
TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR MONADNOCK REGION

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

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Impact Reporting: UNH Cooperative Extension is very interested to know how individuals and groups use "Tapping into Teen Concerns, Perceptions and Behavior." If you use the information in this report for educational purposes, writing grants, planning community efforts, changing programs or policies, gaining positions for your organization, strengthening community linkages, or in any other way, please contact one of the individuals listed above. Thank you.

Table of Contents

	page
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	xiv
Executive Summary	xv
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
Protective and Risk Factors in the Lives of Youth	3
2. Administration of the Teen Assessment Project	8
3. Characteristics of the Monadnock Region Students and Their Families	10
Family Characteristics	11
School Characteristics	14
4. Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use	16
Overall Alcohol and Drug Use	18
Alcohol Use	25
Tobacco Use	56
Marijuana Use	71
Inhalant Use	82
Other Drugs	87
5. Sexuality	88
Sexual Activity	88
Teenage Pregnancy	94
Sexually Transmitted Infections	98
Parents' Role in Level of Teen Sexual Activity	100
Sexual Abuse	106
Sexual Harassment in School	107
6. Physical and Mental Health Issues	108
Teen Worries	108
Support and Advice	111
Teen Depression and Suicide	115
Dieting and Exercise	123
Seat Belt Use	125

7. Parent-Teen Relationships	127
Communication	127
Getting Along with Parents at Home	129
Decision-Making	131
Parental Support and Love	131
Parental Monitoring	122
8. Student Time Use	136
9. Perceptions of School and Community	140
Perceptions of School	140
Future Plans and Career Plans	144
Perceptions of Community	146
Social Responsibility	154
School Safety and Youth Violence	159
10. Understanding Teen Behaviors in the Context of Adolescent Development	171
Cognitive Development	171
Peers	172
Parents	172
11. Instrument Development, Reliability, and Validity	174
References	177

List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
1-1:	Ecological Model of Youth Development	2
3-1:	Students Taking the TAP Survey (By Grade and Gender)	10
3-2:	Family Living Situations	11
3-3:	Biological Parents Divorced or Separated	12
3-4:	Parental Education Levels	12
3-5:	Parental Employment	13
3-6:	Average Student Letter Grade	14
3-7:	Average Student Letter Grade (By School Level)	14
3-8:	Average Student Letter Grade (By Gender)	15
3-9:	Number of Times Teens Have Had to Change Schools	15
4-1:	Parental Alcohol or Drug Abuse as a Teen Worry	16
4-2:	Being Pressured into Drinking or Doing Other Drugs as a Teen Worry	17
4-3:	Being Pressured into Drinking or Doing Other Drugs as a Teen Worry (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by Gender and School Level)	17
4-4:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Any Use at All)	18
4-5:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Monthly or More Often)	18
4-6:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Weekly or More Often)	19
4-7:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Any Use at All, by School Level)	19
4-8:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Monthly or More Often, by School Level)	20
4-9:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Weekly or More Often, by School Level)	20
4-10:	Obtainability of Alcohol and Other Drugs (Very Easy or Easy to Get, by School Level)	21
4-11:	Where Teens Get Illegal Drugs (By School Level)	22
4-12:	Perceived Risk of Alcohol and Other Drug Use (No Risk or Slight Risk, by School Level)	23
4-13:	Perceived Risk of Alcohol and Other Drug Use (Great Risk, by School Level)	24
4-14:	Age Students Had Their First Drink of Alcohol (By Gender)	25
4-15:	Frequency of Alcohol Use (Of Those Who Have Had Alcohol, by School Level)	26
4-16:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	27
4-17:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	28
4-18:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	29
4-19:	Perceived Risk: Take 1 or 2 Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Nearly Every Day (By School Level)	30
4-20:	Perceived Risk: Take 1 or 2 Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Nearly Every Day (By Gender)	30
4-21:	Frequency of Binge Drinking (Number of Times in the Past Month)	31

4-22:	Frequency of Binge Drinking (Number of Times in the Past Month, by School Level)	31
4-23:	Binge Drinking (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	32
4-24:	Perceived Risk: Binge Drinking Once or Twice Each Weekend (By School Level) . . .	33
4-25:	Perceived Risk: Binge Drinking Once or Twice Each Weekend (By Gender)	33
4-26:	Perceived Risk: Binge Drinking Every Weekend vs. Those Who Have Engaged in Binge Drinking at Least Once in the Past Month (By Gender)	34
4-27:	Risk Behaviors Among Those Teens Who Engage in Binge Drinking vs. Those Who Don't Engage in Binge Drinking	35
4-28:	When Teens Use Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	36
4-29:	When Teens Use Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by Gender)	36
4-30:	Teens Who Have Driven a Vehicle After Drinking or Using Drugs (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	37
4-31:	Frequency of Driving in a Vehicle After Drinking or Using Drugs (In the Past Month, by School Level)	38
4-32:	Teens Who have Ridden in a Vehicle with a Driver Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	39
4-33:	Frequency of Riding in a Vehicle with a Driver Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by School Level)	39
4-34:	Teens Who Have Ridden with a Friend Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Gender and School Level)	40
4-35:	Teens Who Have Ridden with an Adult Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Gender and School Level)	41
4-36:	Teens Who Always Use a Designated Driver (Of Those Who Go Out and Drink or Use Drugs, by Gender and School Level)	42
4-37:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink)	43
4-38:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	43
4-39:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by Gender)	44
4-40:	Where Teens Drink Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink)	44
4-41:	Where Teens Drink Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	45
4-42:	Where Teens Drink Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by Gender)	46
4-43:	Obtainability of Alcohol	46
4-44:	Obtainability of Alcohol (By School Level)	47
4-45:	Who Teens Most Often Drink With (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	48
4-46:	Who Teens Most Often Drink With (Of Those Who Drink, by Gender)	48
4-47:	One Main Reason Why Teens Drink (By School Level)	49
4-48:	One Main Reason Why Teens Drink (By Gender)	50
4-49:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Drink (By School Level)	51
4-50:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Drink (By Gender)	52
4-51:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Levels of Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	53
4-52:	Relationship Between Parental Monitoring and Levels of Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	54
4-53:	Relationship Between Monthly Teen Drinking and Thinking They Will Get in Trouble at Home (By Gender)	55

4-54:	Age Students First Smoked a Whole Cigarette (By Gender)	56
4-55:	Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	57
4-56:	Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	58
4-57:	Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	59
4-58:	How Frequently Teens Have Smoked Cigarettes in the Past Month (By School Level)	60
4-59:	How Frequently Teens Have Smoked Cigarettes in the Past Month (By Gender)	60
4-60:	When Teens Use Tobacco (Of Those Who Use Tobacco, by School Level)	61
4-61:	When Teens Use Tobacco (Of Those Who Use Tobacco, by Gender)	61
4-62:	Perceived Risk: Smoke One or More Packs of Cigarettes a Day (By School Level)	62
4-63:	Perceived Risk: Smoke One or More Packs of Cigarettes a Day (By Gender)	62
4-64:	Perceived Risk of Smoking One or More Packs of Cigarettes a Day and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender).	63
4-65:	Where Teens Get Tobacco (Of Those Who Smoke)	64
4-66:	Where Teens Get Tobacco (Of Those Who Smoke, by School Level)	64
4-67:	One Main Reason Why Teens Use Tobacco Products (By School Level)	65
4-68:	One Main Reason Why Teens Use Tobacco Products (By Gender)	65
4-69:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Use Tobacco Products (Of Those Who Don't Use Tobacco, by School Level)	66
4-70:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Use Tobacco Products (Of Those Who Don't Use Tobacco, by Gender)	67
4-71:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Levels of Monthly Teen Tobacco Smoking (By Gender)	68
4-72:	Relationship Between Parental Monitoring and Levels of Monthly Teen Tobacco Smoking (By Gender)	69
4-73:	Relationship Between Teens' Level of Monthly Smoking and Thinking They'll Get in Trouble at Home (By Gender)	70
4-74:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	71
4-75:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	72
4-76:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	73
4-77:	When Teens Use Marijuana and Other Drugs (Of Those Who Use Drugs, by School Level)	74
4-78:	When Teens Use Marijuana and Other Drugs (Of Those Who Use Drugs, by Gender)	74
4-79:	Obtainability of Marijuana	75
4-80:	Obtainability of Marijuana (By School Level)	75
4-81:	One Main Reason Why Teens Use Marijuana (By School Level)	76
4-82:	One Main Reason Why Teens Use Marijuana (By Gender)	76
4-83:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Use Marijuana (By School Level)	77
4-84:	One Main Reason Why Teens Don't Use Marijuana (By Gender)	77
4-85:	Perceived Risk: Try Marijuana Once or Twice (By School Level)	78
4-86:	Perceived Risk: Try Marijuana Once or Twice (By Gender)	78

4-87:	Relationship Between Perceived Risk of Trying Marijuana Once or Twice vs. Any Use at All of Marijuana (By Gender)	79
4-88:	Perceived Risk: Smoke Marijuana Regularly (By School Level)	80
4-89:	Perceived Risk: Smoke Marijuana Regularly (By Gender)	80
4-90:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceived Risk of Smoking Marijuana Regularly and Teens' Monthly Use of Marijuana (By Gender)	81
4-91:	Age Students First Experimented with Inhalants (By Gender)	82
4-92:	Teens Who Use Inhalants (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	83
4-93:	When Teens Use Inhalants (Of Those Who Use Inhalants, by School Level)	84
4-94:	When Teens Use Inhalants (Of Those Who Use Inhalants, by Gender)	84
4-95:	Perceived Risk: Inhalant Use (By School Level)	85
4-96:	Perceived Risk: Inhalant Use (By Gender)	85
4-97:	Perceived Risk of Inhalant Use and Any Use of Inhalants (By Gender)	86
5-1:	Sexual Activity of Teens (By School Level)	88
5-2:	Teens Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse (By Grade and Gender)	89
5-3:	Frequency of Sexual Activity (By School Level)	90
5-4:	Frequency of Sexual Activity (By Gender)	90
5-5:	Number of Partners Teens Have Had (By School Level)	91
5-6:	Number of Partners Teens Have Had (By Gender)	92
5-7:	Teens Who Usually Use Alcohol or Drugs Before They Have Sexual Intercourse (Of Those Who Have Ever Had Sex)	93
5-8:	Birth Control Use by Sexually Active Teens (By Gender)	94
5-9:	Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By Grade and Gender)	95
5-10:	Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By School Level and Gender)	95
5-11:	Method of Birth Control Used by Teens the Last Time They Had Sex (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by Gender)	96
5-12:	Obtainability of Condoms or Other Birth Control (By School Level)	96
5-13:	One Main Reason Why Teens Did Not Use Birth Control (Of Teens Who Have Had Sex, by School Level)	97
5-14:	One Main Reason Teens Did Not Use Birth Control (Of Teens Who Have Had Sex, by Gender)	97
5-15:	Condom Use by Teens (Of Those Who Have Ever Had Sex, by Gender)	98
5-16:	Topics Teens Have Discussed With Sexual Partners (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by School Level)	99
5-17:	Topics Teens Have Discussed With Sexual Partners (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by Gender)	99
5-18:	Relationship Between Parental Monitoring and Level of Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	100
5-19:	Relationship Between Level of Sexual Activity and Thinking They'll Get in Trouble at Home (By Gender)	101
5-20:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Level of Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	102

5-21:	Talks with Father or Mother About Whether or Not It's Okay to Have Sex (In the Past Year)	103
5-22:	Talks with Father or Mother About Birth Control (In the Past Year)	104
5-23:	Talks with Father or Mother about AIDs or STDs (In the Past Year)	105
5-24:	Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused by an Adult (By Gender)	106
5-25:	Teens Who Have Been Sexually Harassed (By Gender)	107
5-26:	Teens Who Have Been Sexually Harassed in One or More Ways (By Grade and Gender)	107
6-1:	Teen Worries (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by School Level)	109
6-2:	Teen Worries (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by Gender)	109
6-3:	How Often Teens Feel Confused About Their Sexuality (By School Level)	110
6-4:	How Often Teens Feel Confused About Their Sexuality (By Gender)	110
6-5:	Who Teens Would Talk to About Problems (By School Level)	111
6-6:	Who Teens Would Talk to About Problems (By Gender)	112
6-7:	Who Teens Consider Their Most Positive Role Model (By School Level)	113
6-8:	Who Teens Consider Their Most Positive Role Model (By Gender)	114
6-9:	Depression or Sadness Among Students (At Any Time in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	115
6-10:	Serious Thoughts About Killing Themselves (At Any Time in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	116
6-11:	Plans Made To Commit Suicide (At Any Time, by Grade and Gender)	117
6-12:	Plans Made To Commit Suicide (In the Past Year, by Grade and Gender)	118
6-13:	Plans Made To Commit Suicide (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	119
6-14:	Suicide Attempts (At Any Time, by Grade and Gender)	120
6-15:	Suicide Attempts (In the Past Year, by Grade and Gender)	121
6-16:	Suicide Attempts (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	122
6-17:	Teens Who Tried to Lose Weight or Keep from Gaining Weight (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	123
6-18:	What Teens Did in the Past Month to Lose Weight or Keep from Gaining Weight (By Gender)	124
6-19:	How Often Teens Exercised (In the Past Week, by School Level)	125
6-20:	How Often Teens Exercised (In the Past Week, by Gender)	125
6-21:	How Often Teens Wear Seat Belts (By School Level)	126
6-22:	How Often Teens Wear Seat Belts (By Gender)	126
7-1:	Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Fathers (In the Past Year)	127
7-2:	Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Mothers (In the Past Year)	128
7-3:	Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home	129
7-4:	Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by Grade and Gender)	129
7-5:	Parents' Decision-Making Style	130
7-6:	Parents Are There For Them	131
7-7:	Parental Support (Often or very Often)	131

7-8:	Teens Who Feel Their Parents Are Interested in What They Learn and How They Are Doing in School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	132
7-9:	Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always)	133
7-10:	Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always, by School Level)	134
7-11:	Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always, by Gender)	134
8-1:	How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week)	136
8-2:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week)	137
8-3:	How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week, by School Level)	137
8-4:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week, by School Level)	138
8-5:	How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week, by Gender)	138
8-6:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week, by Gender)	139
9-1:	Enjoy Going to School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	141
9-2:	School Rules Enforced Fairly (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	141
9-3:	Good Quality Education (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	142
9-4:	Perceptions of Teacher Expectations (By School Level)	143
9-5:	Perceptions of Teacher Expectations (By Gender)	143
9-6:	Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	144
9-7:	Future Plans After High School (Middle School Students, by Gender)	145
9-8:	Future Plans After High School (High School Students, by Gender)	145
9-9:	Neighborhood Support (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	146
9-10:	Neighborhood Monitoring (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	147
9-11:	Social Responsibility (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)	154
9-12:	Teens' Involvement in Volunteer Work (By School Level)	155
9-13:	Teens' Involvement in Volunteer Work (By Gender)	155
9-14:	Level of Teens' Religious Activity (By School Level)	156
9-15:	Level of Teens' Religious Activity (By Gender)	156
9-16:	Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By School Level)	157
9-17:	Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By Gender)	157
9-18:	Why Teens Are Treated Differently (Of Those Who Have Been Treated Differently, by School Level)	158
9-19:	Why Teens Are Treated Differently (Of Those Who Have Been Treated Differently, by Gender)	158
9-20:	Perceived School Safety (By School Level)	159
9-21:	Perceived School Safety (By Gender)	159
9-22:	Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe (Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by School Level)	160
9-23:	Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe (Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by Gender)	161
9-24:	Where in the Community Teens Feel Unsafe (Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by School Level)	162

9-25:	Where in the Community Teens Feel Unsafe (Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by Gender)	163
9-26:	Ever Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By School Level)	164
9-27:	Ever Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By Gender)	164
9-28:	How Teens Handle Anger and Disagreements (By School Level)	165
9-29:	How Teens Handle Anger and Disagreements (By Gender)	166
9-30:	Why Teens Would Not Fight (By School Level)	167
9-31:	Why Teens Would Not Fight (By Gender)	167
9-32:	Days Teens Carried Weapons on to School Property (In the Past Month, by School Level)	168
9-33:	Days Teens Carried Weapons on to School Property (In the Past Month, by Gender)	169
9-34:	What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By School Level)	170
9-35:	What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By Gender)	170

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
1-1:	Monadnock Assessed Protective Factors	5
3-1:	Student Characteristics	11
4-1:	Overall Drug Use	87
9-1:	Where Teens in SAU 1 Go For Entertainment	149
9-2:	Where Teens in SAU 29 Go For Entertainment	150
9-3:	Where Teens in SAU 38 Go For Entertainment	151
9-4:	Where Teens in SAU 47 Go For Entertainment	152
9-5:	Where Teens in SAU 60 Go For Entertainment	153



Teen Assessment Project Executive Summary For the Monadnock Region

The Monadnock United Way, concerned that local youth issues had changed since the Drugs, Alcohol, and Youth (DAY) regional survey was done in 1987, reviewed tools that could be used for another regional youth survey. The University of New Hampshire Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey was chosen due to its depth, focus on protective factors as well as risk factors, and its community educational component. As was the DAY survey, TAP was used with youth in SAUs 1, 29, 38, 47 and 60. 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 changes in attitudes and behaviors that build assets/protective factors in families, schools, and communities.

The Monadnock United Way Assessment Committee involved many community coalitions and agencies in identifying critical questions to ask. These were formatted into a 160 question 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 survey was administered to 7th through 12th grade students in SAUs 29, 38 and 60 and 9th through 12th grade students in SAUs 1 and 47 in March of 2000. A total of 5,576 surveys were used for data analysis. This represents approximately 84% of the students eligible to take the survey in the Monadnock Region. Following are selected local TAP survey results.

Family Characteristics

The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for local youth is living with two parents, either biological or adoptive (58%). Other reported living situations include living with a single parent (15%), and living with a step-family (17%).

The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school education or beyond (fathers, 80% and mothers, 86%). Thirty-one percent (31%) of fathers and 32% of mothers have a high school diploma with no further degrees. Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 32% of mothers have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Only 5% of all fathers and 3% 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 many local youth use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- Sixty percent (60%) of all youth have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 40% and high school, 68%). Thirty-four percent (34%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (middle school, 16%; high school, 42%) and 12% reported using it weekly or more often (middle school, 6% and high school, 14%).
- Twenty percent (20%) of all middle school youth and 41% of all high school youth reported binge drinking ("*5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row*") at least once in the past month.
- Forty-five percent (45%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 31% and high school, 52%). Twenty-one percent (21%) reported smoking monthly or more often (middle school, 10%; high school, 26%) and 16% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 7% and high school, 20%). Weekly smoking habits increase with each grade level and peak in the 12th grade for both genders.
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 18% and high school, 45%). Nineteen percent (19%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (middle school, 8%; high school, 24%) and 12% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 5% and high school, 15%).
- Sixty-eight percent (68%) of all youth believe it is either "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get beer/wine/liquor. Forty-nine percent (49%) believe it is "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get marijuana.
- Eleven percent (11%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (middle school, 12% and high school, 10%). Two percent (2%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (middle school, 2% and high school, 2%). Sixteen percent (16%) of local youth feel that using inhalants carries "*no*" or "*slight risk*" (middle school, 22% and high school, 14%).

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 & Skronnal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, and Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg & Kerns, 1993).

Sexuality

Overall, 33% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 18% and high school, 41%). Sixty percent (60%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse. Only 60% of sexually active teens always use some form of birth control (middle school, 52%; high school, 62%).

A high percentage of local teens do not talk with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 54% either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 70% "*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 66% who either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 79% who "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their fathers about the issue.

Eight percent (8%) of local teens reported some degree of forced sexual activity by an adult (males, 5% and females, 11%). Two percent (2%) reported current sexual abuse by an adult and 6% reported previous sexual abuse.

Emotional Health

Worries of local youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (63%); how they look (48%); getting along with parents at home (46%); how well their parents get along with each other (36%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (29%); and that their family has enough money to get by (25%). Other concerns include that their parents drink too much or use drugs (13%); and being pressured to drink or use drugs (9%).

Overall, 72% of all local teens reported feeling depressed or sad at some time during the past month (61% for males and 83% for females). Twenty-three percent (23%) of local youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (18% for males and 27% for females). Twenty-three percent (23%) of local youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (17% for males and 28% for females) and 14% reported they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (10% for males and 18% for females).

Parent-Teen Relations

Good communication is a key part of healthy parent-teen relationships. Many local 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.

Forty-six percent (46%) of all teens reported they worried either "*very much*" or "*quite a bit*" about getting along with their parents at home (middle school, 45%; high school, 47%). A high percentage of teens felt their parents either "*often*" or "*very often*" cared about them; 90% felt

this way about their mothers and 80% for their fathers. Sixty-two percent (62%) of students felt that their mothers were fair "*often*" or "*very often*" when it came to enforcing the family rules; 59% felt this about their fathers. Parental monitoring, sharing family values, and letting teens know there would be consequences were all found to be related to lower rates of regular smoking, drinking, and sexual activity by local teens.

Student Time Use

Local youth spend the most time (at the level of 5 or more hours a week) watching TV (52%). The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for local youth include staying at home alone with no adults present (44%); doing homework or studying (43%), participating in extra-curricular school sports or activities (39%); working for pay (36%); using the Internet (29%) and engaging in non-school activities (17%).

Perceptions of School and Community

Sixty-two percent (62%) of local youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education, 53% indicated they enjoyed going to school, and 44% felt school rules were enforced fairly.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the youth often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future, 61% felt it is important for them to contribute to their community and society and 78% consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help. An additional 45% of teens would choose to give up their free time to help raise money for a neighborhood project. Seventy-six percent (76%) feel their community is a good place to live, but only 17% feel there are a lot of fun things in town for kids their age to do.

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of students reported feeling safe at school, yet 13% of students have carried a weapon on to school property in the past month.

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.