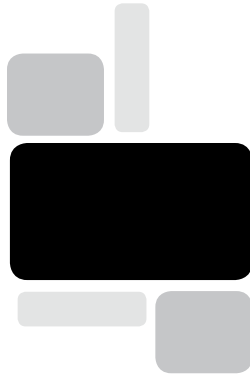


Building **Resilience** in Vulnerable Youth



The McCreary Centre Society 



Building Resilience in Vulnerable Youth

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The *Adolescent Health Survey* is a project of The McCreary Centre Society, a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of B.C. youth through research, education, and youth leadership projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people. Areas of interest include:

- Health promotion
- Health risk behaviours
- Youth participation and leadership skills development

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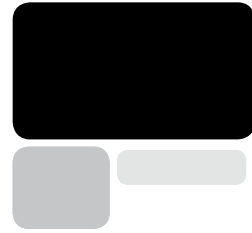
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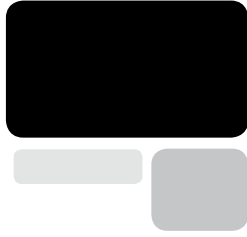
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Introduction

Some youth find the road to adulthood harder to navigate and face more challenges than their peers

Most adolescents in British Columbia navigate their teen years successfully. Surrounded by supportive families and communities, most youth do well in school and avoid the negative experiences and risky behaviours that can lead to long-term health problems. These youth have hope for the future and work hard to make their aspirations a reality. Their dreams and plans include further education, meaningful careers, involvement in their communities, and warm relationships with family and friends.

But some young people find the road to adulthood much harder to navigate and face more challenges than their peers. For these youth, the journey is filled with obstacles and stressors that can derail healthy development, leaving them vulnerable to poorer health and diminished achievement. Vulnerable youth are at greater risk for not finishing school, experiencing homelessness, problem substance use, and other health-compromising behaviours. Their difficult life situations and disconnection from meaningful relationships can leave some vulnerable youth at risk for emotional distress and some even attempt suicide.

In this report, we explore the experiences, risks and health challenges facing vulnerable youth in B.C., and describe protective factors that offer hope for helping them build resilience, connections and a positive future.

Risk and protective factors

The *risk factors* these youth face are associated with an increased likelihood of risky behaviours that are harmful to youth health and development. Conversely, *protective factors* promote healthy youth development and reduce the risk of harmful behaviours. For example, research has shown that youth who feel connected and safe at home with their family, at school, and in the community have better health, take fewer risks, and have higher educational aspirations.

Protective, positive relationships foster self-worth

My story started with childhood abuse and criminal neglect. I was vulnerable by all accounts, a prime candidate for long-term negative outcomes, yet somehow I emerged from childhood comparatively well equipped to be successful. I was not immune, however, to risky behaviour. I abused drugs, ran away, misused sex, and became convinced that suicide was my only way out. But behind the drugs and depression, the loneliness and isolation, I continued to struggle to define myself. This teenage quest to consolidate a stable self-concept created a critical period in which I was desperate for feedback. Then, at 15, an opportunity arose, and I eagerly became a representative and advocate for disadvantaged youth. I had never been successful in school, academically or socially, yet, in this circle, people listened when I spoke. That first opportunity led to another, and I began to incorporate concepts like “articulate” and “bright” into my self-concept. I began to believe that it was worth the effort to protect my health, physically and emotionally. I continued down this path of youth empowerment and advocacy, developing confidence and skills, travelling the globe, until I was no longer considered a youth. The organizations that facilitated my growth (the McCreary Centre Society was a major one) and the relationships I developed with adults were a strong source of protection.

Relationships with strong adult women gave me something to aspire to, helped me negotiate the convergence of my fragmented identity, and facilitated my positive self-image. Once I valued my own humanity, the opportunities for success opened up considerably. I am now a successful university student, wife and mother. I focus on encouraging the budding relationships between my children and myself, my partner and the community. As my journey continues, I recognize the value and power of protective relationships in those around me.

Patricia
25-year-old, two-time
Ken Dryden Scholarship recipient,
third-year undergraduate student



Key Findings

- Having protective factors in vulnerable teens' lives can decrease the likelihood these youth report negative behaviours and increase the chance they indicate positive attitudes and goals.
- The most potent protective factors for vulnerable teens include positive relationships in key settings:
 - » Connectedness to people at school and in their families
 - » Having someone in their family they can talk to about problems
 - » Having friends with healthy attitudes towards risky behaviours
- Safety at school was another important protective factor: young people who do not feel safe and welcome at school do not do well in school and are less likely to develop supportive relationships to help them thrive.
- Having parents present at key times in the day during the school week can also help reduce the odds of negative outcomes and foster positive opportunities for teens. Sharing the evening meal and being at home when teens go to bed showed positive benefits for vulnerable youth.

Positive relationships provide the most potent protective factors for vulnerable teens

About the Adolescent Health Survey



The McCreary Centre Society conducted three province-wide *Adolescent Health Surveys* (AHS) to gather data on youth health in B.C., in 1992, 1998 and 2003. In total, over 72,000 students completed the surveys over a decade, providing information about trends among B.C.'s youth. And in 2003, more than 30,500 students in grades seven to 12 filled out a questionnaire. The fourth AHS will take place in 2008.

Young people often establish lifelong attitudes and habits during adolescence, so survey questions were designed to identify factors that can influence present and future health. For instance, questions were asked about health status, risk behaviours, family background, and feelings of connectedness with family and school to assess how these broader determinants of health affect youth.

McCreary staff focused on sample size and selection, confidentiality, administration procedures, validity of responses, and data analysis to ensure the accuracy of the survey results.

Building Resilience in Vulnerable Youth is based on the third AHS, and focuses on vulnerable youth who are attending school. McCreary has conducted additional studies to collect data on the health status of street youth and young people in custody who are not enrolled or regularly attending school. *No Place to Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia* and *Time Out II: A Profile of B.C. Youth in Custody* can be downloaded from the McCreary website at www.mcs.bc.ca. In addition, McCreary is conducting another survey of street youth in the fall of 2006.

The Adolescent Health Surveys provide information about trends among B.C.'s youth

Want more information?

Visit the McCreary website to see the complete 2003 AHS provincial highlights report, regional reports, details of the survey methodology, information about McCreary, and additional publications from the Adolescent Health Surveys.

www.mcs.bc.ca



A Profile of Vulnerable Youth

“I moved to 25 foster homes and 10 schools in the first 11 years of my life. Constantly moving created instability, mistrust, anger, frustration, isolation, pain and sadness in my life.”

—19-year-old female

Who are our vulnerable youth?

Positive, supportive relationships are a key determinant of health among all age groups. Relationships with family and friends are particularly important for adolescents. Conversely, researchers have repeatedly found that certain stressors during childhood and adolescence create challenges for healthy development into adulthood, particularly:

- Physical abuse and sexual violence are among the most damaging influences on the emotional and mental well being of teens.
- Families struggling with substance use, mental health problems, and violence have difficulty creating supportive relationships for young people.
- Frequent moves, being in foster care, or running away from home make it harder for teens to stay connected with supportive adults and school, and to maintain positive friendships with peers.

Although vulnerable youth are at higher risk as they grow and develop, not all vulnerable teens drop out of school, struggle with addictions and violence, or attempt suicide. Consequently, learning what helps these teens not only survive but thrive, in spite of challenges to their healthy development, can identify possible protective factors for vulnerable youth. These factors give parents, schools, and governments new ways to offset risks and help all young people reach for the best possible future.

In this report, we look at two groups of vulnerable youth in school—those who have experienced abuse and those who have a challenging, unstable home life.

A history of abuse

A history of abuse was determined by affirmative responses to any one of three questions:

- *Physical abuse* – Youth who answered yes to:
 - » Have you ever been physically abused or mistreated by anyone in your family or anyone else?
- *Sexual abuse* – Youth who answered yes to one or both of the following questions:
 - » Have you ever been sexually abused? Sexual abuse is when anyone (including a family member) touches you in a place you did not want to be touched, or does something to you sexually which you did not want.
 - » Have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to? (Yes, by another youth/Yes, by an adult)

Vulnerable youth are at higher risk as they grow and develop

Youth were then divided into four categories:

- Never abused in their lifetime
- Experienced physical abuse in their lifetime
- Experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime
- Experienced both sexual and physical abuse in their lifetime

The different types of abuse were combined into a single category called “ever abused.” This report compares youth who were ever abused with those who were never abused.

The group who was abused includes youth of all ages. As youth age, they are more likely to have ever experienced abuse, showing that abuse is not limited to childhood and continues to happen to youth throughout adolescence. In addition, a quarter of female youth were abused, higher than the 14% of males who were abused.

Categories of abuse by gender (of all youth in school)			
	Male	Female	Total
Never abused	86%	75%	80%
Ever physically abused	10%	10%	10%
Ever sexually abused	2%	7%	5%
Been both physically and sexually abused	1%	8%	5%

Experience with abuse by gender (of all youth in school)			
	Male	Female	Total
Never abused	86%	75%	80%
Ever abused	14%	25%	20%

A challenging home life

Youth faced a challenging home life lacking stability when they:

- Moved three or more times in the past year
- Lived in a foster or group home in the past year
- Ran away from home in the past year
- Worried a lot about violence, drinking, or drug use in their home

Home life by gender (of all youth in school)			
	Male	Female	Total
Have a more stable home life	81%	77%	79%
Have a challenging home life	19%	23%	21%

Males and females were equally likely to have moved three or more times (7%), or to have lived in a foster or group home (2%), in the year before the survey. Females were more likely than males to have run away from home in the past year (10% compared to 7%), and to worry a lot about violence or drug use in the home (10% versus 8%). As a result, females were more likely than males to have a challenging, unstable home life (23% compared to 19%).

Overlap between groups

Some youth have both a challenging home life and have been abused:

- Youth who experienced abuse were more likely than youth who did not to have a challenging, unstable home life (38% compared to 17%).
- Youth with challenging home lives were more likely to have been abused than those with more stable home lives (35% versus 16%).

Key outcomes

Although researchers have identified a variety of potential health risks that are higher for vulnerable youth, this report focuses on three key negative behaviours that can seriously jeopardize health: attempting suicide, having problem substance use, and being involved in violence.

Research also shows certain positive attitudes and goals are strongly associated with long-term health and well being, such as: doing well in school, aspiring to post secondary education, or feeling in good or excellent health. *Building Resilience* looks at these measures of well being in the lives of vulnerable youth.

Negative behaviours

These three negative behaviours can seriously jeopardize youth health:

- *Suicide attempts in the past year* – Suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents, and youth who attempted suicide in the past year are at high risk for repeat attempts.
- *Problem substance use* – Substance use can affect every aspect of young peoples' lives, impairing their ability to complete school, maintain employment, or engage in healthy relationships. A number of other negative results can also occur with problem substance use, such as legal problems, accidents, injuries, unwanted sex and unprotected sex.
- *Involvement in violence* – Young people who engage in violent behaviours are more likely to be injured, involved in the criminal justice system, and isolated from supportive relationships as a result of their behaviours. These youth also pose a health risk to others.

Positive attitudes and goals

These three positive attitudes and goals are associated with long-term health and well being:

- *Positive school performance* – Education is one of the key determinants of health. Students who do well in school are more likely to be able to complete post secondary education, develop satisfying careers with better income levels and, in general, have healthier lives.
- *Educational aspirations* – Students who plan to graduate from high school and continue with post secondary education generally have a more positive outlook for the future, and are more likely to achieve their educational and employment goals.
- *Perceiving health as good or excellent* – Health is not simply determined by the absence of disease and disability; in fact, teens with chronic conditions can still feel healthy and function well in life. Similarly, teens without obvious physical illnesses can lack health and wellness. Youth perceptions of good health are strong predictors of long-term healthy behaviours and quality of life.

Definitions

Suicide—Attempted suicide, or had to be treated by a doctor or nurse after an attempt, in the past year.

Problem substance use—Binge drank three or more days in the past month, or ever used two or more drugs (other than marijuana), or used marijuana 20 or more times in the past month, plus had three or more negative consequences resulting from substance use.

Violence—Injured in a physical fight in the past year, or in four or more fights in the past year, or carried a weapon to school in the past 30 days.

Definitions

Positive school performance—Youth reported above average marks (As and Bs).

Educational aspirations—For college, a technical institute or university.

Health—Youth perceived their own health as good or excellent.

Gender comparisons for youth who experienced abuse

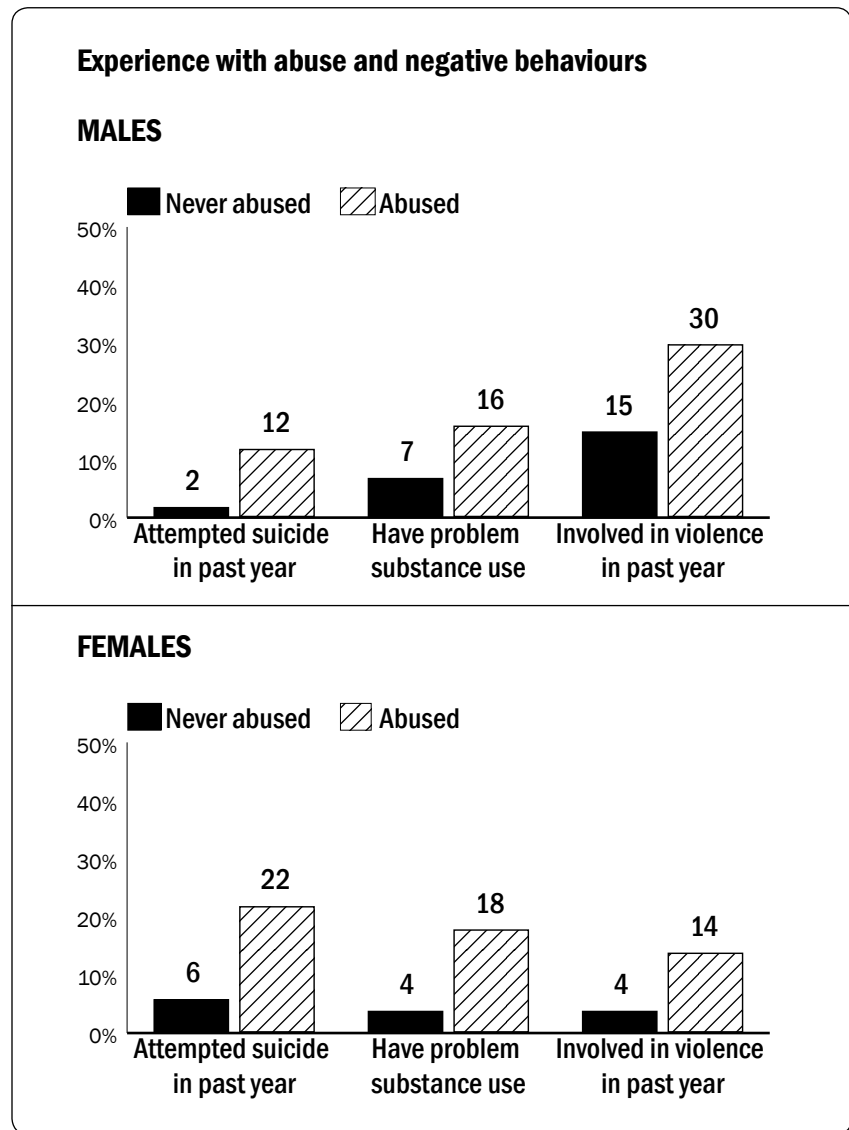
Negative behaviours

Male and female youth who were abused were more likely than those who had not to:

- Attempt suicide in the past year
- Have a problem with substance use
- Be involved in violence in the past year

Youth who were both sexually and physically abused were more likely than those who experienced one type of abuse to have attempted suicide in the year before the survey, have problem substance use, or be involved in violence in the past year.

Girls who experienced abuse were more likely than boys who were abused to attempt suicide in the year before the survey. Girls and boys who were abused were equally likely to have a problem with substance use. And boys who experienced abuse were more likely than girls who were abused to be involved in violence in the past year.

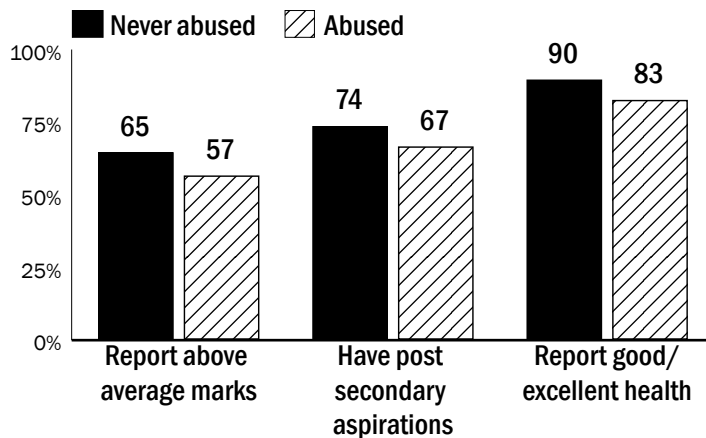


“I’ve experienced physical and sexual abuse and lived in care. But I’ve also developed positive attitudes and goals, because of the supports in my life. Every little bit helps, and that’s why I keep getting up every morning. Maybe I can make a difference in another young person’s life, like so many people did for me.”

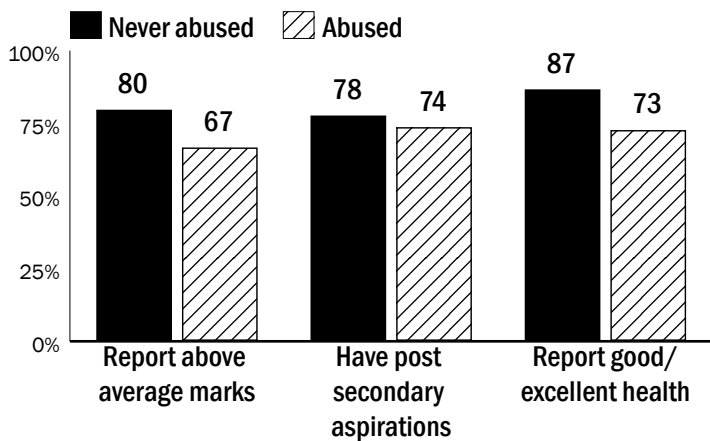
—22-year-old male

Experience with abuse and positive attitudes and goals

MALES



FEMALES



Positive attitudes and goals

Male and female youth who were abused were less likely than those who had not to have:

- Reported above average marks
- Post secondary aspirations
- Perceived their health as good or excellent

In addition, youth who experienced both sexual and physical abuse were less likely than those who experienced one type of abuse to have reported above average marks, or to perceive their health as good or excellent. They are equally likely to have post secondary aspirations.

Girls who experienced abuse were more likely than boys who had been abused to report above average marks and post secondary aspirations. Boys who were abused were more likely than girls who were abused to perceive their health as good or excellent.

Gender comparisons for youth with a challenging home life

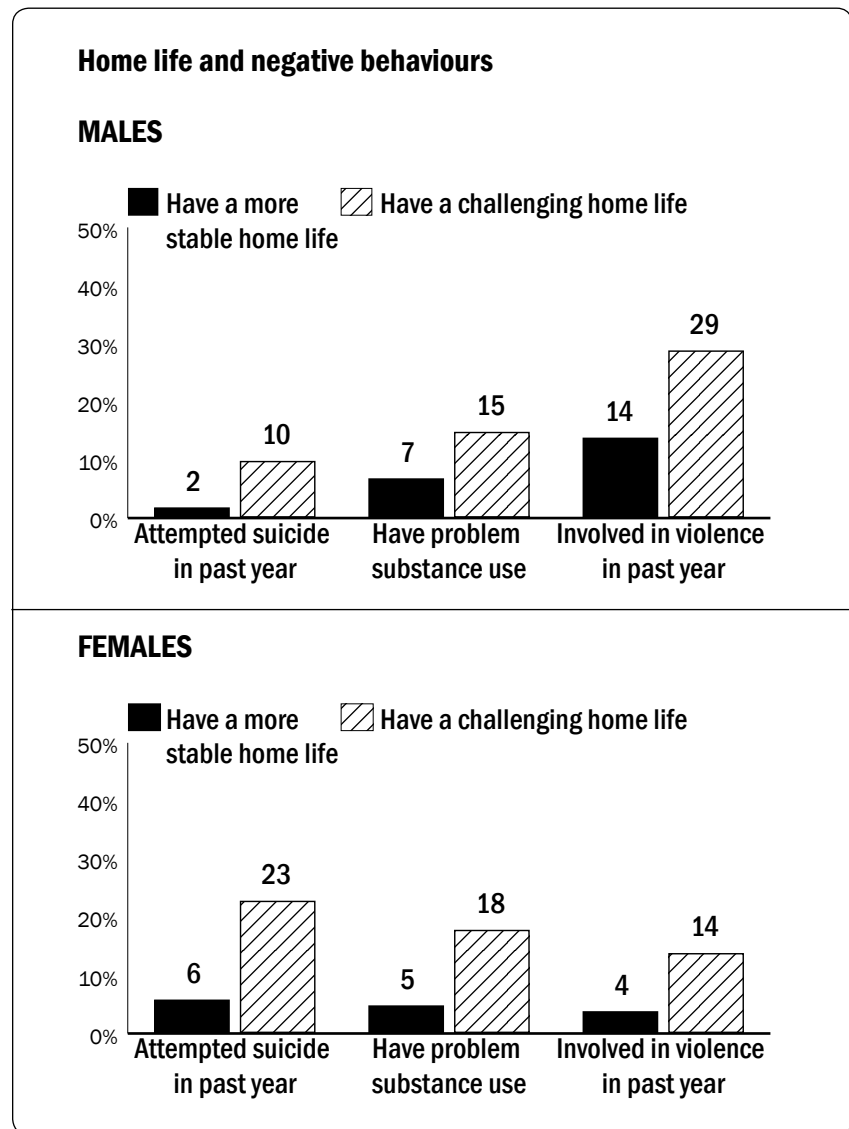
Negative behaviours

Youth with a challenging, unstable home life were more likely to have:

- Attempted suicide in the past year
- Problem substance use
- Been involved in violence in the past year

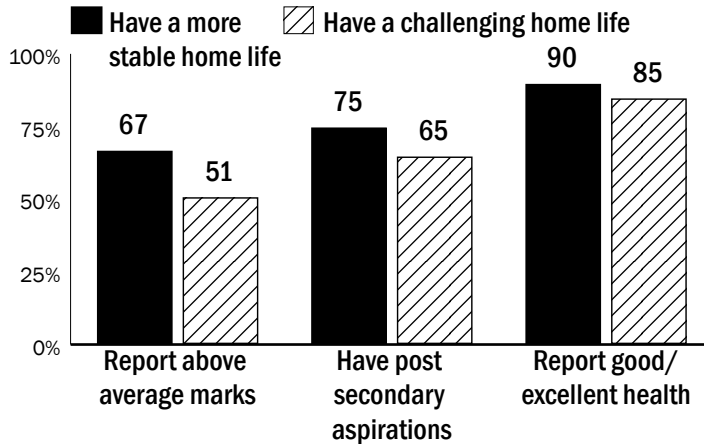
Among youth with a challenging home life:

- Girls were more likely than boys to have attempted suicide in the past year.
- Girls and boys were equally likely to have a problem with substance use.
- Boys were more likely than girls to be involved in violence in the past year.

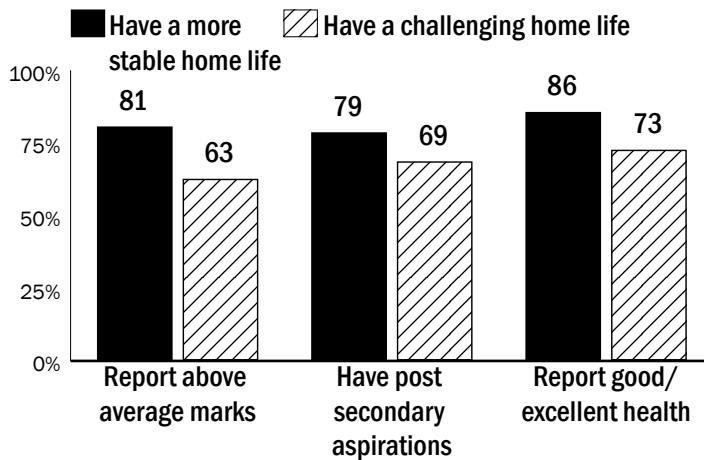


Home life and positive attitudes and goals

MALES



FEMALES



Positive attitudes and goals

Youth with a challenging, unstable home life were less likely to have:

- Reported above average marks
- Post secondary aspirations
- Perceived their health as good or excellent

Among youth with a challenging home life:

- Girls were more likely than boys to report above average marks.
- Girls and boys were equally likely to have post secondary aspirations.
- Boys were more likely than girls to perceive their health as good or excellent.

“I was abused, and tried to kill myself. But I had very good support to help me through it and better myself.”

—25-year-old male



Protective Factors Build Resilience

Can protective factors offset risks and build capacity?

Over the past few decades, a number of studies have identified protective factors that increase the likelihood of healthy development for youth. Young people need positive relationships and caring social environments to grow and thrive. Not surprisingly then, most of the protective factors for youth are related to different kinds of positive relationships, such as:

- Feeling cared about by their family
- Feeling connected to school
- Having caring adults to turn to with problems
- Having supportive friends with positive social values

Other protective factors create opportunities for mastering creative skills and artistic expression, for teamwork, for health-enhancing social activities, and for making a difference in the community through volunteer work. When these protective factors are present, teens report lower levels of emotional distress, are less likely to engage in health-compromising behaviours, and are more likely to adopt healthy behaviours such as wearing seatbelts, or using condoms if they are sexually active.

In some studies, protective factors appear to reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviours or experience negative outcomes, even in the presence of risk factors, such as depression or substance use.

But what about youth who are more vulnerable than others due to circumstances like a history of abuse or an unstable home life? Do these protective factors also buffer their trauma or challenging circumstances? When present, do protective factors help teens reach their potential, in spite of the stressors they face?

Youth need positive relationships and caring social environments to grow and thrive

We tested whether the likelihood of having negative behaviours and positive attitudes and goals would change among vulnerable teens, when they had various protective factors in their lives. We also identified the strongest protective factors for reducing negative behaviours or increasing the chances of positive health and school achievement. Because protective factors may exert different influences on younger and older teens, we adjusted for age in every analysis.

Evaluating protective factors

For the analysis in this report, we identified protective factors that are likely to reduce the chance a vulnerable youth will report negative behaviours such as attempting suicide, problem substance use, or being involved in violence. We also indicate which protective factors increase the likelihood a vulnerable youth will report more positive behaviours and goals such as having above average marks and post secondary aspirations, or rating their health as excellent or good. We investigated the protective properties of:

- Family factors
- School factors
- Friend factors
- Involvement in extracurricular activities
- Volunteering in the past year
- Feeling very religious or spiritual
- Feeling you are good at something

Family factors

Eleven questions were combined to give a family connectedness score; for example:

- How close do you feel to your mother?
- How much do you think your father cares about you?
- How much do you feel your family pays attention to you?

“I failed grade seven, eight and nine. But in grade 12, I was on the principal’s honour roll.”

—25-year-old male

In addition, youth were asked if they had a:

- Supportive adult in the family they feel they can talk to if they have a serious problem.
- Supportive adult outside the family they feel they can talk to if they have a serious problem.
- Parent at home on each of the past five days when they either woke up, came home from school, or went to bed.
- Parent in the room on each of the past five days when they ate an evening meal.

School factors

Seven questions were combined to give a school connectedness score; for example:

- How much do you feel your teachers care about you?
- Since school started this year, how often have you had trouble getting along with your teachers?

Students were also asked if they liked school and felt safe at school.

Friend Factors

The survey asked students if they had a peer group with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours. For instance, youth were asked if their friends would be upset if they:

- Beat someone up
- Got pregnant or got someone else pregnant
- Used marijuana
- Got drunk
- Got arrested
- Carried a weapon for protection
- Dropped out of school

Results

- Family and school connectedness were two of the most strongly protective factors for youth who were abused and youth with challenging home lives.
- Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours was also highly protective, and was more protective than family connectedness against problem substance use for both vulnerable groups.
- Liking school, feeling safe at school, and having a supportive adult in the family to talk to were consistently among the most protective factors for youth who experienced abuse and youth with unstable home lives.

Other protective factors had a less consistent positive influence and varied by gender and type of behaviour. Three factors—having an adult outside the family youth felt they could talk to about a serious problem, having a parent at home when youth came home from school, and feeling very religious or spiritual—were protective, but never made it into the top six protective factors for either vulnerable group. The relationship between extracurricular activities and negative and positive behaviours and goals was ambiguous and not clearly protective.

“Even though I moved to several different foster homes, this did not stop me from graduating or continuing on to university. I have the caring and loving support of those close to me to help me achieve my goals.”

—19-year-old female

Protective factors for youth who experienced abuse

Reducing risk

These tables summarize the top six factors that best protect youth who experienced abuse from being involved in risky behaviours like attempted suicide, problem substance use, and in violence.

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth who were abused report attempting suicide in the past year			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Having a supportive adult in the family	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family
Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth who were abused report having problem substance use			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Liking school	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	Liking school
Volunteering in the past year	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ½	Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days
Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ½	Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth who were abused report being involved in violence in the past year			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Liking school	★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days
Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family

More detailed information about the statistical results is available upon request.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ — ★ ★ Most protective to protective.

Supporting positive behaviour

These tables summarize the top six protective factors that increase the odds a youth who experienced abuse will report positive attitudes and goals, such as having above average marks, aspiring to post secondary education, and feeling in good or excellent health.

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth who were abused report above average marks			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Feeling safe at school	★ ★	★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Volunteering in the past year	★ ★	★ ★ ★	Volunteering in the past year

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth who were abused have post secondary aspirations			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Family connectedness
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★	★ ★	Feeling good at something
Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days	★ ★	★ ★	Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth who were abused feel they have good or excellent health			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Having a supportive adult in the family	★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family

More detailed information about the statistical results is available upon request.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ — ★ ★ Most protective to protective.

Protective factors for youth with challenging home lives

Reducing risk

These tables summarize the top six factors that best protect youth with a challenging, unstable home life from attempting suicide, having a problem with substance use, and being involved in violence.

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth with challenging home lives report attempting suicide in the past year			
	Males	Females	
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Having a supportive adult in the family	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Liking school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Having a parent at home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth with challenging home lives report having problem substance use			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Liking school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★	Liking school
Having a supportive adult in the family	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days
Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having a parent at home when youth woke up in the morning on each of the past 5 days

Top six protective factors that reduce the likelihood youth with challenging home lives report being involved in violence in the past year			
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school
Liking school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family
Having a parent home when youth went to bed on each of the past 5 days	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Liking school

More detailed information about the statistical results is available upon request.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ – ★ ★ Most protective to protective.

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth with challenging home lives report above average marks

	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	Family connectedness
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Volunteering in the past year	★ ★	★ ★	Volunteering in the past year
Feeling good at something	★ ★	★ ★	Feeling safe at school

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth with challenging home lives have post secondary aspirations

	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Having a parent in the room for the evening meal on each of the past 5 days	★ ★	★ ★	Feeling good at something
Feeling safe at school	★ ★	★ ★	Volunteering in the past year

Top six protective factors that increase the likelihood youth with challenging home lives feel they have good or excellent health

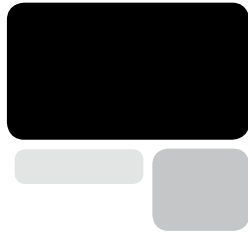
	Males	Females	
School connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	School connectedness
Family connectedness	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	Family connectedness
Feeling safe at school	★ ★ ★ ★ ½	★ ★ ★	Having a supportive adult in the family
Liking school	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Liking school
Having a supportive adult in the family	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Having friends with healthy attitudes about risky behaviours
Feeling good at something	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	Feeling safe at school

More detailed information about the statistical results is available upon request.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ — ★ ★ Most protective to protective.

Supporting positive behaviour

These tables summarize the top six protective factors that increase the odds youth with a challenging home life will report positive behaviours such as achieving above average marks, aspiring to post secondary education, and feeling in good or excellent health.



Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings for vulnerable youth—those who experienced abuse and those with challenging home lives—were remarkably consistent. Although they were more likely to report suicide attempts, problem substance use, and involvement in violence than their peers, having protective factors in their lives significantly decreased the likelihood of vulnerable teens reporting these negative behaviours.

Reducing exposure to risk is not enough, however. Vulnerable youth were also less likely to report positive measures of wellness such as doing well in school, having post secondary aspirations, and reporting good or excellent health. The good news is the same protective factors increased the likelihood of these positive measures for vulnerable youth.

School, family and friends matter

Relationships at school and with friends appear to be highly influential for these youth. Family was also important: when teens felt cared about by family, could talk to family about their problems, or had a parent present at key times in the day during the school week, they reported more positive outcomes and fewer health-compromising behaviours.

Safety at school was another important protective factor: young people who do not feel safe and welcome at school do not do well in school, and are less likely to develop the supportive relationships that help them thrive.

When teens felt cared about by family, they reported more positive outcomes and fewer health-compromising behaviours.

How can we help vulnerable teens?

Provide safe and caring schools

Schools can provide positive social environments and help isolated youth develop a sense of belonging. Teachers who demonstrate respect and caring for all students, staff who help teens get along with their teachers and with other students, and policies and practices that promote safe school environments contribute to positive outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Promote healthy attitudes about risky behaviours

Having friends with healthy attitudes toward risky behaviours makes it easier for vulnerable youth to avoid these risks. Schools and communities can help promote healthy values and attitudes among young people through communication, public campaigns, and positive role modelling. Families who encourage open communication and model healthy behaviours about substance use, violence, and staying in school are an important influence on the behaviour of their teens and their teens' friends.

Support families in parenting roles

Family relationships can make an important, positive difference. To achieve this, parents may need support with healthy parenting practices, stable and affordable housing and employment, family-friendly employment policies that allow parents to be home at key times, and help with the challenges of substance use and violence.

Vulnerable youth who cannot live with their parents need an adult to feel connected to, someone they can talk with about problems—perhaps a grandparent, aunt, uncle or other relative.

Provide opportunities to get involved

Volunteering and other opportunities in the community can help vulnerable youth achieve their long-term goals and aspirations, and build a sense of competence and self-worth.

Create an environment for positive youth development

Promoting a youth-positive society where all young people, even vulnerable youth, are seen as having resilience and strengths, not simply problems or weaknesses, can support the healthy development of all youth into successful adults.

“Engaging youth in helping others in similar situations gives us a sense of purpose, and can sometimes be the difference between life or death.”

—22-year-old male

McCreary Centre Society Publications

Reports for AHS III

Healthy Youth Development: Highlights from the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey III (2004)

Adolescent Health Survey III Regional Reports for: Northwest; Northern Interior; Thompson Cariboo Shuswap; Okanagan; Coast Garibaldi/North Shore; Kootenay Boundary; East Kootenay; North Vancouver Island; Central Vancouver Island; South Vancouver Island; Vancouver; Richmond; Fraser; and Fraser North. (2004)

Reports for AHS II

Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth (1999)

Adolescent Health Survey II: Regional Reports for: Kootenays Region; Okanagan Region; Thompson/Cariboo Region; Upper Fraser Valley Region; South Fraser Region; Simon Fraser/Burnaby Region; Coast Garibaldi/North Shore Region; Central/Upper Island Region; North Region; Vancouver/Richmond Region; Capital Region; East Kootenay Region; Kootenay Boundary Region; North Okanagan Region; Okanagan Similkameen Region; Thompson Region; Cariboo Region; Coast Garibaldi Region; Central Vancouver Island Region; Upper Island/Central Coast Region; North West Region; Peace Liard Region (2000)

Reports for AHS I

Adolescent Health Survey: Province of British Columbia (1993)

Adolescent Health Survey: Regional Reports for: Greater Vancouver Region; Fraser Valley Region; Interior Region; Kootenay Region; Northeast Region; Northwest Region; Upper Island Region; and Capital Region (1993)

Special group surveys and topic reports

Promoting Healthy Bodies: Physical activity, weight, and tobacco use among B.C. youth (2006)

Time Out II: A Profile of BC Youth in Custody (2005)

Raven's Children II: Aboriginal Youth Health in BC (2005)

British Columbia Youth Health Trends: A Retrospective, 1992-2003 (2005)

Healthy Youth Development: The Opportunity of Early Adolescence (2003)

Accenting the Positive: A developmental framework for reducing risk and promoting positive outcomes among BC youth (2002)

Violated Boundaries: A health profile of adolescents who have been abused (2002)

Violence in adolescence: Injury, suicide, and criminal violence in the lives of BC youth (2002)

Between the Cracks: Homeless youth in Vancouver (2002)

Homeless youth: An annotated bibliography (2002)

Time Out: A profile of BC youth in custody (2001)

The Girls' Report: The Health of Girls in BC (2001)

No Place to Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia (2001)

Making Choices: Sex, Ethnicity, and BC Youth (2000)

Raven's Children: Aboriginal Youth Health in BC (2000)

Lighting Up: Tobacco use among BC youth (2000)

Silk Road to Health: A Journey to Understanding Chinese Youth in BC (2000)

Mirror Images: Weight Issues Among BC Youth (2000)

Being Out-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Youth in BC: An Adolescent Health Survey (1999)

Our Kids Too-Sexually Exploited Youth in British Columbia: An Adolescent Health Survey (1999)

Adolescent Health Survey: AIDS-Related Risk Behaviour in BC Youth - A Multicultural Perspective (1997)

Adolescent Health Survey: Youth & AIDS in British Columbia (1994)

Adolescent Health Survey: Chronic Illness & Disability Among Youth in BC (1994)

Adolescent Health Survey: Street Youth in Vancouver (1994)

AHS III fact sheets

Physical Fitness Among BC Youth
Body Weight Issues Among BC Youth
Alcohol Use Among BC Youth
Illegal Drug Use Among BC Youth
Marijuana Use Among BC Youth
Tobacco Use Among BC Youth

AHS III youth fact sheets

Facts About Mental Health
Facts About Physical Health
Facts About Substance Use
Facts About Sexual Health
Facts About Smoking

Next Step

The Next Steps: BC Youths' Response to the AHS III and Ideas for Action (2006)

The Next Steps: A Workshop Toolkit to Engage Youth in Community Action. A project of the Adolescent Health Survey III (2005)

The Aboriginal Next Step: Results from Community Youth Health Workshops (2001)