
CHAPTER 7

Personal Safety and Violence

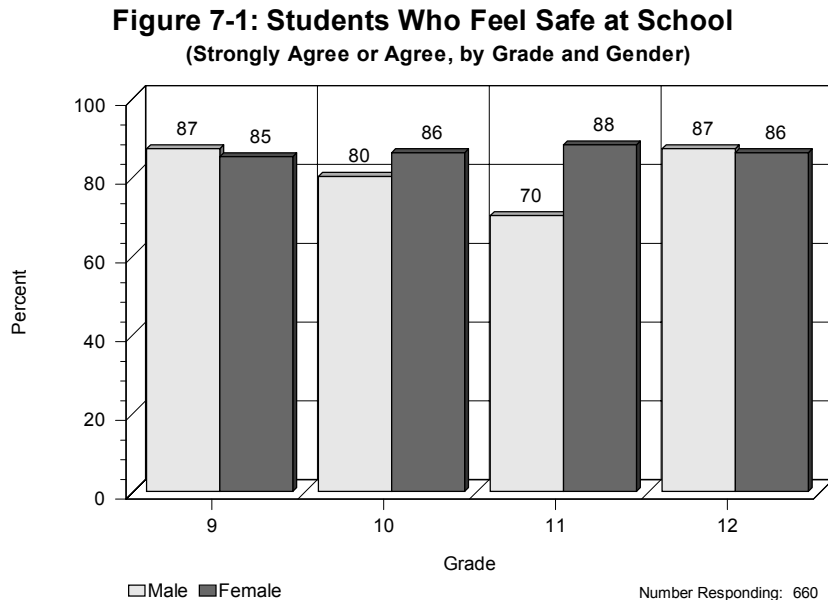
Young people are increasingly exposed to violence in the form of verbal and physical assaults in their homes, their schools, and their communities (Hastings & Kelley, 1997). A National Crime Survey reported violent victimization rates for young persons, twelve to nineteen years of age, to be twice those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

Youth victims show more problem behaviors and emotions, such as 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?

School Safety

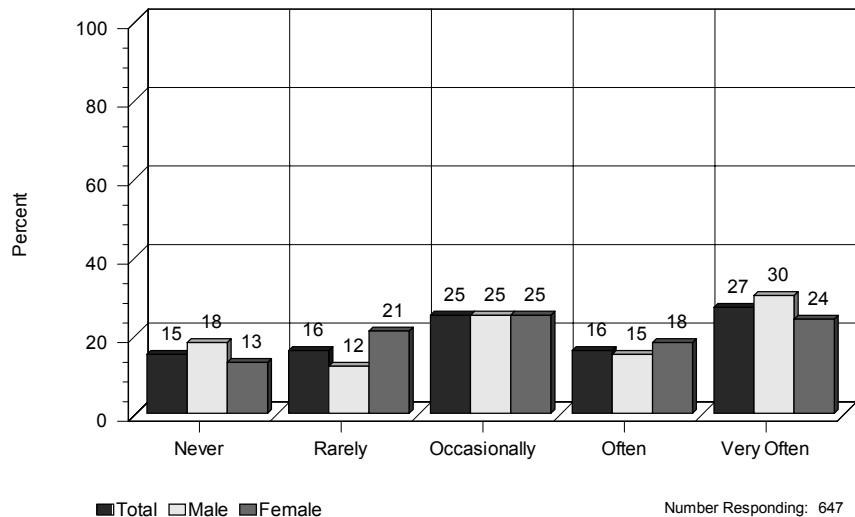
Students were asked to respond to the statement “*I feel safe at school.*” Figure 7-1 shows the percentage of students who “*agreed*” or “*strongly agreed*” with this statement. Overall, (83%) of the students reported they felt safe at school. A greater percentage of males than females disagreed with this statement (males, 10%; females, 3%).



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

Figure 7-2 shows the student responses to the question, “How often in the *past month* have you heard other students make derogatory or insulting comments about someone’s religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation?”. Fifteen percent (15%) of students reported “never” hearing such comments, while 43% reporting “often” or “very often” hearing derogatory or insulting comments about someone’s religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

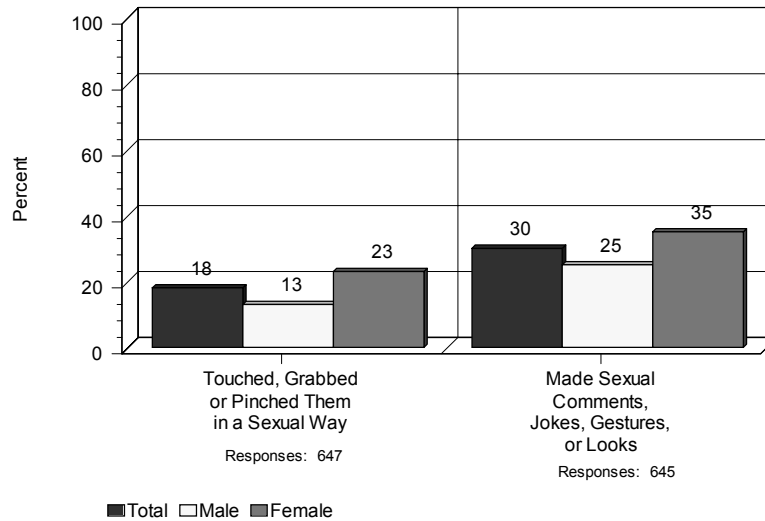
Figure 7-2: Frequency of Hearing Insulting Comments About Someone's Religion, Ethnicity or Sexual Orientation
(In the Past Month, by Gender)



Sexual Harassment

Youth were asked “How often 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...made sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks”. Figure 7-3 shows the percentages of students who responded that these behaviors had occurred “occasionally” or “often”. A greater percentage of females than males reported both kinds of harassment.

Figure 7-3: Incidents of Sexual Harassment in School
(Occasionally or Often, by Gender)



Weapons in School

Youth were asked “During the *past month*, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property?”. Ten percent (10%) of students reported that they had carried a weapon onto school property in the past month (males, 17%; females, 4%). Figure 7-4 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-4: Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property

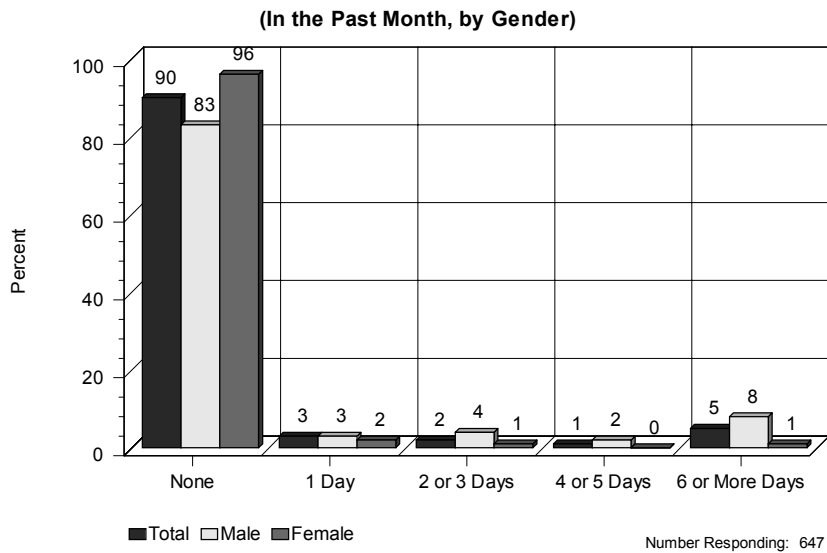


Table 7-1 shows data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2002).

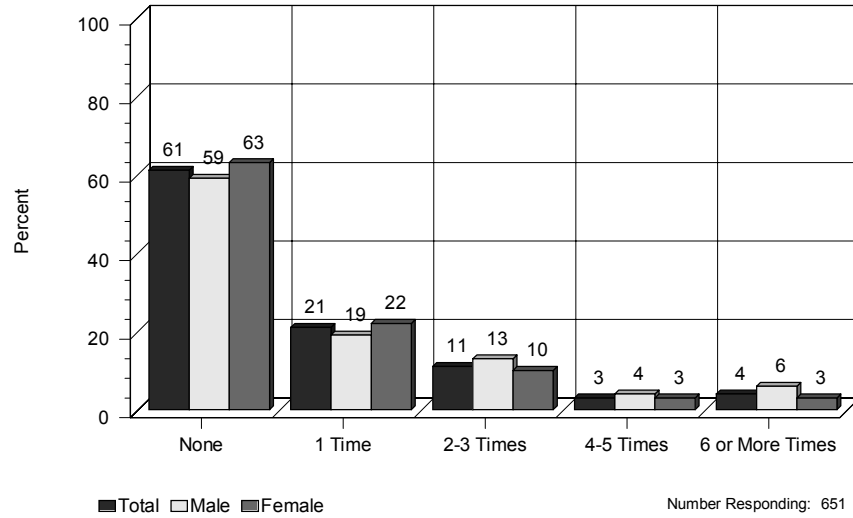
Table 7-1: 2001 YRBS Data: Carried Weapon Onto School Property (Grades 9-12 only)

Behavior	YRBS National 2001 %			YRBS N.H. 2001 %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Carried weapon (e.g. gun, knife, or club) onto school property on ≥ 1 of the 30 days preceding the survey	6.4	10.2	2.9	6.9	11.1	2.5

Personal Property at School

Students were asked, “During the *past year*, how many times has someone stolen or deliberately damaged your property?”. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the students surveyed responded that this has occurred at least once (males, 41%, females, 37%). Figure 7-5 shows the responses by gender.

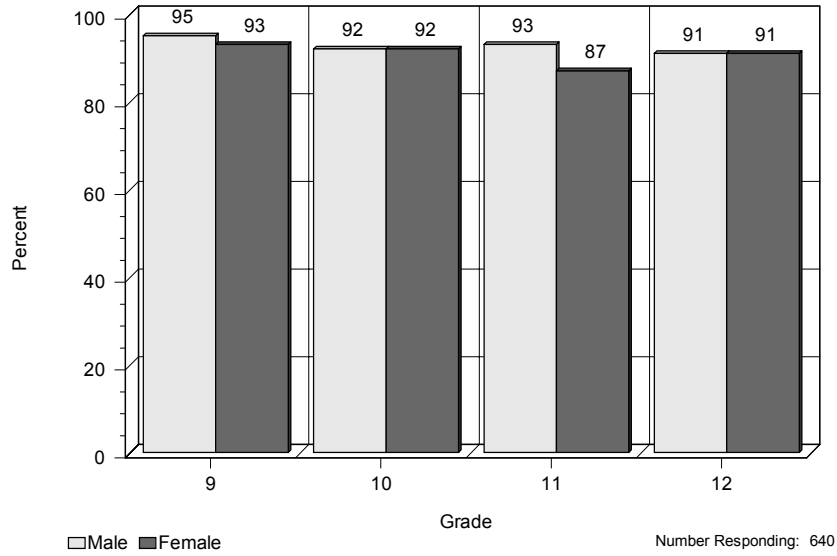
Figure 7-5: Number of Times Teens Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged While in School
(In the Past Year, by Gender)



Safety at Home

Students were asked to respond to the statement “*I feel safe at home.*” Ninety-two percent (92%) of students responded that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with this statement. Figure 7-6 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 7-6: Students Who Feel Safe at Home
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



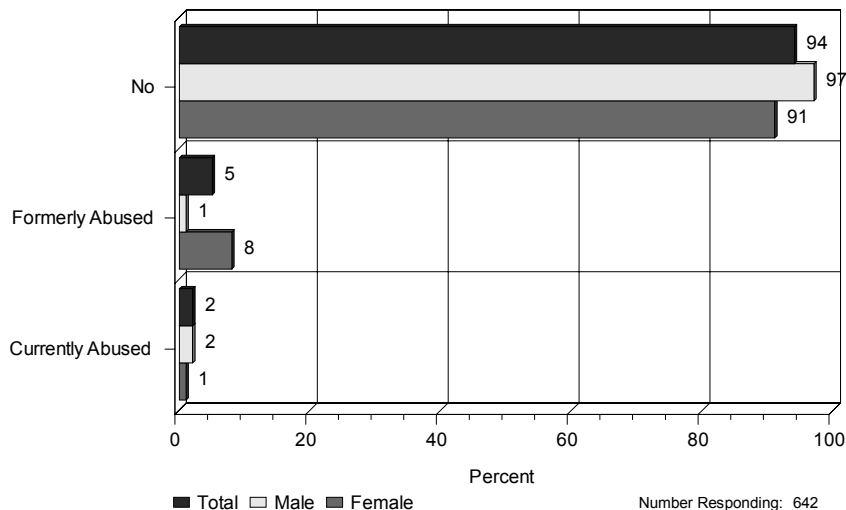
Sexual Violence: Sexual Abuse

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 7,400 reports of suspected child abuse/neglect that were assessed in New Hampshire in 2001 (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-four percent (94%) of youth said that they had not been sexually abused by an adult (males, 97%; females, 91%). Figure 7-7 shows the responses by gender. Eight percent (8%) of females (26 students) and 1% of males (3 students) reported that they had been sexually abused in the past, but the abuse had stopped. Two percent (2%) of youth (10 students) reported that they were currently being sexually abused (males, 2%; females, 1%).

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



Teens were also asked, “*Have you ever been sexually abused by another teenager?*” (*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.*). Figure 7-8 shows that 10% of teens reported having been sexually abused by another teenager. Twelve percent (12%) of females (40 students) and 1% of males (4 students) reported that they had been sexually abused in the past, but the abuse had stopped. Three percent (3%) of youth (22 students) reported that they were currently being sexually abused (males, 4%; females, 3%).

Three percent (3%) of students surveyed reported that they had experienced sexual abuse from an adult and from a teenager (males, 1%; females, 5%).

Figure 7-8: Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused By Another Teen (By Gender)

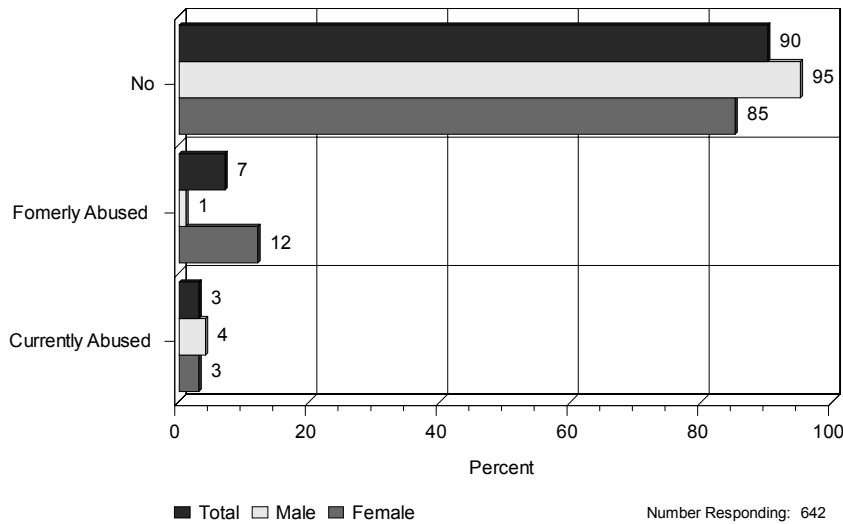
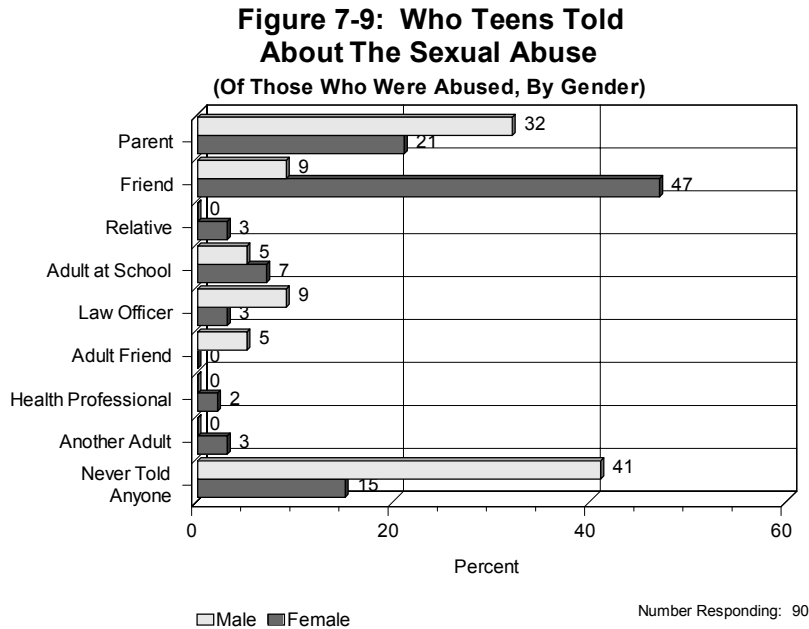


Table 7-2 shows data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2002).

Table 7-2: 2001 YRBS Forced Sexual Intercourse (Grades 9-12 only)

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

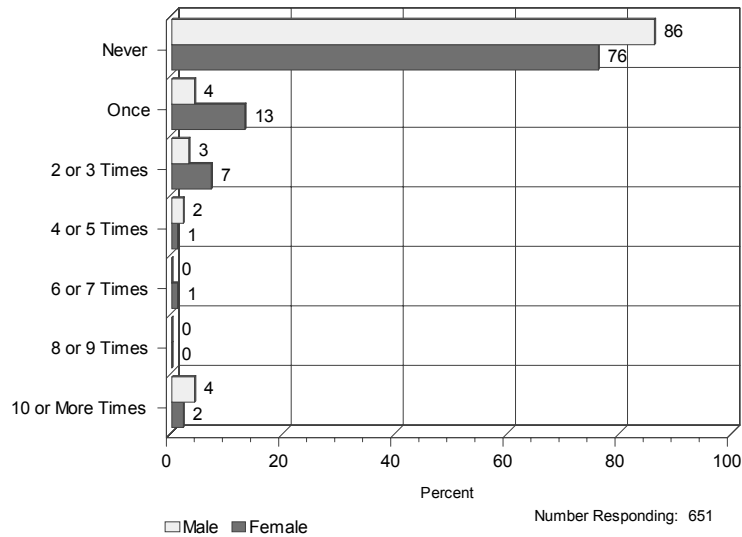
Teens were asked, “If you have ever been sexually abused, have you ever told anyone?”. Of the 90 students who answered that they had been sexually abused, 21% reported that they told no one. Figure 7-9 show the responses by gender. Females were more likely to tell a friend; males were more likely not to tell anyone.



Abuse by Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date

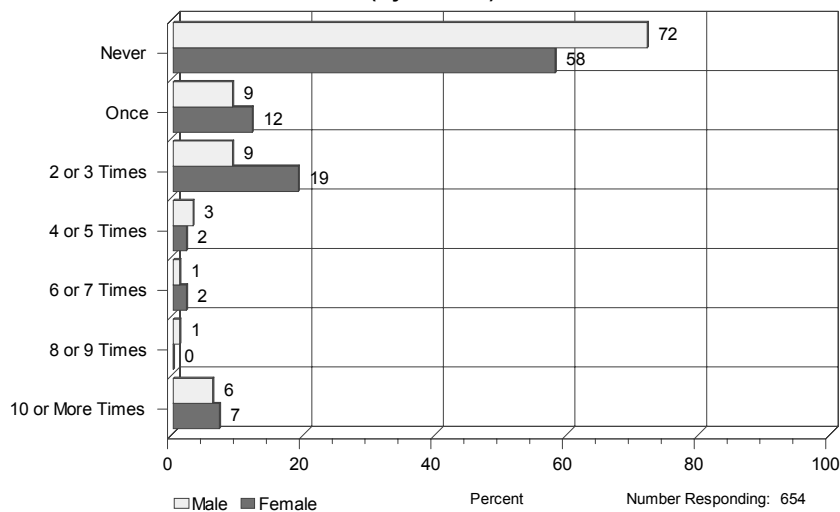
Physical abuse at the hands of a romantic partner is a serious health issue. Teens were asked, "How many times have you been hit, pushed or beaten by a girlfriend, boyfriend or date?". Figure 7-10 shows that while most teens have not had this experience, 19% of teens have (males, 14%; females, 24%).

Figure 7-10: Physical Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (By Gender)



In addition to physical abuse, teens were asked about emotional abuse in the question "How many times have you been put down, yelled at, or insulted by a girlfriend, boyfriend or date?". Thirty-five percent (35%) of students surveyed reported that this had happened (males, 28%; females, 42%).

Figure 7-11: Emotional Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (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 *2000-2001 TAP 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 *2000-2001 TAP Multi-Community Report* is a multi-community report based on data from ten NH SAUs surveyed from January 2000 through December 2001 (Teen Assessment Project, 2002). These data represent 9,458 teens. 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 7-3: Safety Comparison
(Grades 9-12 only)**

Behavior	YRBS ¹ National 2001 %	YRBS ² N.H. 2001 %	TAP ³ Multi- Community 2000-2001 %	TAP ⁴ Pe mi- Baker 2002 %
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	6
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	-	-	11	10

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

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

³ Teen Assessment Project, 2002.

⁴ Teen Assessment Project, 2002.

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