



Survey of Healthy Youth Experimentation

A research project conducted by faculty and students at the University of Minnesota

During April 2004, you allowed us to come into your school and your students graciously shared their experiences with us. This is a summary of what we found. We would like to thank the teachers and staff for their support of this project, and the students who participated for their time and for all that they taught us.

Survey of Healthy Youth Experimentation (SHYE)

We started this research project in 2003 by talking with youth and parents across Minnesota. We conducted six group interviews with teenagers; and five group interviews with parents of teenagers. We asked teens questions about their experiences with experimentation and risk-taking and what advice they would offer to parents of teens. We asked parents questions about their teens' experiences with experimentation and risk-taking and about what it is like to parent a teenager who is experimenting. Based on what parents and teens told us, we developed the Survey of Healthy Youth Experimentation (SHYE). The SHYE includes questions about family relationships, peer relationships, participation in extracurricular activities, alcohol use, drug use, and sexual activity.

Sample

During April 2004, 253 students completed the Survey of Healthy Youth Experimentation during the school day. This included 97 7th graders, 89 8th graders, and 67 9th graders. About half of the students were female, 90% described themselves as White, 95% reported living in a two-parent family, and 74% reported that religion is "somewhat" or "very important" in their lives. Just over a quarter of youth reported working outside the home. Nearly two thirds (63%) of students said they plan to attend a 4-year college or pursue a graduate or advanced degree after high school, 11% plan to attend a community college or technical school, and 13% plan to either find a job or enlist in the armed forces.

Family

Overwhelmingly, students reported close, positive family relationships and parent-child communication. The majority of students agreed that the following statements were true or very much true for them:

- My family is very close (70.9%)
- I can talk with my mother about important things (74.4%)
- I can talk with my father about important things (63.3%)

Friends

We often think of the negative influence peers have on young people's behaviors. But only 32.0% agreed with the statement, "My friends have gotten me into trouble". And students told us about the positive influence their peers have on their behavior. Students agreed with the following statements:

- My friends have encouraged me to try different activities (66.5%)
- The friends I hang around with think it's wrong to get drunk (56.9%)
- My parents approve of my friends (83.5%)

Students also described feeling comfortable in sharing their opinion with peers. In fact, 86.9% of youth said they have admitted that what they like and don't like is different from their friends, and 83.3% said they have given their opinion on an unpopular issue in a conversation with friends.

Extracurricular Activities

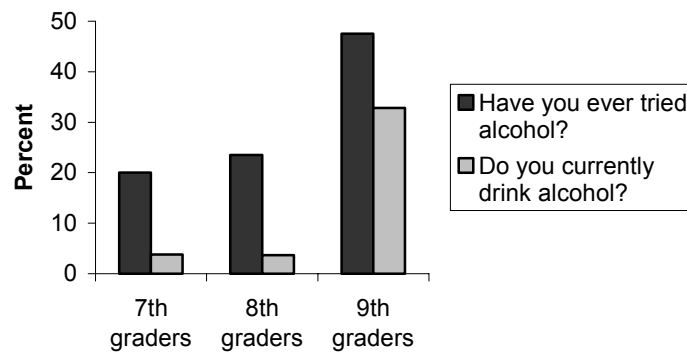
Students responded to a series of questions about their extracurricular activities. Students reported being actively involved in a range of different activities.

In the past six months:

- 73.5% have entered a competition
- 57.2% have joined a new club or activity
- 56.6% have held a leadership position in an activity

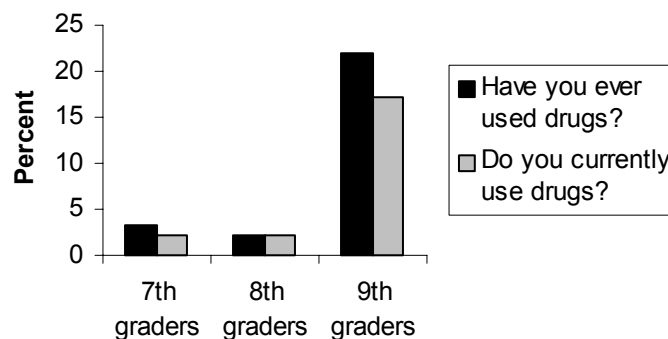
Alcohol Use

Across the country, 45.6% of 8th graders, and 65% of 9th graders report having tried alcohol^{1,2}. Students at your school are making better choices.



Drug Use

Although the SHYE was not designed to obtain detailed information on the types of drugs students have used, we did ask general questions about whether or not students have tried an illegal drug other than alcohol. Rates of drug use at your school were similar to rates across the country^{1,2}.

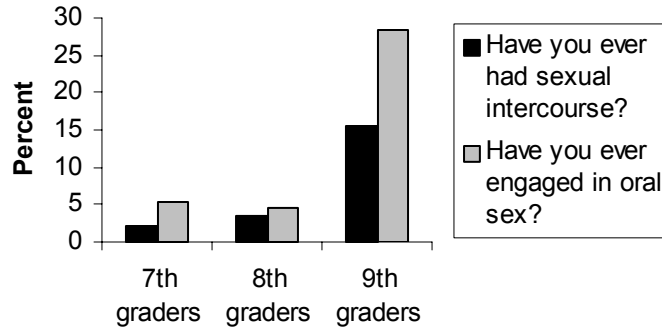


¹ <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/data/03data/pr03t1.pdf>

² <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NHSDA/2k3NSDUH/2k3results.htm#ch3>

Sexual Activity

According to national statistics, 32.8% of 9th graders have had sexual intercourse, and 9.3% of all young people have intercourse before the age of 13³. Once again, students at your school are making better choices.



What's Next?

Students reported positive family and peer relationships, high rates of participation in healthy activities, and low rates of participation in health-compromising behaviors. We are now using what we learned to revise the SHYE. We plan to administer SHYE II to youth across Minnesota, to continue to develop a better understanding of youth behavior from the perspective of youth.

To learn more about this research and to find useful resources, check us out on the web: www.parentingteens.che.umn.edu
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IN PARTNERSHIP...



³ <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5302.pdf>