single parent (15%) and living in a step-family (16%).
- The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, bachelor’s degree, or higher (fathers, 96%; mothers, 97%). Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 31% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 31% of mothers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use

- Sixty-one percent (61%) of students surveyed have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 41%; high school, 71%). Thirty-four percent (34%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (middle school, 16%; high school, 43%). Thirteen percent (13%) of all youth reported using alcohol weekly or more often (middle school, 6%; high school, 16%).
- Almost half of all youth (49%) reported that binge drinking (“5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time”) once or twice each weekend carries “great risk” (middle school, 54%; high school, 46%). Twenty-three percent (23%) of youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 21%; high school, 24%). Eighteen percent (18%) of all middle school youth and 40% of all high school youth reported binge drinking at least once in the past month, with 48% of all seniors reporting binge drinking in the last month.
- Forty-four percent (44%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 30%, high school, 51%). Twenty-one percent (21%) reported smoking monthly or more often (middle school, 10%; high school, 26%). Fifteen percent (15%) reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 7%; high school, 20%).
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 17%, high school, 45%). Nineteen percent (19%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (middle school, 8%; high school, 24%) . Twelve percent (12%) of all youth reported using marijuana weekly or more often (middle school, 4%; high school, 15%).
- Sixty-seven percent (67%) of all youth believe it is either “easy” or “very easy” to get alcohol (middle school, 52%; high school, 74%). Forty-eight percent (48%) believe it is “easy” or “very easy” to get marijuana (middle school, 23%; high school, 60%).
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of youth reported that using inhalants carries “great risk” (middle school, 55%; high school, 68%). Sixteen percent (16%) of youth feel that using inhalants carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 22%; high school, 13%). Ten percent (10%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (middle school, 11%; high school, 10%). Two percent (2%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (middle school, 2%; high school, 2%).

Sexuality Issues

- Overall, 32% of all youth reported that they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 16%; high school, 40%). Fifty-nine percent (59%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse (males, 56%; females, 62%). Fifty-seven percent (57%) of sexually active teens “always” use some form of birth control (males, 54%; females, 60%).
- A high percentage of youth reported not having had “*a good talk*” with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 55% of youth either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 74% “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked with their fathers about whether or not it is okay to have sex. Even fewer teens had birth control discussions with their parents in the past year, with 69% who either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 84% who “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked with their fathers about birth control.

Physical and Mental Health Issues

- Worries of youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (64%); how they look (49%); getting along with parents at home (46%); how well parents get along with each other (37%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (28%); and that their parents drink too much or use drugs (12%).
- Overall, 72% of all teens reported feeling sad or depressed at some time during the past month (males, 61%; females, 82%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 18%; females, 26%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of all youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 17%; females, 27%) and 14% reported that they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 10%; females, 17%).

Personal Safety and Violence

- Of the seven percent who reported that sexual abuse by an adult had occurred, 6% reported that this had occurred in the past (middle school, 4%; high school, 7%; males, 3%; females, 9%) and 1% reported sexual abuse by an adult currently (middle school, 1%; high school, 1%; males, 2%; females, 1%).
- Ten percent (10%) of youth reported carrying a weapon onto school property in the past month (middle school, 9%; high school, 11%). Sixteen percent (16%) of males and 4% of females surveyed reported carrying a weapon onto school property within the past month.

Parent-Teen Relations

- The majority of youth reported that their parents were there when they needed them (about mothers, 82%; about fathers, 69%) and that parents “often” or “very often” cared about them. Ninety-two percent (92%) indicated this about their mothers; 85% about their fathers. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the students felt that their mothers were fair “often” or “very often” when it came to enforcing the family rules; 62% felt this way about their fathers. Eighty-five percent (85%) reported that their parents were interested in what they learn and how they are doing in school (middle school, 87%; high school, 83%).
- Many youth reported they had not had “a good talk” with either parent about birth control, the risk of AIDS or other STDs, whether it is okay for teens their age to have sex, the risks of drinking and using drugs, or personal problems. Parents were more likely to talk with the teens about job or educational plans.
- Parental monitoring, parental consequences, and parental values were all found to be related to teen behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity. Youth who knew their parents’ values and the consequences for the behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity were less likely to engage in these behaviors. Similarly, those teens with high parental monitoring were less likely to engage in the behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity.

Student Time Use

- Fifty-three percent (53%) of youth spend 5 or more hours a week watching TV. The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for youth include doing homework or studying (47%); staying at home with no adults present (43%); participating in extracurricular school sports or activities (40%); working for pay (36%); and engaging in non-school activities (18%).

Perceptions of School and Community

- Sixty-two percent (62%) of youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education (middle school, 72%; high school, 58%). Fifty-three percent (53%) indicated they enjoyed going to school (middle school, 58%; high school, 51%). Forty-eight percent (48%) felt school rules were enforced fairly (middle school, 57%; high school, 44%).

- Six percent (6%) of teens surveyed “*strongly agreed*” or “*agreed*” that they would drop out of school before completing high school (middle school, 6%; high school, 5%). No information was available about those students who had already dropped out of school. Sixty percent (60%) of high school students planned to go to a 4-year college or university after high school (males 54%; females 67%).

Conclusions

Areas of concern for teens documented by this report include: substance use, sexuality issues, physical and mental health, and personal safety and violence. Protective factors that can impact these behaviors are youth characteristics such as perception of substance use risk; parental characteristics such as parenting style, parental consequences for behaviors, parental values about behaviors, and parental monitoring; school attachment; and neighborhood support and monitoring. The call to action must come from each community in its collaborative efforts with youth to prioritize issues and develop a strategic plan to address issues and concerns. However, across all the communities in the 2000-2001 TAP Multi-Community report we can see common concerns and the need to expand the web of collaboration beyond community efforts to a larger network of supports and resources.