

## Youth Violence and Harassment

*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

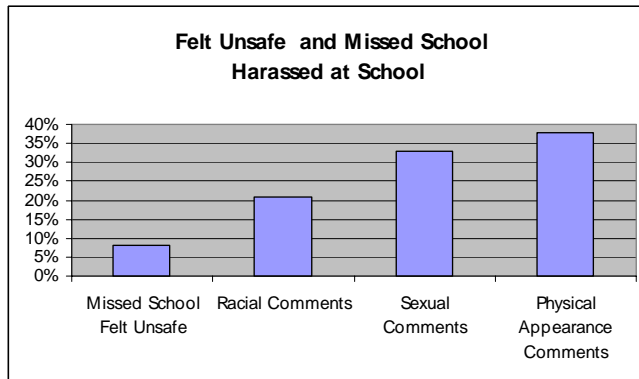
- ▼ A substantial number of student respondents have been harassed by other students. Specifically, 38% had been the object of comments about their weight, size or physical appearance, 33% had experienced offensive sexual comments, and 21% had been the object of offensive racial comments. A higher percentage of black students than white students reported each of these types of comments. Racial comments were more likely to be directed toward males, while sexual comments tended to be directed toward females.
- ▼ One-third of students reported they had been in a physical fight within the past year, including 39% of males and 24% of females. Significant differences in reported fighting exist among the different demographic groups; however, among all groups studied the minimum incidence of fighting was 21%.
- ▼ Fourteen percent of students reported that, during the past year, a boyfriend or girlfriend had purposely hurt them, with no significant differences reported by gender. Eleven percent of students (14% of girls; 7% of boys) indicated they had ever been forced to have sexual intercourse against their will.
- ▼ Overall, fighting peaked in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and decreased with each subsequent year. Ninth grade students reported the highest levels of physical fighting, fighting at school, and being threatened with a weapon at school. Since student enrollment declines annually after 9<sup>th</sup> grade (primarily due to dropouts), reports of less fighting may be attributed to student attrition as well as to increasing maturity.
- ▼ Overall, 22% of students carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club within the past month, and 8% had carried this type of weapon on school property. Seven percent carried a gun within the past month. Male students were more likely than female students to carry weapons.
- ▼ Weapon carrying was associated with several other risk behaviors. Over one in five students carried a weapon in the past month -- a number which was significantly higher among students reporting harassment, abuse or fighting. Similar findings were associated with students who carry guns (7% of all students). The data cannot impute causality. For example, one cannot determine that a student carries a weapon *because* he has been the object of abuse or harassment. One can only say that these behaviors tend to occur more often in people experiencing abuse and harassment.

- ▼ Black students in the sample were significantly more likely than white students to be exposed to and involved in harassment and violence, including fighting, and being threatened by a weapon (but not carrying a weapon). A greater percentage of black students than white students were also more likely to have missed school in the past month because they felt unsafe.
- ▼ Each of the violent and harassment behaviors studied was reported by a greater percentage of low performing students (makes primarily C's, D's, or F's) than better performing students (makes primarily A's or B's).

## I. Harassment

### A. General

Students were asked whether they had missed any days of school within the past month because they did not feel safe. In addition, students indicated whether or not offensive comments had been made to them or about them, while at school, or on their way to or from school, based on three criteria – race, sex, or physical appearance. The overall responses to each question are illustrated below.



### B. Missed School Because Felt Unsafe

Overall, 8% of students indicated they had missed one or more days of school within the past month because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. Missing school for this reason was higher among:

- ▼ Black students than white students (13% vs. 5%)
- ▼ Low performing students (primarily C's, D's, or F's) than better performing students (primarily A's or B's) (11% vs. 5%)

### C. Offensive Comments Based on Race

One in five students reported that offensive comments had been made to them, or about them, based on their race or ethnicity, while they were in school or on their way to or from school. Racial comments were more likely to be reported by:

- ▼ Male students than female students (24% vs. 18%)
- ▼ Black students than white students (27% vs. 17%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (25% vs. 19%)

### D. Offensive Sexual Comments

One-third of students reported that offensive sexual comments had been made to them, or about them, while they were in school or on their way to or from school. Offensive comments of this kind were more likely to be reported by:

- ▼ Females than males (42% vs. 24%)
- ▼ Black students than white students (43% vs. 30%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (38% vs. 30%)

### E. Based on Weight, Size, or Physical Appearance

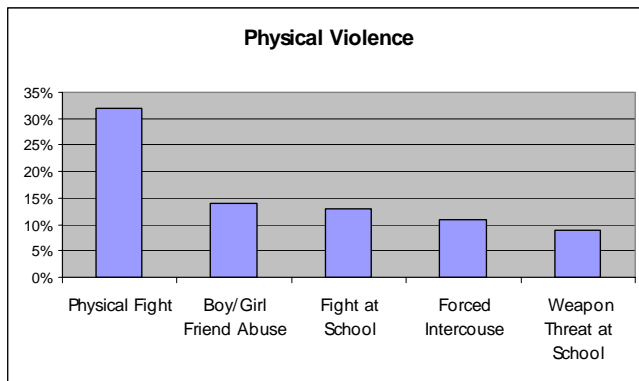
Thirty-eight percent of students reported that others had made offensive comments, to them or about them, based on weight, size, or physical appearance while they were in school or on their way to or from school. Offensive comments of this kind were more likely to be reported by:

- ▼ Black students than white students (44% vs. 36%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (43% vs. 35%)
- ▼ 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, than 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (43%, 40%, 35%, and 31%, respectively)

## II. Physical Violence

### A. General

Students were asked several questions about they had engaged in, or had been the victim of, certain violent behaviors. Overall reported violent behaviors are charted below, followed by a detailed description of each behavior.



### B. Physical Fight

One-third of students surveyed reported they had been in a physical fight within the past year. Four percent of students had sustained injuries in a fight that were treated by a medical professional.

Regardless of the demographic group, large numbers of students have been in a physical fight. Significant differences in reported fighting exist among the different demographic groups; however, among all groups described below the minimum incidence of fighting was 21%. Reported incidence of physical fighting is higher among:

- ▼ Males than females (39% vs. 24%)
- ▼ Black students than white students (39% vs. 28%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (44% vs. 23%)
- ▼ Ninth grade students vs. 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (40% vs. 33%, 29%, and 21%, respectively)
- ▼ Students living with both parents vs. students in parent/stepparent or in single-parent households (26% vs. 36% and 37%, respectively)

### C. Physical Fight on School Property

Overall, 13% of students had been in a physical fight on school property within the past year. Incidence of physical fighting on school property is higher among:

- ▼ Males than females (17% vs. 8%)
- ▼ Black students than white students (16% vs. 11%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (20% vs. 8%)
- ▼ Ninth grade students vs. 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (18% vs. 13%, 11%, and 7%, respectively)

#### **D. Been Threatened With Weapon on School Property**

Nine percent of students reported they had been threatened with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club on school property. Reported incidence of being threatened on school property is higher among:

- ▼ Black students than white students (12% vs. 8%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (12% vs. 7%)
- ▼ 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, than 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (12% vs. 9%, 9%, and 5%, respectively)

#### **E. Physical Abuse by Boyfriend or Girlfriend**

Fourteen percent of students reported that, during the past year, a boyfriend or girlfriend had purposely hit, slapped or physically hurt them. Lower performing students were more likely to have experienced this behavior than better performing students (17% vs. 11%). No other demographic differences were indicated.

#### **F. Forced Intercourse**

Eleven percent of students reported they had ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Forced intercourse was higher among:

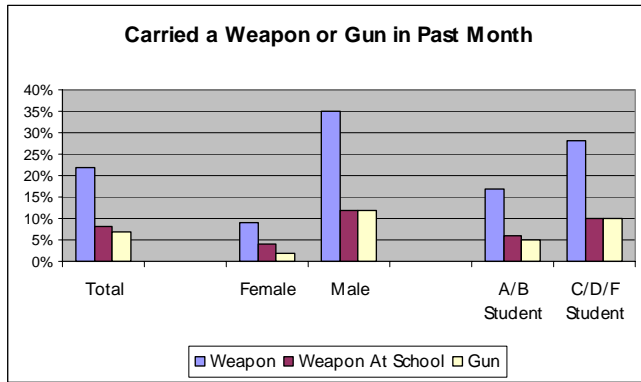
- ▼ Females than males (14% vs. 8%)
- ▼ Lower performing students than better performing students (14% vs. 9%)

### III. Weapon Carrying

#### A. General

Overall, 22% of students surveyed reported they had carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club within the past month, and 8% carried a weapon of this type on school property. Seven percent reported carrying a gun within the past month.

Weapon carrying was more common among males, and low performing students. There were no statistically significant differences according to grade in school, or race.



#### B. Weapon Carrying and Other Behaviors

Weapon carrying is associated with several other risk behaviors. While 22% of all students carried weapons, the percentage was significantly higher among students reporting harassment, abuse and fighting. Similar findings were associated with students who carry guns (7% of all students).

