
TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

1998/99 Multi-Community Report

A Report of the Teen Assessment Project (TAP) University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension

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Thank you.

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Executive Summary Teen Assessment Project 1998/99 Multi-Community Report

Pittsfield, Nashua, Exeter Cooperative, Dover and Pemi-Baker School Districts

Concerns about New Hampshire youth issues prompted the school districts of Pittsfield, Nashua, Exeter, Dover and Pemi-Baker to adopt the University of New Hampshire Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey for use with youth in their school districts. The goal of TAP is to provide communities with local research-based information that can help them better support New Hampshire 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 changes in attitudes and behaviors that build protective factors/assets in families, schools and communities.

Local steering committees coordinated the review and administration of 160-item surveys which 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 (9th through 12th in Pemi-Baker) in each school district from the Spring of 1998 to the Winter of 1999. A total of 9,105 surveys were used for data analysis. This number represents approximately 85% of the total student populations in the school districts (9% of all New Hampshire teens grades 7 through 12). Following are selected TAP survey results.

Family Characteristics

The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for New Hampshire youth is living with two parents (59%). The next most common living situations include living with a single parent (17%) and living in a step-family (15%).

The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, Bachelor's Degree, or higher (fathers, 95%; mothers, 96%). Twenty-five percent (25%) of fathers and 29% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Thirty-three

percent (33%) of fathers and 32% of mothers have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Only 5% of all fathers and 4% of all mothers were reported to have less than a high school education.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey found that many New Hampshire youth use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of all youth have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 38%; high school, 69%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (middle school, 11%; high school, 37%) and 11% reported using it weekly or more often (middle school, 4%; high school, 15%).
- Fourteen percent (14%) of all middle school youth and 37% of all high school youth reported binge drinking ("*5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time*") at least once in the past month with 48% of all seniors reporting binge drinking in the last month. Twenty-six percent (26%) of New Hampshire youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries "*no*" or "*slight risk*" (middle school, 26%; high school, 26%).
- Forty-two percent (42%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 26%; high school, 50%). Eighteen percent (18%) reported smoking monthly or more often (middle school, 8%; high school, 24%) and 14% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 6%; high school, 19%).
- Thirty-two percent (32%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 13%; high school, 42%). Sixteen percent (16%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (middle school, 6%; high school, 21%), and 10% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 3%; high school, 13%).
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of all youth believe it is either "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get beer/wine/liquor (middle school, 42%; high school, 71%). Forty-five percent (45%) believe it is "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get marijuana (middle school, 22%; high school, 57%).
- 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, 3%; high school, 2%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of New Hampshire youth feel that using inhalants carries "*no*" or "*slight risk*" (middle school, 33%; high school, 17%).

These emerging dependencies put youth at risk of 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).

Sexuality Issues

Overall, 30% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 14%; high school, 39%). Fifty-nine percent (59%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse. Only 49% of sexually active teens always use some form of birth control (middle school, 38%; high school, 51%).

A high percentage of New Hampshire teens do not talk with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 55% either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 69% "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to 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 71% who either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 80% who "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their fathers about the issue.

Six percent (6%) of New Hampshire teens reported some degree of forced sexual activity by an adult (males, 4%; females, 8%). Current sexual abuse by an adult was reported by 2% (173 students); 4% (346 students) reported previous sexual abuse.

Emotional Health Issues

Worries of New Hampshire youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (63%); how they look (50%); getting along with parents at home (33%); how well their parents get along with each other (25%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (20%); that they are too fat (19%); and that their parents drink too much or use drugs (8%).

Overall, 68% of all New Hampshire teens reported feeling depressed or sad at some time during the past month (males, 58%; females, 78%). Nineteen percent (19%) of New Hampshire youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 16%; females, 23%). Eighteen percent (18%) of New Hampshire youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 16%; females, 20%) and 12% reported they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 10%; females, 14%).

Parent-Teen Relations

Good communication is a key part of healthy parent-teen relationships. Many New Hampshire youth felt they had not had a good talk with their mothers or fathers in the past year about whether or not it is okay to have sex, birth control, AIDS and other STDs, the risks of drinking and using drugs, and personal problems. Parents were much more likely to talk with their teens about job or education plans.

Thirty-three percent (33%) of all teens reported they worried either "*very much*" or "*quite a bit*" about getting along with their parents at home (middle school, 35%; high school, 32%). A high percentage of teens felt their parents either "*often*" or "*very often*" cared about them; 91%

felt this way about their mothers and 81% about their fathers. Sixty-four percent (64%) of students felt that their mothers were fair "*often*" or "*very often*" when it came to enforcing the family rules; 57% felt this about their fathers. Parental monitoring, sharing family values, and letting teens know that there would be consequences were all found to be related to lower rates of regular smoking, drinking, and sexual activity by New Hampshire teens.

Student Time Use

New Hampshire youth spend the most time (at the level of 5 or more hours a week) doing homework or studying (56%). The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for New Hampshire youth include watching TV (53%); staying at home alone with no adults present (47%); participating in extra-curricular school sports or activities (39%); working for pay (35%); and engaging in non-school activities (15%).

Perceptions of School and Community

Seventy-one percent (71%) of New Hampshire youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education, 56% indicated they enjoyed going to school, and another 50% felt school rules were enforced fairly.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of youth often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future, 63% felt it is important for them to contribute to their community and society, and 80% consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help. An additional 46% of teens would choose to give up their free time to help raise money for a neighborhood project. Eighty-two percent (82%) feel their community is a good place to live, but only 33% feel there are a lot of fun things in town for kids their age to do.

Seven percent (7%) of students have missed school at least once in the past month because they felt unsafe. Nine percent (9%) of students have carried a weapon onto school property in the past month. Three-quarters (75%) of the students surveyed plan to continue their education in either vocational, two year, or four year college programs after graduating from high school. Five percent (5%) of students indicated plans to drop out of school before graduating.

In Closing

Youth today face many challenges as they grow and develop. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) provides information that empowers youth, parents, neighborhoods, schools, youth-serving organizations, agencies, the spiritual community, law enforcement, and community leaders to work together to develop and implement strategies addressing concerns identified. TAP can serve as a vehicle for youth, parent, school and community education and action. In addition, it sets a baseline from which to evaluate the impact of local efforts to encourage positive youth development in families, schools and communities.