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## CHAPTER 5

### Sexuality

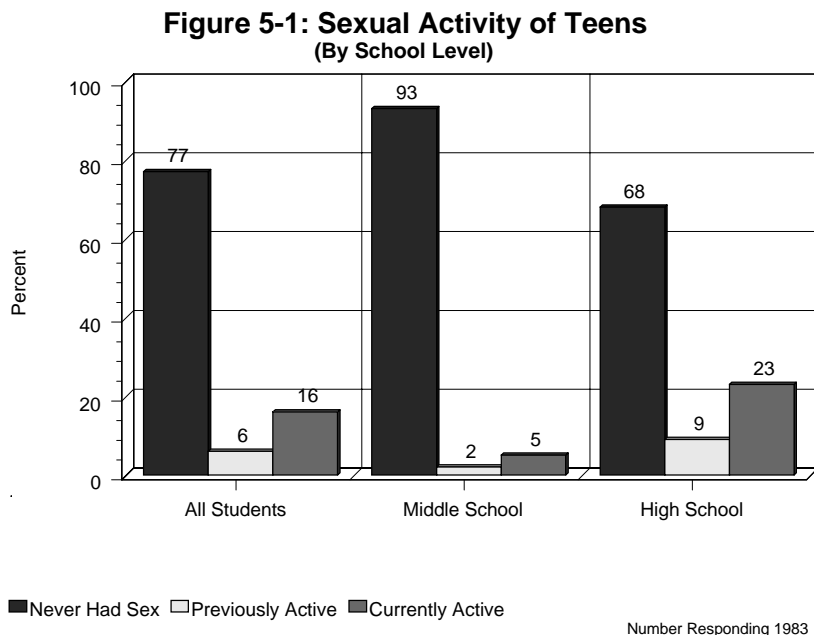
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One of the biggest fears for many parents is that their children will become sexually active before they are ready. This fear includes concern about unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), emotional harm, and sexual abuse. Most parents feel that early sexual experience will, in some way, harm their children. Early sexual experiences have been found to lead to greater risk for multiple partners, STDs, and pregnancy (Valois et al., 1999).

#### Sexual Activity

The United States has the highest teen pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion rates of any industrialized Western nation (Jones et al., 1985) with about 25% of all U.S. women having a pregnancy by age 18 (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). Figure 5-1 shows 23% of teens surveyed have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 7% and high school 32%).

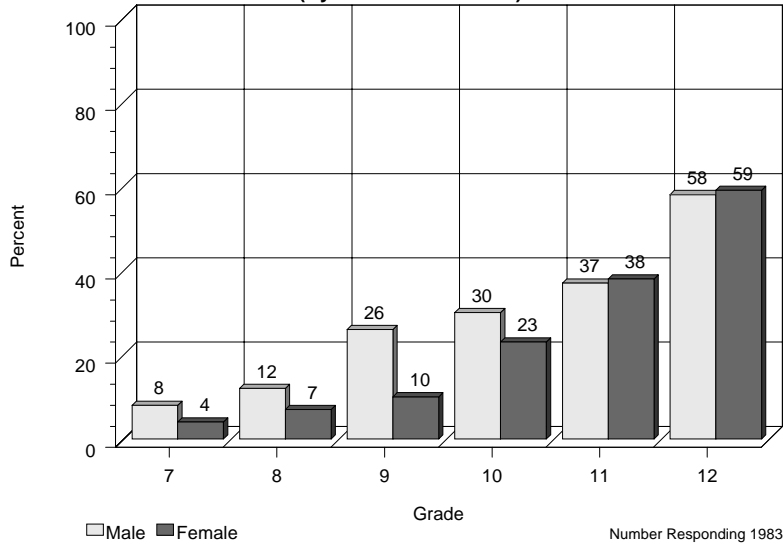
The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1998) reports that nationally, 48.4% (N.H., 47.8%) of high school students (*grades 9-12*) have had sexual intercourse at some time in their lives. New Hampshire ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of 28 states surveyed.



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

Teens are having sex at a young age. Even as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 26% of males and 10% of females reported they have had sexual intercourse. Figure 5-2 shows that more teens become sexually active as they get older. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of local teens in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (males, 58% and females, 59%) reported having had sexual intercourse.

**Figure 5-2: Teens Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse (By Grade and Gender)**



How old students were when they first had sexual intercourse is shown in Figure 5-3.

**Figure 5-3: Age Students First Had Sex (By Gender)**

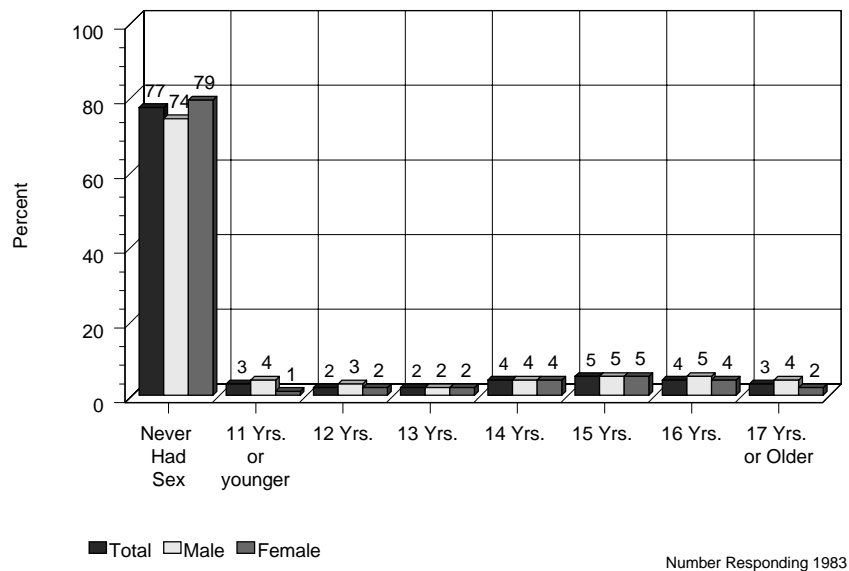
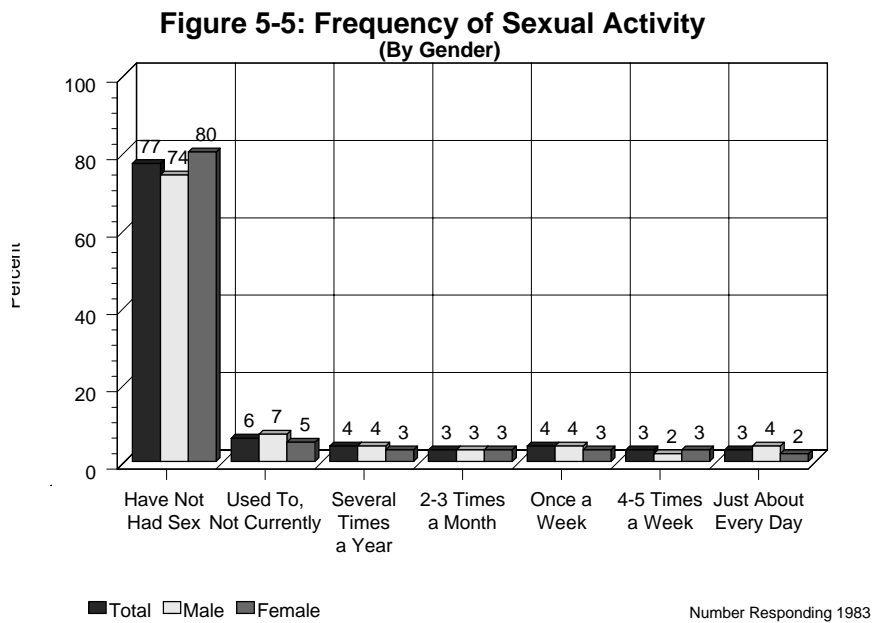
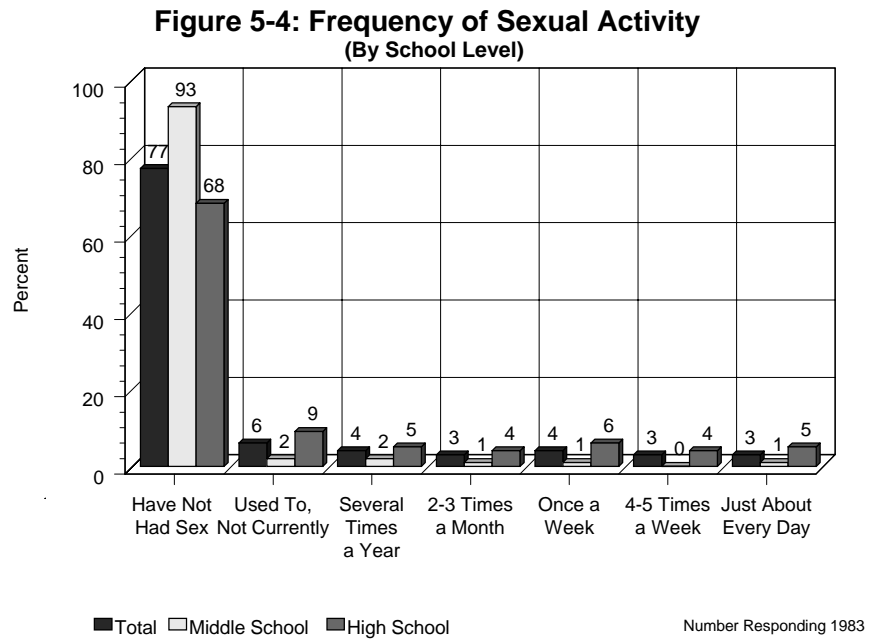


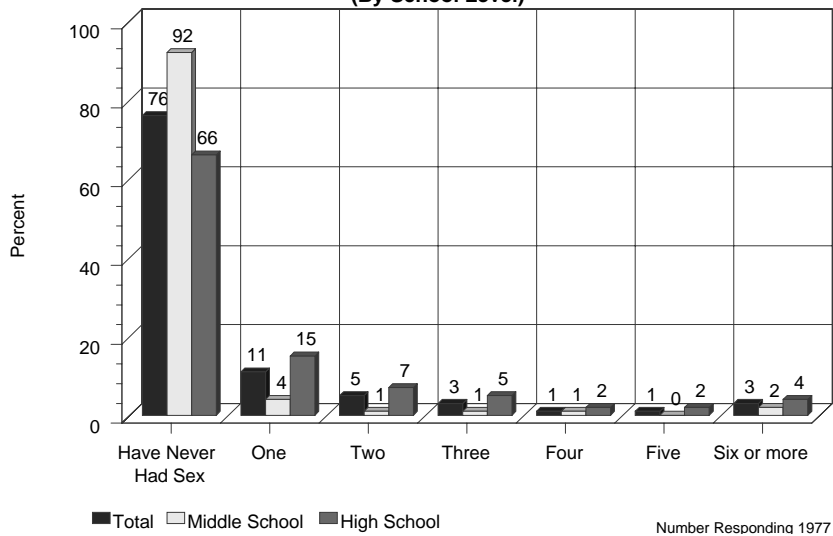
Figure 5-4 shows how often teens are having sex, based on the school level of the student. Figure 5-5 shows how often teens are having sex on the basis of gender.



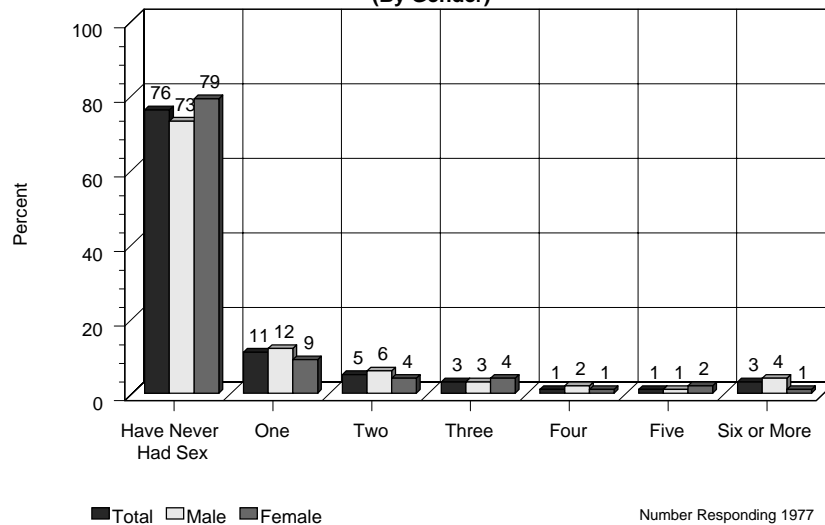
Youth were asked how many sexual partners they had in their lifetimes. Five percent (5%) of teens surveyed responded they have had sex with 4 or more partners in the past year (middle school, 3%; high school, 8%). Figure 5-6 shows all responses broken down by school level. Figure 5-7 shows 7% of males and 4% of females reported they had 4 or more partners in the past year.

Nationally, 16.0% (N.H., 11.9%) of high school students had sexual intercourse with 4 or more partners in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). New Hampshire ranks 21<sup>st</sup> out of 30 states surveyed.

**Figure 5-6: Number of Partners Teens Have Had in Their Lifetimes (By School Level)**



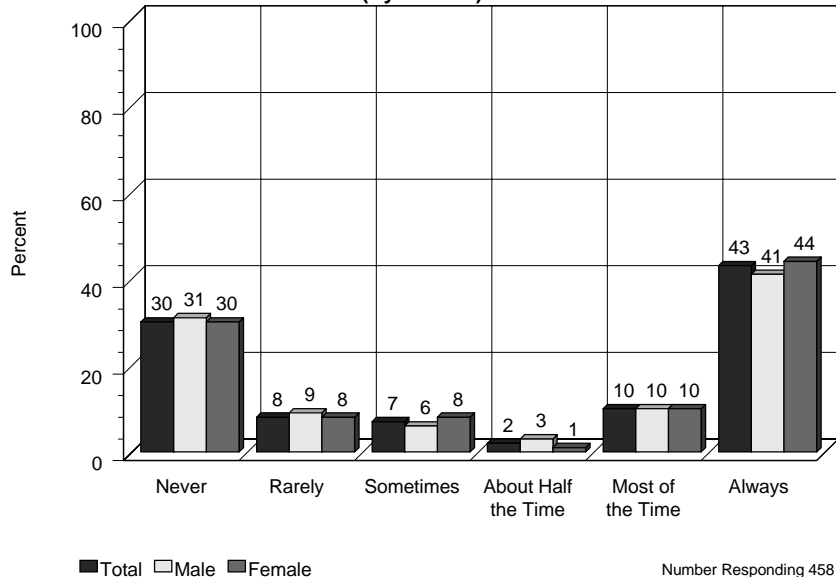
**Figure 5-7: Number of Partners Teens Have Had in Their Lifetimes (By Gender)**



## Contraception

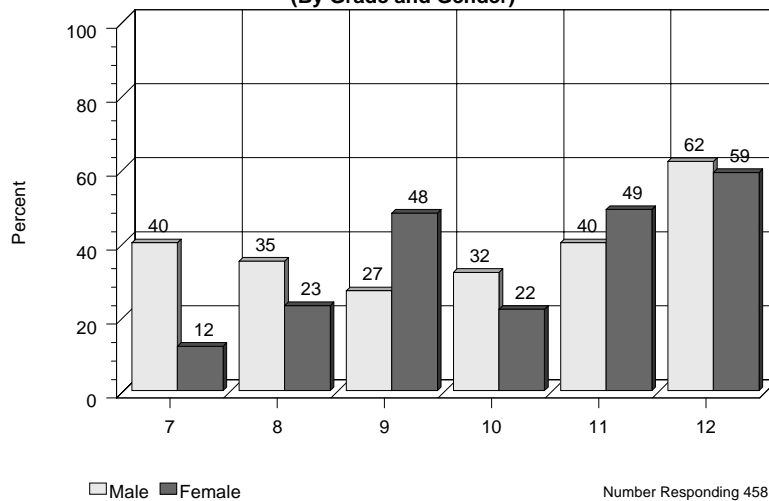
Of those students who report current or past sexual activity, 43% said they "always" use some form of birth control (males, 41% and females, 44%), while 30% of students who report being sexually active "never" use some form of birth control (males, 31% and females, 30%). Figure 5-8 shows the frequency of birth control use between sexually active male and female students.

**Figure 5-8: Birth Control Use by Sexually Active Teens**  
(By Gender)

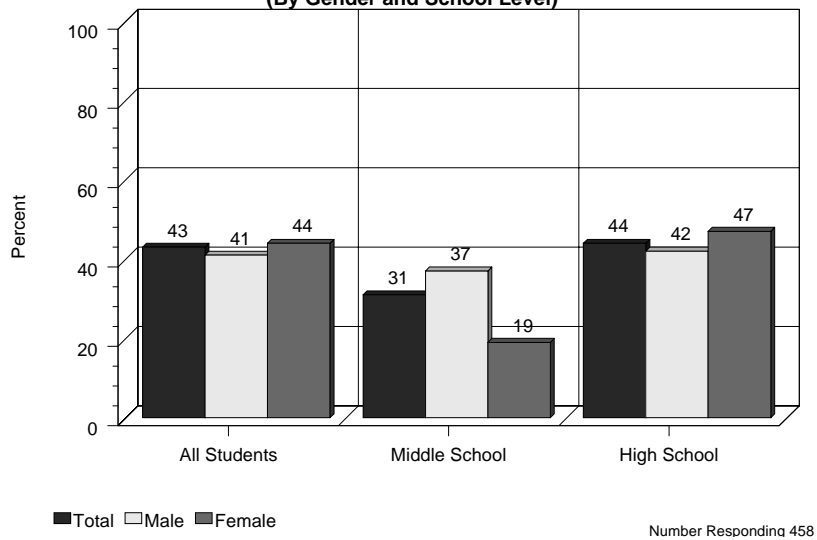


According to Healthier People in Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, 1990), after teens become sexually active, they usually wait on average twelve months before they begin to use contraception. Recent national statistics indicate teen contraceptive use does not vary by age (Adams et al., 1995). However, TAP research within New Hampshire has consistently indicated that younger teens are generally less likely to use a contraceptive than are older teens. This is troubling since the health risks associated with a pregnancy are much greater for younger teens. Figure 5-9 shows the breakdown by grade and gender for sexually active teens (currently or previously) who "always" use birth control. Figure 5-10 gives a similar breakdown by school level.

**Figure 5-9: Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By Grade and Gender)**



**Figure 5-10: Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By Gender and School Level)**

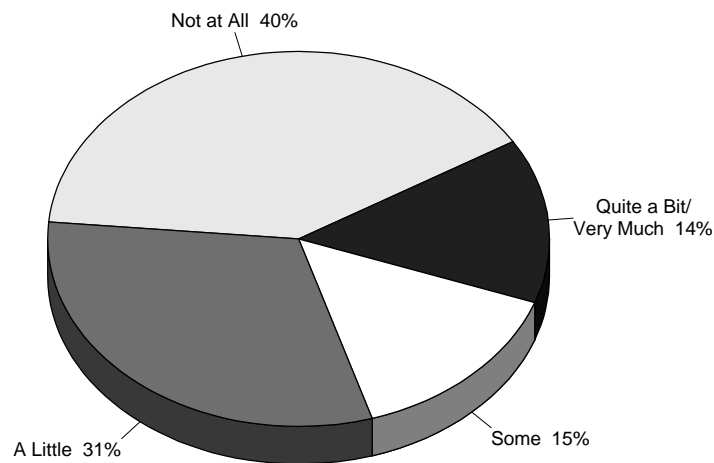


## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Teens who are sexually active run certain risks that can affect their health and their future. In 1998, an estimated 29 New Hampshire teens age 15-19 were infected with gonorrhea, and 428 were infected with chlamydia (Adamski, C., 1999). AIDS has become the 6th leading cause of death in the 15-24 age group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999) estimates 1,598 AIDS cases were diagnosed in 1998 in the 13-24 age group in the nation. In New Hampshire, from 1981 to 1998 there were 816 cases of full-blown AIDS reported; of these, 47 were reported in 1998 alone. In Rockingham County, 189 cases were reported between 1981 and 1998 (Adamski, C., 1999).

The survey asked youth how much they worried about contracting a sexually transmitted disease or AIDS. Figure 5-11 shows 60% of teens surveyed said they worried to some degree about this matter.

**Figure 5-11: Contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease or AIDS as a Teen Worry**



Number Responding 2029

Local teens were asked "If you have had sexual intercourse, how often do you or your partner use a condom?" Only 44% of sexually active teens said they always used a condom. Fifty-four percent (54%) of sexually active middle school students reported they always use a condom (males, 50% and females, 62%) and 43% of all high school students do so (males, 44% and females, 41%). Figure 5-12 shows the frequency of condom use of sexually active teens on the basis of gender.

**Figure 5-12: Condom Use by Sexually Active Teens (By Gender)**

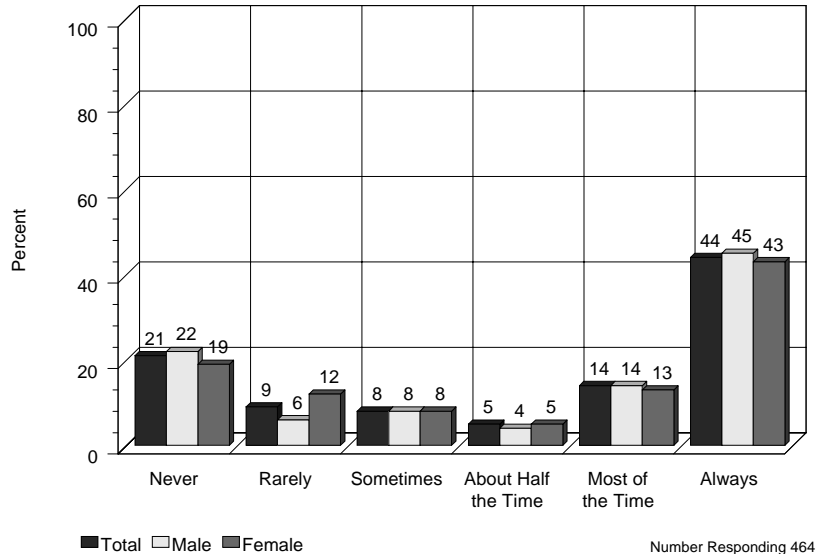
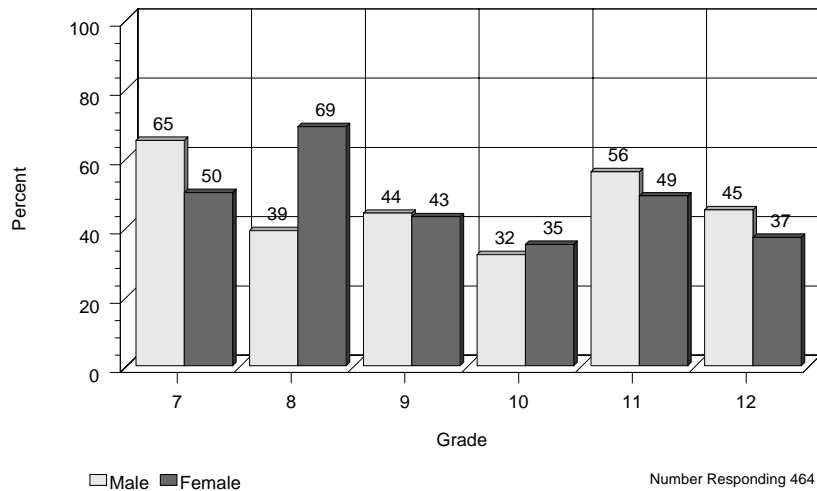


Figure 5-13 shows how often sexually active teens "always" use condoms by grade and gender.

**Figure 5-13: Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Condoms (By Grade and Gender)**



In our survey we asked teens, "What do you think is the one main reason why teens your age have sexual intercourse?" The three most common choices were: "It makes them feel good," (32%) "They want to see what it's like" (21%) and "It makes them feel loved" (18%). Figure 5-14 shows more high school students (39%) than middle school students (21%) thought teens have sex because it made them feel good.

**Figure 5-14: One Main Reason Why Teens Have Sex  
(By School Level)**

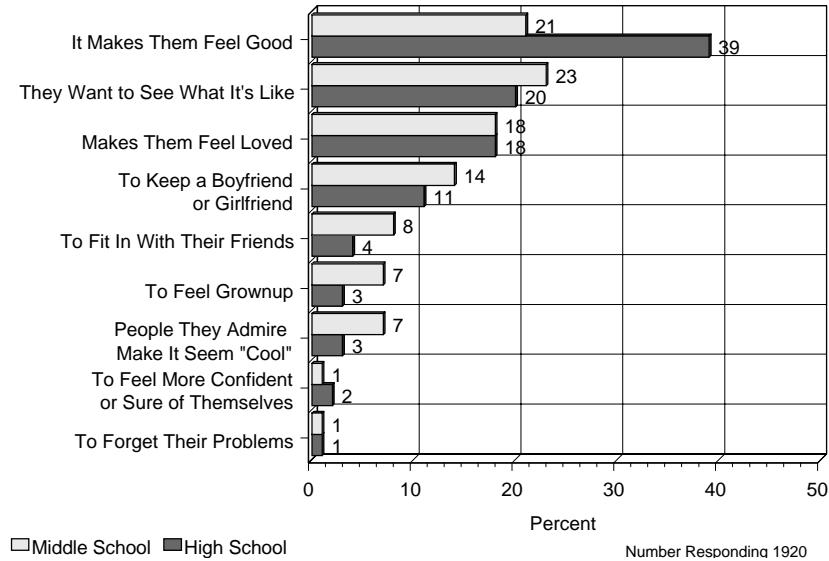
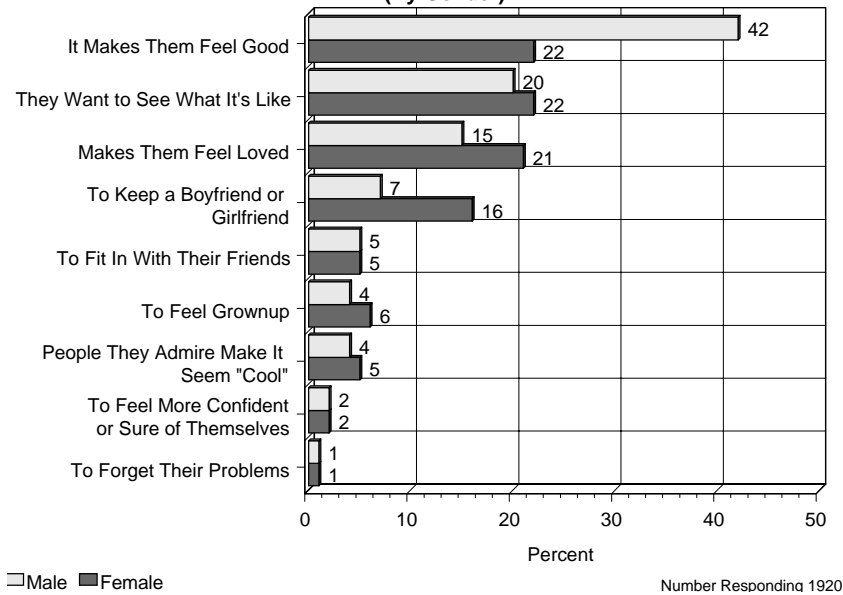


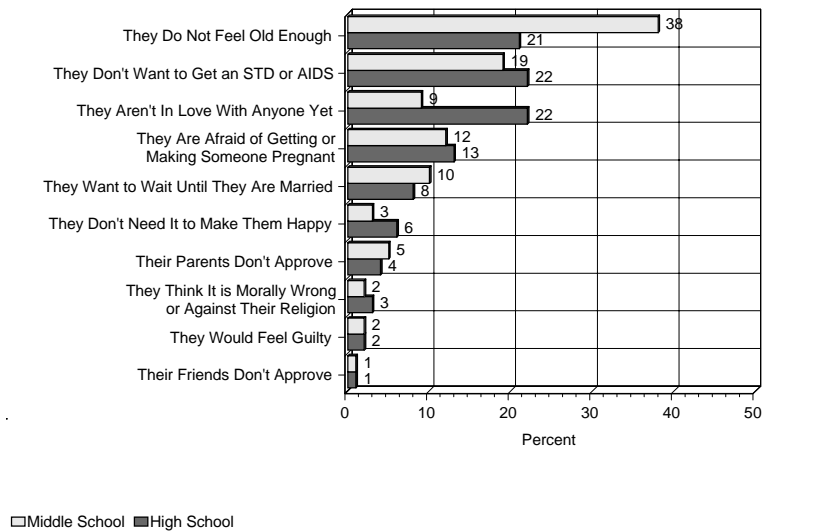
Figure 5-15 shows more males than females think teens their age have sex because it feels good (males, 42% and females, 22%). More females (21%) than males (15%) felt teens their age have sex because it makes them feel loved and more females (16%) than males (7%) felt teens do so to keep a boyfriend or girlfriend. Other differences were small.

**Figure 5-15: One Main Reason Why Teens Have Sex (By Gender)**



We also asked teens why they felt teens their age do *not* have sex. Figure 5-16 shows the three most common reasons reported by local student were *"They do not feel old enough to handle it"* (27%), *"They don't want to get a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or a disease like AIDS"* (21%) and *"They aren't in love with anyone yet"* (17%). More middle school students (38%) than high school students (21%) felt teens their age do not have sex because they do not feel old enough to handle it. More high school students (22%) middle school students (9%) feel teens don't have sex because they aren't in love with anyone yet.

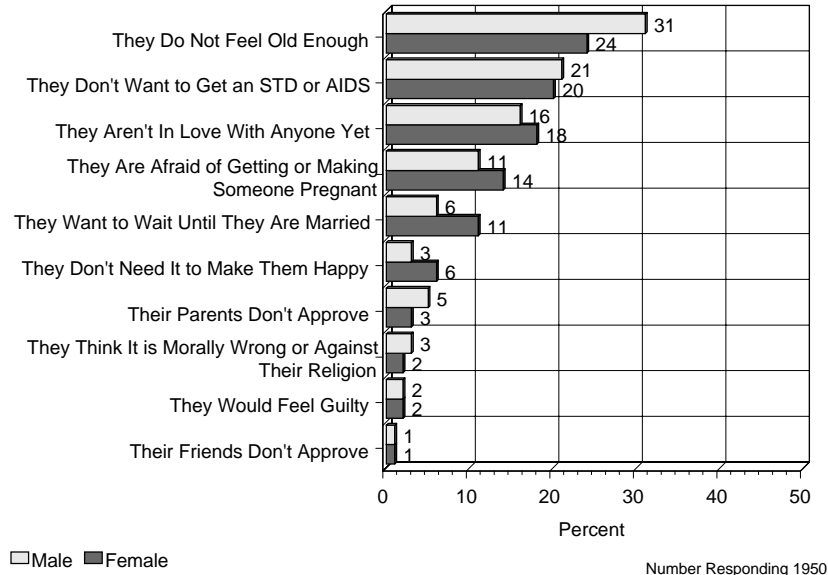
**Figure 5-16: One Main Reason Why Teens Do Not Have Sex (By School Level)**



Number Responding 1950

Figure 5-17 shows all responses broken down by gender. More males (31%) than females (24%) reported they felt teens their age do not have sex because they do not feel old enough. More females (11%) than males (6%) said teens their age do not have sex because they want to wait until they are married. There were no major differences between males and females in the other responses

**Figure 5-17: One Main Reason Why Teens Do Not Have Sex (By Gender)**

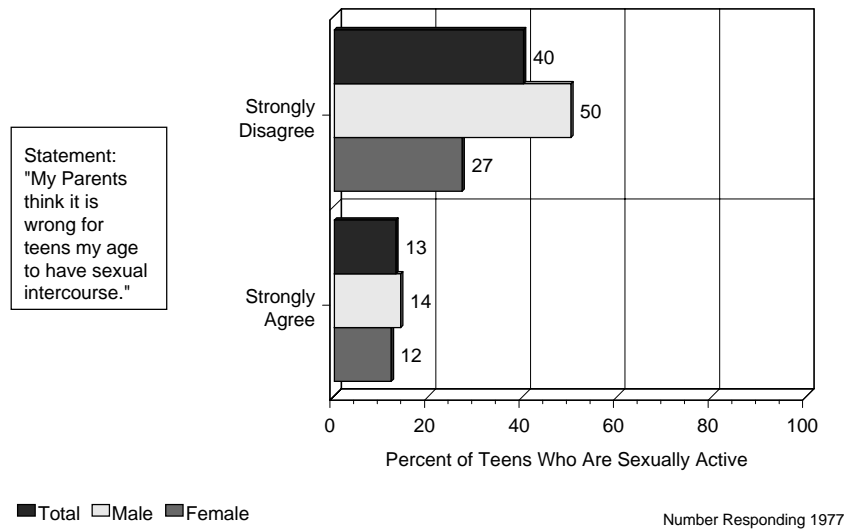


**Parents' Role in Level of Teen Sexual Activity**

There is evidence suggesting children who talk with their parents about sexuality and their values regarding it are less likely to be sexually active, if the values parents convey discourage early sexual activity. In Figure 5-18, the relationship is shown between teens' perceptions of their parents' values about teen sexual activity and the level of sexual activity on the teens' part. Students who don't believe their parents think it is wrong for them to have sex are three times as likely to engage in sex as are students who believe their parents do think it is wrong for them to have sex (40% vs. 13%).

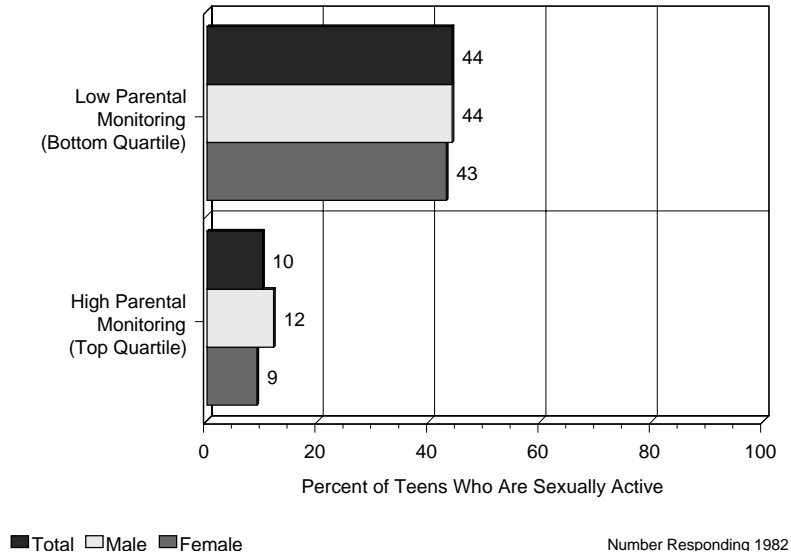
**Figure 5-18: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Level of Teen Sexual Activity**

(By Gender)



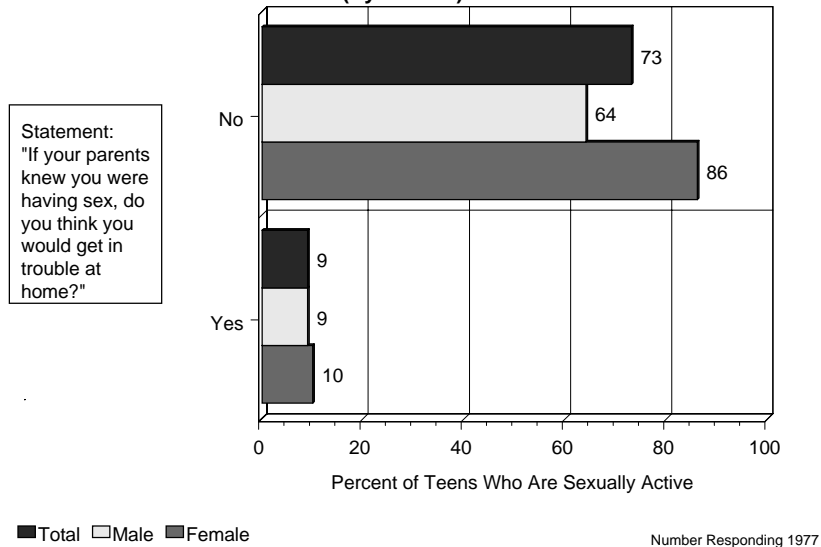
Parental monitoring is another important factor in preventing adolescent sexual activity. Parental monitoring means parents supervise their children or know where they are and what they are doing. Higher levels of parental monitoring are related to lower levels of sexual activity. The level of sexual activity of teens is greater when parents do not supervise them closely. Figure 5-19 shows the level of local teen sexual activity is much greater with low parental monitoring (low monitoring, 44% and high monitoring, 10%).

**Figure 5-19: Relationship Between Parental Monitoring and Level of Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)**



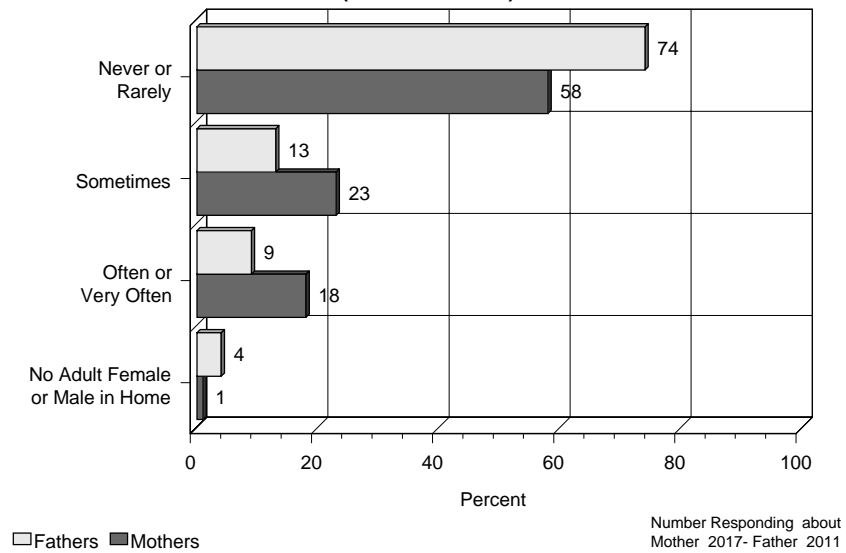
Another strong parental influence on levels of teen sexual activity is whether or not teens think they will get in trouble if their parents knew they were sexually active. Figure 5-20 shows that teens who do not feel they will get in trouble at home are about seven times more likely to be sexually active (not get in trouble, 73% and get in trouble, 9%). Thinking they will get in trouble is strongly related to teen sexual activity for both males and females.

**Figure 5-20: Relationship Between Level of Sexual Activity And Thinking They'll Get in Trouble at Home (By Gender)**



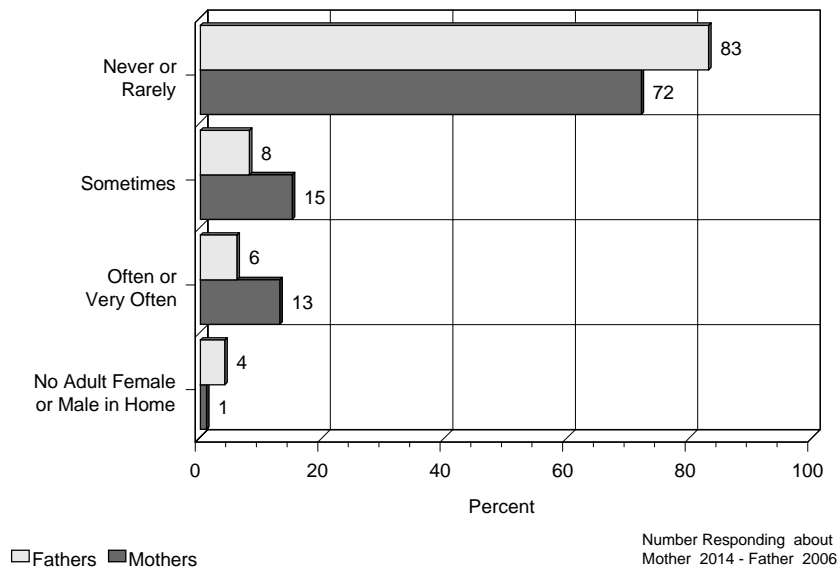
A high percentage of local teens do not have good talks with their parents about sexuality issues. Figure 5-21 presents how often in the past year teens have had good talks with their mothers or fathers about "whether or not it's okay for teenagers to have sex." Overall, 58% of teens "rarely" or "never" have talked with their mothers and 74% "rarely" or "never" talked with their fathers in the past year about this issue.

**Figure 5-21: Talks With Father or Mother About Whether Or Not It's Okay To Have Sex (In the Past Year)**



Seventy-two percent (72%) of local teens reported "rarely" or "never" having a good talk with their mother about birth control in the past year, while 83% reported "rarely" or "never" having a good talk with their father. Figure 5-22 shows how often in the past year parents have had a good talk about birth control with their children. These findings indicate that the majority of local parents and teens simply do not talk with one another enough about sexuality issues.

**Figure 5-22: Talks With Father or Mother About Birth Control  
(In the Past Year)**



Some people believe if you talk to teens about sex, you will encourage it by planting ideas in their heads. Contrary to this belief, a study based on TAP data found that teens who are sexually active are more likely to be so because they perceive fewer costs, not because they perceive more benefits (Small, Silverberg, and Kerns, 1993). In other words, sexually active teens may not be perceiving the consequences realistically. This would suggest that teens need help (information) in seeing the responsibilities and costs that come with sexual intercourse and in making sensible decisions about sexuality.

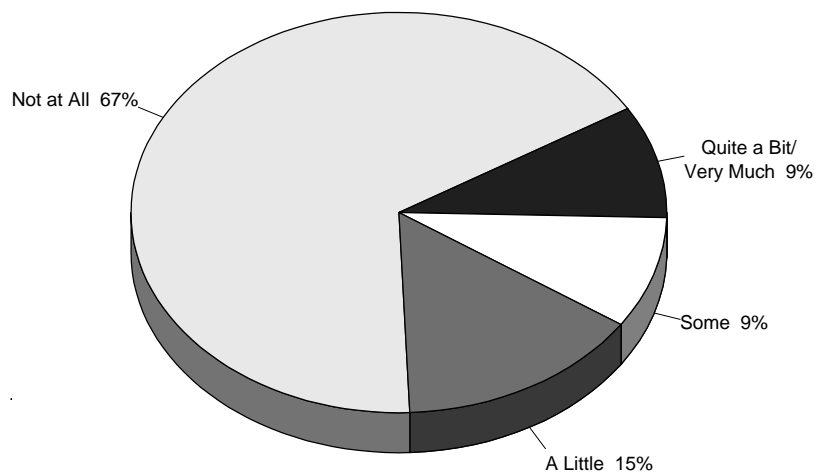
## Teenage Pregnancy

Early unplanned pregnancy or parenthood not only affects the future life prospects of the young mother or father, but it also puts the baby at higher risk for both short and long-term health and social problems. How teens perceive the costs of their actions can give us insight into understanding why some teens are sexually active while others are not. If we wish to design programs that prevent or delay the occurrence of sexual intercourse or help teens make responsible decisions about sex, it is critical to understand the consequences teens associate with it.

In 1997, (out of a total of 3,353 live births) there were 59 live births to mothers 17 years and younger and 115 to mothers 18-19 years of age in Rockingham County (New Hampshire Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics, personal communication). This is troubling due to increased health risks related to teenage pregnancy and the emotional, social and economic costs of early parenthood. Because "live birth" data does not include the number of miscarriages or induced abortions in the teen population, or births to local teens occurring outside the county, the number of teen pregnancies can be assumed to be higher than the number of live births to teens.

We asked teens how much they worried about getting pregnant or getting someone else pregnant. Figure 5-23 shows that 33% worried to some degree about pregnancy (middle school, 25% and high school, 38%).

**Figure 5-23: Pregnancy as a Teen Worry**



Number Responding 2024

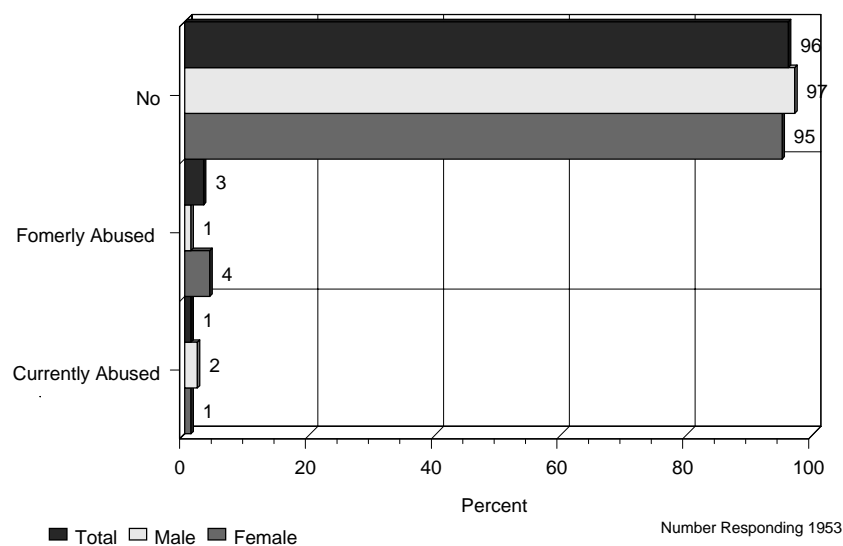
## Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as when someone in a youth's family or another person does sexual things to the youth or makes the youth do sexual things to them the youth does not want. According to researchers in the field, child sexual abuse is a problem which occurs across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Roosa & Tein, 1997; Anderson et al., 1993; Berenson, San Miguel & Wilkinson, 1992; Priest, 1992; Cosentio, 1989). The actual prevalence of sexual abuse nationwide is unknown. Nonetheless, it is generally assumed that the problem is far greater than one would expect and far greater than statistics presently reveal. There were 1,319 allegations of child sexual abuse in New Hampshire in 1997 (Bloom, 1999).

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 (Facts for Families: Child Sexual Abuse). Studies also show a link between sexual abuse and early onset of voluntary intercourse among females (Roosa & Tein, 1997; Butler and Burton, 1990). However, high levels of parental monitoring and support from at least one parent decreases the risk that sexually abused adolescents will develop problem behavior (Luster & Small, 1999).

Local youth were asked whether they have ever been "*sexually abused by an adult or someone older.*" Figure 5-24 shows that 4% of students reported forced sexual activity by an adult (females, 5% and males, 3%). These percentages represent both current and past episodes of sexual abuse. Three percent (3%) of these cases were reported as past occurrences and 1% of our teens reported being abused at the time of the survey.

**Figure 5-24: Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused By An Adult (By Gender)**



### **Forced Sexual Activity by Another Teen**

Earlier in this chapter, data were presented regarding the incidence of sexual activity among local youth. It is important to note that some percentage of sexual activity among teens is a response to emotional or physical pressure on the part of another teen. Because of concern over this phenomenon, the TAP survey asked students, "Have you ever been made to do something sexual that you didn't want to do, by another teenager?" The expression "something sexual" connotes sexual activities that include kissing, touching and sexual intercourse. Fourteen percent (14%) of all teens responded "yes" to this question (females, 17% and males, 9%). Figure 5-25 shows the percentage of those who responded "yes" in any way broken down by grade and gender.

**Figure 5-25: Teens Who Have Been Forced to Do Something Sexual by Another Teen (By Grade and Gender)**

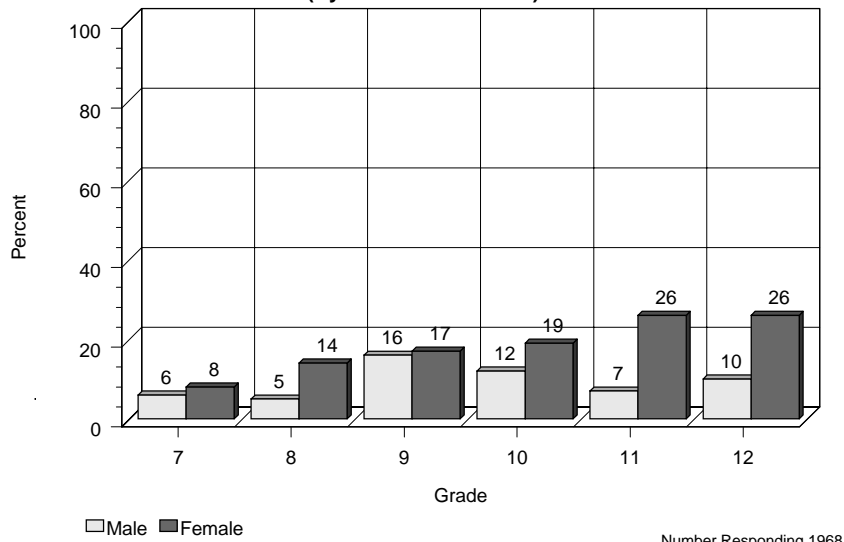
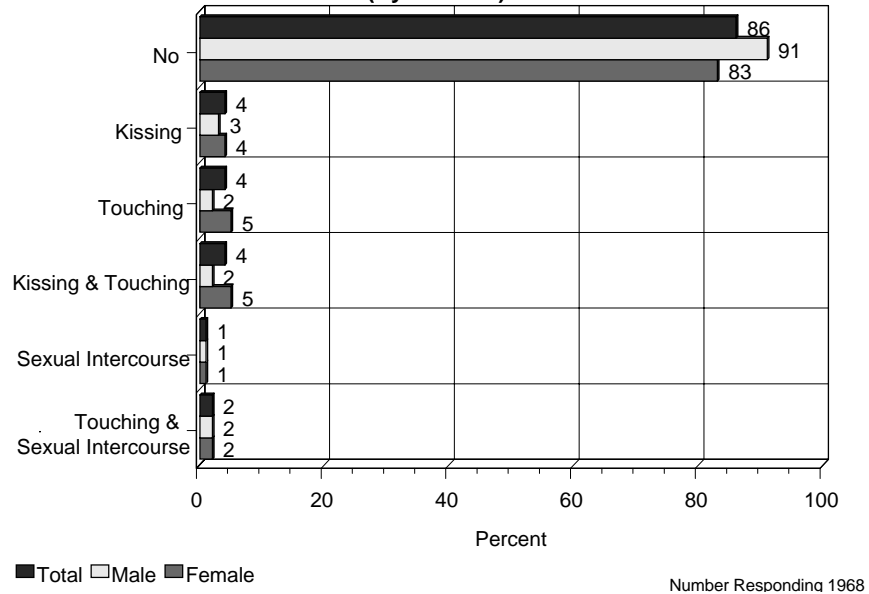


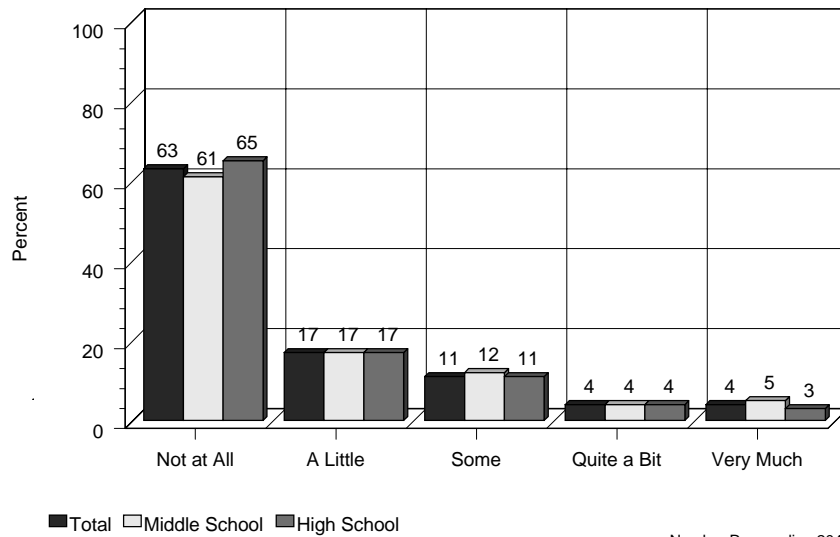
Figure 5-26 shows all responses broken down by gender.

**Figure 5-26: Teens Who Have Been Forced to Do Something Sexual by Another Teen**  
(By Gender)

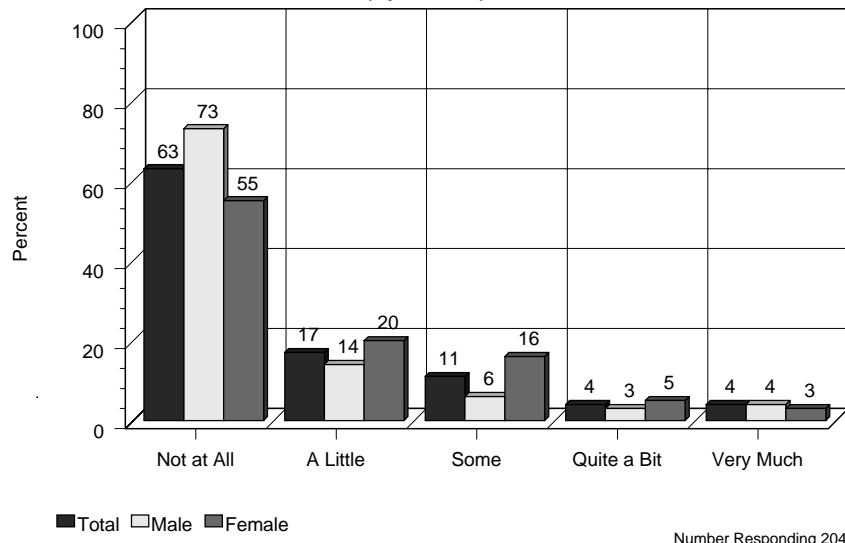


Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the students surveyed reported worrying to some degree about "being pressured into having sex." Figure 5-27 shows slightly more middle school youth reported being worried about this issue than high school youth (39% vs. 35%). In both middle school and high school, more females than males worry to some degree about this issue (middle school females, 45%; middle school males, 32%; high school females, 46% and high school males, 24%). Figure 5-28 shows the total breakdown by gender.

**Figure 5-27: Teen Worries About Being Pressured Into Having Sex (By School Level)**



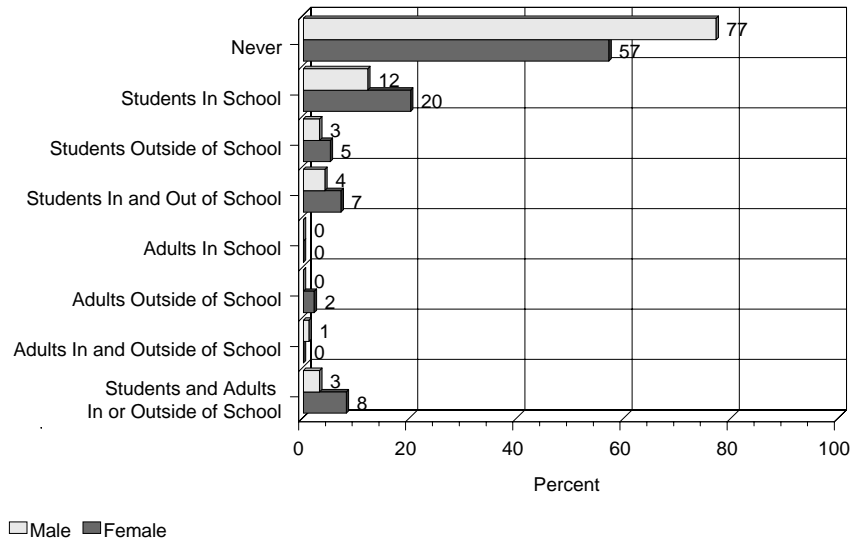
**Figure 5-28: Teen Worries About Being Pressured Into Having Sex (By Gender)**



**Sexual Harassment In and Outside of School**

Local youth were asked whether or not they had been a victim of sexual harassment (sexual harassment was defined as unwanted sexual name calling, making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks). Figure 5-29 shows that more students were harassed by other students in school than any other category. More females than males reported harassment in almost all categories.

**Figure 5-29: Teens Who Have Ever Been Sexually Harassed (By Gender)**



Number Responding 1967