

Mental Health

The following report is based on a portion of self-reported data from the 2002 Hamilton County Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted among 2,752 Hamilton County students in grades 9 through 12. A total of 19 schools, including 16 public and 3 private schools, participated in the survey. The questionnaire was designed by the Centers for Disease Control with eight questions generated by the Chattanooga Hamilton County Regional Health Council. The questionnaire included 96 questions addressing behaviors concerning personal safety, violence, depression and suicidal thoughts, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, sexual behaviors, diet, and exercise. Within the analysis, all discussions of differences between respondent groups are based on differences which are statistically significant.

The survey was administered in the classroom and relies on anonymous, self-reported responses.

Executive Summary

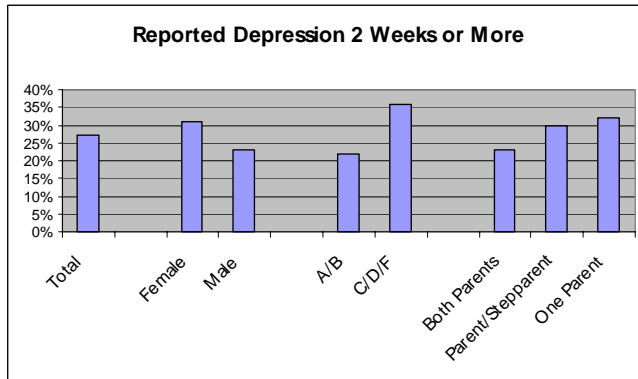
- ▼ Overall, 27% of respondents reported depression within the past year, defined as feeling “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities.”
- ▼ Reported depression was significantly higher among students who had been victims of abuse or harassment which included the following: forced intercourse (49%); being hit or slapped by boyfriend or girlfriend (43%); being the object of comments about race or ethnicity (43%), sex (41%), and physical appearance (37%).
- ▼ Within the past year 16% of students seriously considered suicide, 15% made a plan about how they would attempt suicide, and 10% actually attempted suicide.
- ▼ Depression and suicide attempts were associated with increased participation in the broad spectrum of risky behaviors, including smoking, alcohol, drugs, sex, and lack of seat belt use.
- ▼ Females were more likely than males to report depression, seriously considering suicide, and planning suicide. However, males were more likely than females to attempt suicide. This implies that suicide attempts by males may be impulsive rather than planned.
- ▼ Reported incidences of depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts were higher among white students than black students, and higher for students from parent/stepparent and single-parent homes than students from two-parent homes. In addition, the incidences of depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts were higher among poorer performing students (mostly C’s, D’s, or F’s) than among better performing students (mostly A’s or B’s).

▼ Depression

A. General

To determine the possible incidence of depression, students were asked whether or not over the past year they ever felt “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities.” Overall, 27% of students experienced such feelings. While some demographic groups reported significantly more depression than others, no less than 22% of students in any one group reported depression. Reported depression was higher among:

- ▼ Females than males (31% vs. 23%)
- ▼ Poorer performing students (primarily C’s, D’s, or F’s) than better performing students (primarily A’s or B’s) (36% vs. 22%)
- ▼ Students living in single-parent or parent/stepparent homes than two-parent homes (32% and 30% vs. 23%)



B. Depression and Other Factors

Overall 27% of students reported they had been depressed within the past year. The incidence of depression among students who have been victims of abuse or harassment is significantly higher than the average student, as detailed below.

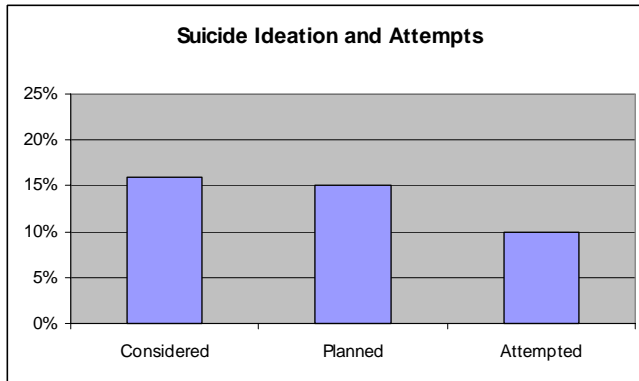
	% Reporting Depression	
	Experience	No Experience
Forced to have sexual intercourse	49%	24%
Hit or slapped by a boyfriend or girlfriend	43%	26%
Offensive comments about race or ethnicity	43%	23%
Unwanted sexual comments	41%	20%
Comments on physical appearance	37%	21%

In addition, students reporting depression were more likely to have engaged in the broad spectrum of risky behaviors, including smoking, alcohol, drugs, sex, and lack of seat belt use.

II. Suicide Ideation and Attempts

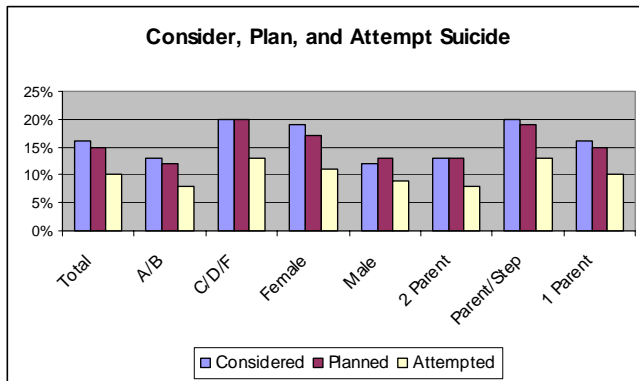
A. General

Students were asked three questions about suicidal thoughts and attempts over the past twelve months. Overall, 16% of students reported they had seriously considered attempting suicide; 15% had made a plan about how they would attempt suicide; and 10% had actually attempted suicide.



B. Demographic Comparisons

Suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts were all associated with school performance. Poorer performing students were more likely than better performing students to report all three activities. Female students were more likely to consider and plan suicide than males, but not significantly more likely to actually attempt suicide. This implies that suicide attempts by males may be impulsive rather than planned. Students from parent/stepparent families were more likely to seriously consider suicide than students in other family arrangements, but living situation was not associated with planning and attempting suicide.



C. Depression and Suicide Ideation

Students who had reported depression were more likely than those not experiencing depression to report suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Behavior	Depression Past Year	
	Yes	No
Seriously considered suicide	40%	7%
Made Plan for suicide	35%	8%
Attempted Suicide	12%	5%

D. Suicide Attempts and Other Risky Behaviors

Overall, 10% of students reported they had attempted suicide within the past year. However, students who have engaged in other risky behaviors are between two and five times more likely to attempt suicide than those not engaging in those behaviors. Most notably, students who have used ecstasy are 5.3 times more likely to attempt suicide than students who have not used ecstasy (37% vs. 7%). Students who have used inhalants are 4.9 times more likely to report a suicide attempt than those who haven't used inhalants (39% vs. 8%). Further, students using all three gateway drugs -- cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana -- are 4.8 times more likely to have attempted suicide than students who use none of those substances (24% vs. 5%). Following is a list comparing the percentage of students attempting suicide according to whether or not they engage in these and other risk behaviors.

Risk	% Attempting Suicide	
	Engage	Don't Engage
Current inhalant use	39%	8%
Ever use ecstasy	37%	7%
Cigarettes & marijuana & alcohol (vs. none of these)	24%	5%
Rate self very underweight or very overweight	23%	8%
Smoke marijuana	21%	6%
Sexual intercourse in past 3 months	17%	7%
Smoke cigarettes	19%	6%
Physical fight past year	17%	6%
Drink alcohol	15%	7%

E. Suicide Attempt and Medical Treatment

Of the 246 students who had attempted suicide, 102, or 42%, reported the attempt resulted in an injury that had to be treated by a medical professional.