

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fact Sheet FS-98-34

Personal Safety: Washoe County Students Report Key Concerns

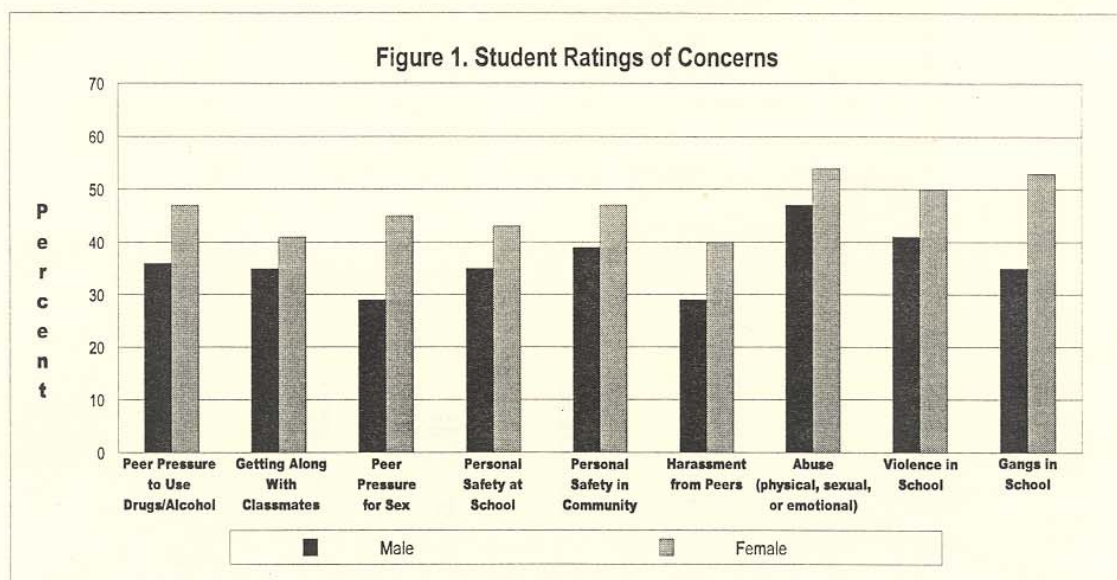
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As more reports of teen violence and problem behaviors become common knowledge, public concern about these issues increases. During the past decade both the rate of juvenile violent crime and the percentage of teen violent deaths have increased throughout Nevada and in Washoe County. Despite the rising number of reports and incidents, little is known of what adolescents feel about personal safety at home, at school and in their neighborhoods.

In early 1996, a total of 1,600 middle and senior high school students in seven Washoe County schools were questioned about personal safety. This fact sheet briefly summarizes student concerns.

Safety Concerns

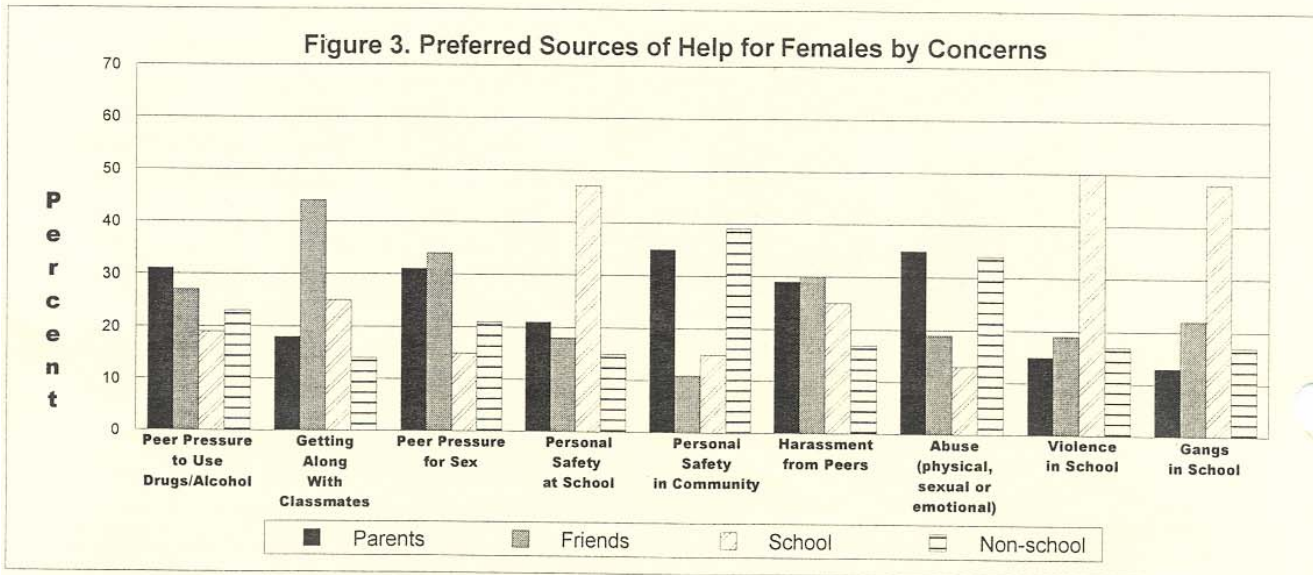
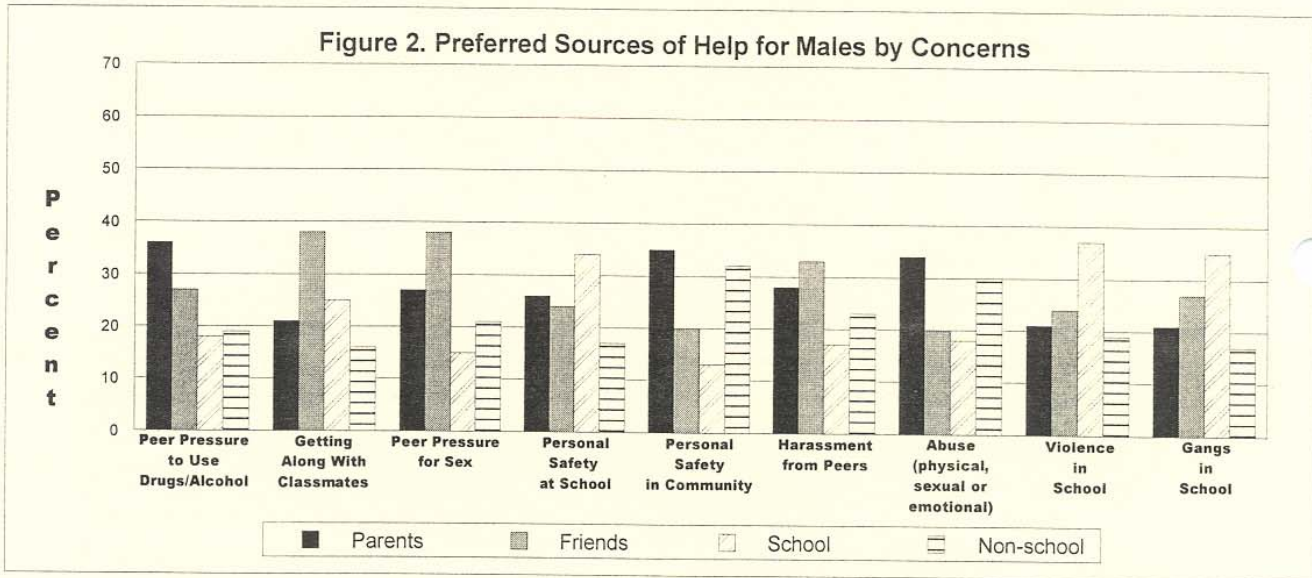
Students were asked their opinions about nine specific safety concerns. These concerns had been generated from previous interviews with teen and community leaders. Youth were asked to rate each concern on a scale of one to five (1+"not concerned" to 5="very concerned.") with only one rating per question. For this fact sheet, concerns are divided into responses made by males and females. Figure 1 shows the students' ratings.



Results are listed for students who marked the “concerned” or “very concerned” categories on the survey. Researchers felt that these two categories would encompass students who had difficulty committing to the high end of the scale. Personal abuse issues and violence in the school appeared uppermost on the minds of survey Washoe County students. Males reported that abuse, violence in school and personal safety in the community were their top concerns. Females reported that abuse, gangs in school and violence at school were their top priorities.

Where Do Youth Most Want to Turn For Help?

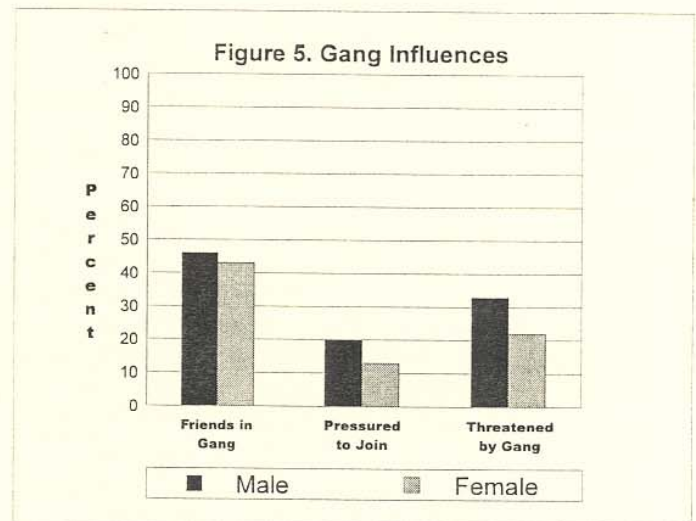
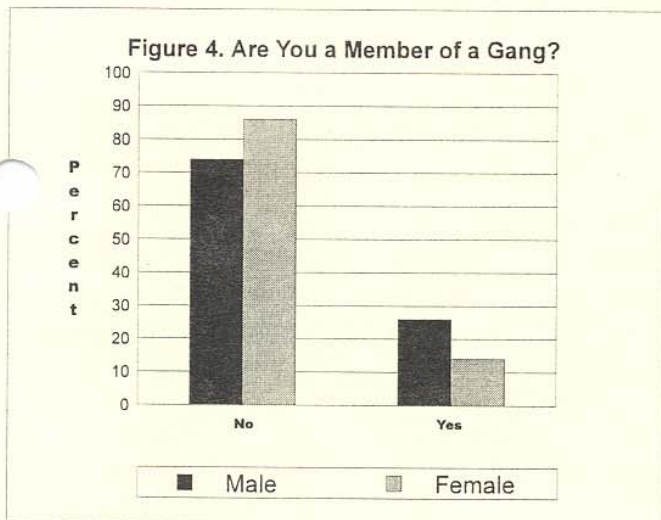
In another section of the survey, students were asked which of eight possible sources they would prefer to use in obtaining information or help. Sources included: parents, friends, school, non-school programs, handouts and brochures, telephone hotlines, church, and other adults. Students were asked to select the one source from which they “would most like to get information or help.” Figures 2 and 3 reveal the four most preferred sources of help listed by students.



Male and female students preferred similar sources of help. These youth wanted to turn to parents for help and information about personal safety in the community, abuse, and peer pressure to use alcohol. Friends were seen as a source of information or help in getting along with classmates, peer pressure for sex, and harassment. Schools were seen as valuable sources of help for issues that dealt with personal safety and violence at school. All sources were relatively important for each concern.

Participation in Risk Behaviors

The survey also asked students about their involvement in specific behaviors. Figures 5 and 6 identify student responses as they relate to gang membership and gang influences. Figures 7 and 8 show student responses as they relate to carrying weapons and being involved in fights. While 74% of males and 86% of females reported that they were NOT members of gangs, a number of students said they had friends in gangs or were pressured or threatened by gangs. Most females were not involved in fights and did not carry weapons. A slightly larger percentage of males indicated involvement in fights and in carrying weapons. Overall, the majority of students are NOT strongly involved in risky, personal safety behaviors, while a small minority of students are quite involved.



Implications

The issues surrounding personal safety and teen violence cannot be solved with “cookie cutter” approaches. Prevention efforts must be tailored to local concerns and local community issues – with an emphasis on creativity and collaboration among agencies and individuals. Students should be involved in solutions to personal safety problems. Some of the most successful personal safety programs have evolved from the ideas and efforts of adolescents. Adults are still seen as sources of support by most adolescents, and the importance of a network of caring adults should not be overlooked. In addition, building trust and developing partnerships between professionals (teachers, principals, nurses, social workers, etc.) and the rest of the community is critical to the success of violence and safety programs. Creating community advisory boards that guide, develop and review violence prevention and personal safety projects is particularly useful in reducing violence and enhancing the perception of public safety.

For More Information...

For more information concerning this survey contact: Sarah Chvilicek, Washoe County Extension Youth Development Coordinator at P. O. Box 11130, Reno, NV 89520 (720) 784-4848. For additional information on personal safety issues and youth, you may want to read these references:

Books

Brendtro, Larry K., Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern. 1990. *Reclaiming Youth At Risk*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Dryfoos, Joy G. 1990. *Adolescents At Risk. Prevalence and Prevention*. New York: Oxford Press.

Kimball, G. 1997. *The Teen Trip, the Complete Resource Guide*. Equality Press: Chico, CA.

Lerner, Richard M. 1995. *America's Youth In Crisis: Challenges and Options for Programs and Policies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Youth Indicators: Trends in the Well-Being of American Youth. 1991. U. S. Department of Education, Washington, D. C.

Educational Materials

I Can Problem Solve: An Interpersonal Cognitive Problem-Solving Program. (1992). \$39.95. Available from: Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, P.O. Box 9177, Department 170, Champaign, Illinois 61826, (217) 352-3273.

Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program. (1993). Educators for Social Responsibility, Metropolitan Area. Available from: 163 Third Avenue, #103, New York, New York 10003; (212) 387-0225.

Straight Talk About Risks (STAR). Washington: Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, (1992). Available from: 1225 Eye Street, Northwest, Room 1150, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 289-7319.

Dealing With Anger: Givin' It, Takin' It, Workin' It Out. A Violence Prevention Program for African American Youth. \$495. Available from: Research Press, 2612 North Mattis Avenue, Champaign, Illinois 61821 (217) 352-3273.