
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 problem behaviors and emotions, such as posttraumatic 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 youth tell us about their experiences of personal safety and violence?

Sexual Harassment

Although there was not a core question about sexual harassment, each community did ask at least one question about this issue. Four school districts asked their youth questions similar to: *“In the past year, has anyone at school (that includes students, teachers, other school employees or anyone else) done the following things to you when you did not want them to? -Touched, grabbed, or pinched you in a sexual way? -Blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way? -Intentionally brushed against you in a sexual way? -Made sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks?”*

One school district asked youth *“Have you ever been a victim of sexual harassment? (Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual name calling, comments, jokes, gestures, looks or physical contact such as touching, grabbing, or pinching that create a hostile or abusive environment.)*

One group of schools asked, *“Which of the following has anyone at school in the past month done to you when you did not want them to? Choices were: touched, grabbed or pinched you in a sexual way; blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way; intentionally brushed against you in a sexual way; made sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks; none of the above; or more than one of the above.*

For the purposes of this report, sexual harassment was determined to occur if a student responded positively to any of these questions.

Figure 7-1 shows the percentages of students who reported sexual harassment by gender and grade level. Seventy-one percent (71%) of youth reported never being a victim of sexual harassment.

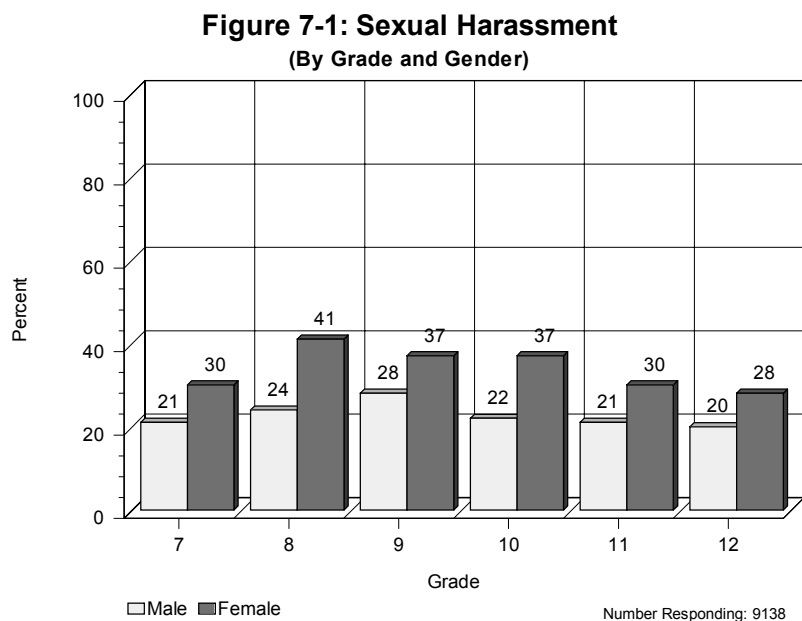
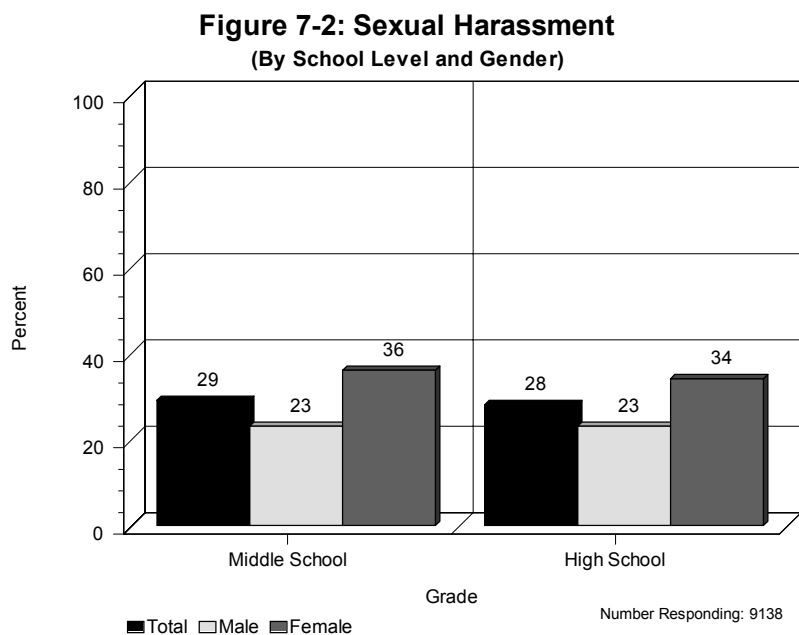


Figure 7-2 shows the responses by gender and grade level. A greater percentage of females than males reported some form of sexual harassment (males, 23%; females, 34%).



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

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 7,400 reports of suspected child abuse/neglect, that were assessed in New Hampshire in 2001. Of those reports, 1,470 involved allegations of sexual abuse (B. Bluhm, Department of Children, Youth and Families, personal communication, September 10, 2002).

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). Joyner and Michael (1995) in their study of 3,400 adults found that childhood sexual abuse was the biggest predictor of teenage pregnancy. However, two protective factors - high levels of parental monitoring and support from at least one parent - have been found to decrease the risk that sexually abused adolescents will develop problem behaviors (Luster & Small, 1997).

Teens were asked, “Have you ever been sexually abused by an **adult**?” (*Sexual abuse is when someone in your family or another person does sexual things to you or makes you do sexual things to them that you don’t want to do.*). Ninety-three percent (93%) of youth said that they had not been sexually abused by an adult (middle school, 95%; high school, 92%; males, 96%; females, 90%). Figure 7-3 shows the responses by school level.

Figure 7-3: Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused by an Adult (By Gender)

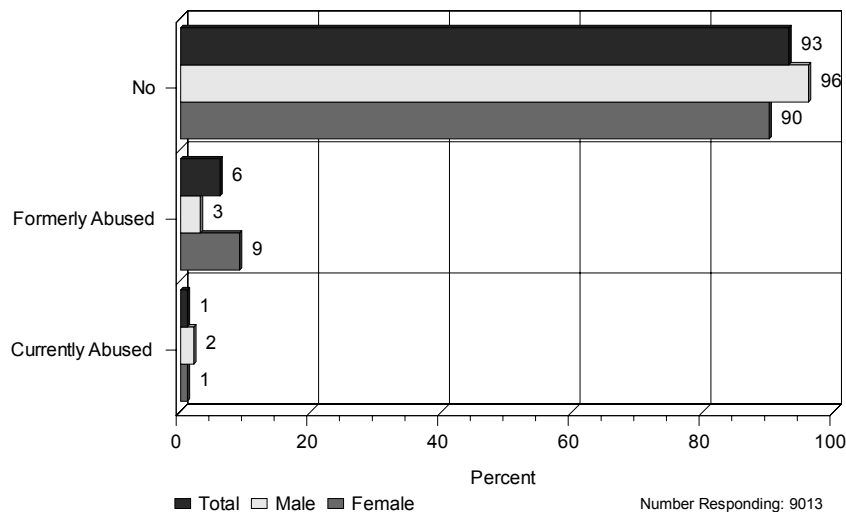


Figure 7-4 shows the responses by gender. Nine percent (9%) of females (398 students) and 3% of males (111 students) reported that they had been sexually abused in the past, but the abuse had stopped. One percent (1%) of youth (124 students) reported that they were currently being sexually abused (males, 2%; females, 1%).

**Figure 7-4: Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused by an Adult
(By School Level)**

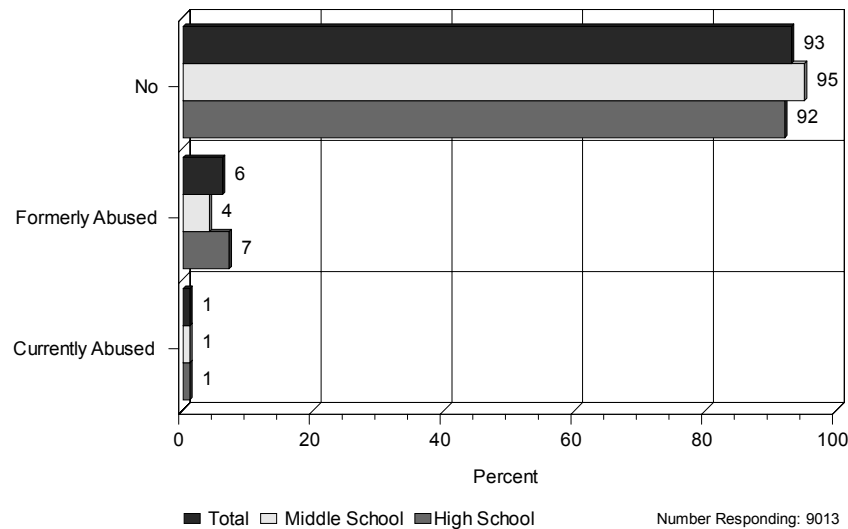


Table 7-1 shows data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2002).

**Table 7-1: 2001 YRBS Data: Forced Sexual Intercourse
(Grades 9-12 only)**

Behavior	YRBS National 2001 %			YRBS N.H. 2001 %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when did not want to	7.7	5.1	10.3	8.7	5.3	11.5

Weapons on School Property

We asked 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, 10% of youth reported they carried a weapon onto school property (middle school, 9%, high school, 11%). Sixty-four middle school students (2%) and two hundred seventy-five high school students (5%) reported carrying a weapon onto school property on 6 or more days. Figure 7-5 shows the responses by school level.

Figure 7-5: Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property

(In the Past Month by School Level)

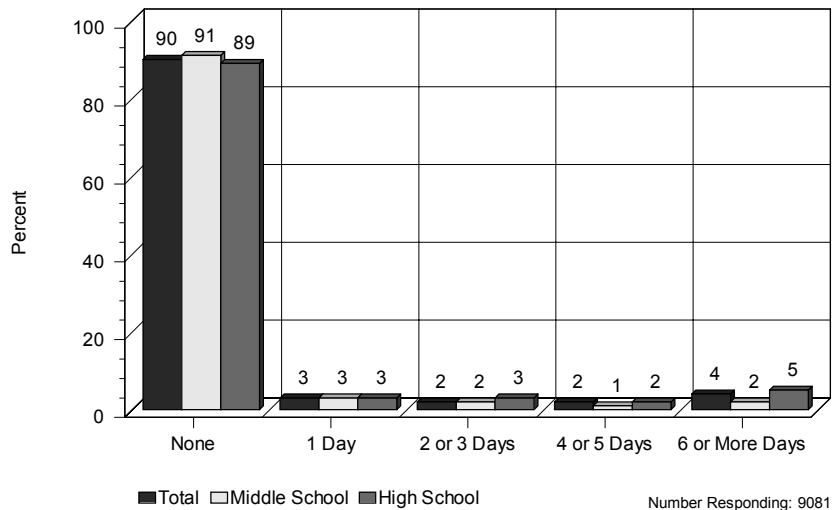
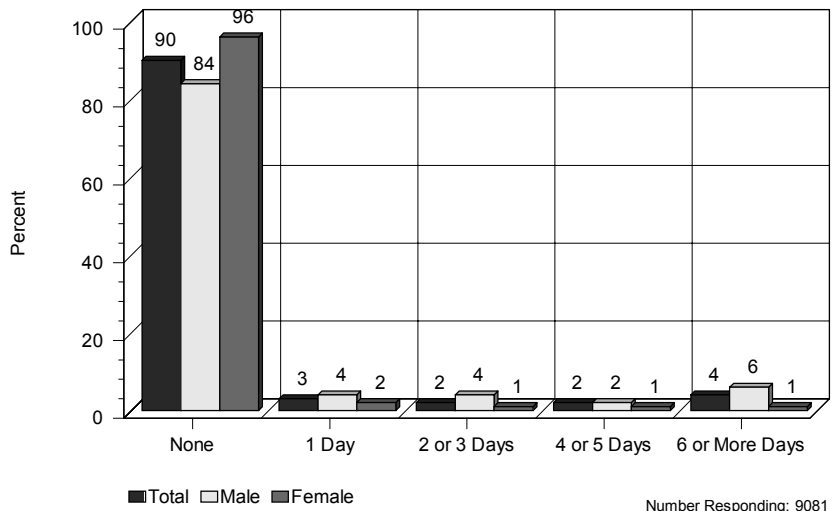


Figure 7-6 shows the number of days males and females carried weapons onto school property. Sixteen percent (16%) of the males carried a weapon onto school property at some time in the past month; Four percent (4%) of the females did.

Figure 7-6: Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property

(In the Past Month by Gender)



Presentation Of Comparable Data

In this section, these multi-community data are compared with other data. The two surveys used for comparison are the *2001 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, 2002). 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 a representative sample, the overall response rate in New Hampshire was less than the minimum criterion of 60%. Thus, the YRBS data could not be weighted for nonresponse and selection probability. Unweighted data represent those 1,303 students who participated in the survey and are not generalizable to all New Hampshire students.

The *Tapping Into Teen Concerns, Perceptions and Behavior: 1998/99 Multi-Community Report* is a multi-community report based on data from five school districts surveyed from April 1998 through December 1999 (Teen Assessment Project, 2000). These data represent 9,105 teens from five different counties around the state--Merrimack, Hillsborough, Rockingham, Strafford and Grafton. Due to the nature of TAP, the survey process is not random. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the population of New Hampshire teens.

**Table 7-2: Safety Comparison
(Grades 9-12 only)**

Behavior	YRBS¹ National 2001 %	YRBS² N.H. 2001 %	TAP³ Multi- Community 1998-1999 %	TAP⁴ Multi- Community 2000-2001 %
YRBS: Ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when did not want to	8	9	-	-
TAP: Formerly or currently being sexually abused by an adult	-	-	8	8
YRBS: Carried a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, or club) on school property on ≥ 1 of the 30 days preceding the survey	6.4	6.9	-	-
TAP: Carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property in past month	-	-	10	11

¹ Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey: National--CDC, 2002.

² Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey: NH--CDC, 2002.

³ Teen Assessment Project, 2000.

⁴ Teen Assessment Project, 2002.

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