

Executive Summary



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To promote and protect the health of Canadians through leadership, partnership, innovation and action in public health. — *Public Health Agency of Canada*

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Background

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)

The HBSC examines the health and health behaviours of youth aged 11-15 years through a population health theory lens. This theory considers both individual and collective factors and conditions within broadly defined determinants of health (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013). Among youth, physical and social environmental determinants include their home life, school life, peer groups, neighbourhood settings, socioeconomic status, and health and risk behaviours.



Purpose

The main purposes of the HBSC are to understand youth health and well-being and to inform education and health policy and health promotion programs, nationally and internationally. The HBSC is conducted every four years following an internationally approved research protocol. By collecting common indicators of adolescent health across multiple countries and administering the survey every four years, health behaviours in youth can be compared internationally, within nations, and over time.

The primary objectives of the HBSC are to:

- initiate and sustain national and international research on health behaviour, health and well-being, and their social and physical contexts in school-aged children;
- contribute to theoretical, conceptual, and methodological development in adolescent health research;
- monitor health and health behaviours and social and physical contexts of school-aged children;
- disseminate findings to the relevant audiences;
- provide an international source of expertise on adolescent health for public health and health education.

Methods

In Canada, the HBSC is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and conducted by Queen's University. The survey protocol and associated questions asked of Canadian students are developed through a broad-based consultation with PHAC, provincial and territorial Ministries of Health and Education through the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, students, and the Canadian HBSC team.

The Canadian HBSC Survey:

- The student questionnaire represents the core source of information in the HBSC.
- Questionnaires were administered to school classes during one 45-70 minute session.
- Researchers were granted ethics clearance for the study by Research Ethics Boards from both Queen's University and PHAC/Health Canada.
- In Canada, we targeted a national weighted representative sample and, for some provinces and territories, a representative sample within those jurisdictions.
- All provinces and two territories (Yukon and the Northwest Territories) participated in 2018.

Key Findings

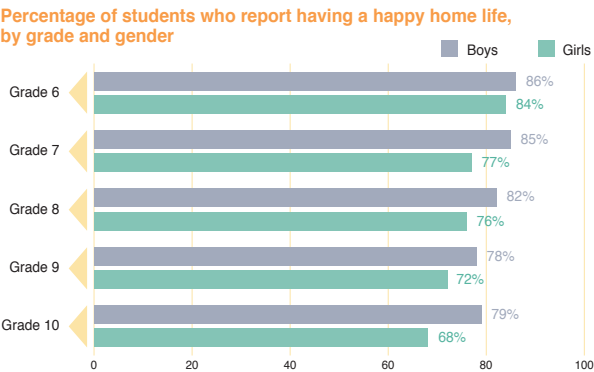
Findings presented in this report include detailed observations about the health and well-being of young Canadians. In addition, there were four major themes that emerged from the survey findings.

- **The mental health and relationships of grade 9 and 10 girls are of great concern.** Girls in grades 9 and 10 are consistently reporting the most negative health experiences relating to their mental health and relationships. For example, they have the highest levels of subjective health complaints, feeling hopeless, sad, nervous, and low confidence. In addition, high proportions of these girls report they feel their parents do not understand them, and they have low levels of teacher and friend support.
- **Positive relationships in homes and families matter.** Positive relationships are a cause for celebration. The majority of students are reporting happy home lives and positive relationships with their mothers and fathers.
- **Profiles of risk-taking are changing.** While young people report less engagement in many forms of risk-taking (e.g., cigarette smoking, sexual intercourse), engagement in other types of risk-taking and negative health behaviours are on the rise and require future attention (e.g., electronic cigarette use/vaping, problematic social media use, and cyber-bullying).
- **Social media use is a growing public health issue among young people.** Although social media can be used in positive ways to communicate, connect and engage with others, its use can also be negative, including exposure to cyber-bullying and symptoms of addiction. Although many students report intensive (frequent) social media use and few report problematic (symptoms of addiction) social media use, levels of both increase with grade. Increased understanding of social media use can contribute to the promotion of healthy social media use and prevention of unhealthy use.



Home and Family

The majority of students in Canada report having a happy home life. They also report positive relationships with their parents, and feel that they are generally understood by them. There are some exceptions. The home life for grade 9 and 10 girls is more challenging – they are less likely to feel understood and are more likely to report they would like to leave home at times.



Friends

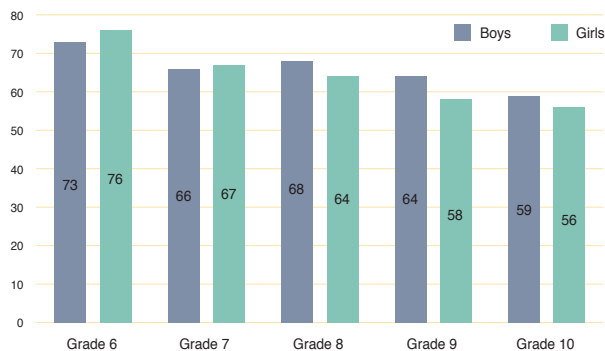
Many students report having frequent contact online with friends, and this increases with grade. It is concerning that the percentage of girls in grades 8 to 10 who report that they have a same-sex friend to talk to has been decreasing over the last two decades. On the other hand, it is encouraging that the majority of students report that most of their friends engage in positive behaviours, and relatively few report that most of their friends engage in risky behaviours.



School

Over time, more and more grade 10 girls report feeling a lot of pressure around school work and school performance. A substantial proportion of students in grades 9 and 10 report that their teachers are not supportive, nor are their peers. The combination of increased school pressure and perceived lack of support may be contributing to mental health challenges experienced by older girls.

Percentage of students who report that their teachers care about them as a person, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

Community

Less than one-half of young people in Canada perceive high levels of support from the people in the communities that they live in. Increases in neighbourhood distrust observed since 2002 are of concern. In each of grades 6 to 10, a higher percentage of girls reported involvement in volunteer work compared to boys.

Physical Activity, Screen Time, and Sleep

While the majority of students adhere to Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines for sleep, adherence to related screen time guidelines is poor. Further, only one-quarter of Canadian students report participating in a least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity.

Healthy Eating

The percentages of students that report daily consumption of fruit and vegetables continue to rise, while the percentages reporting sweets and soft drink consumption continue to decline. The extent of eating in fast food restaurants, skipping breakfast during the school week, and going to school or bed hungry due to a lack of food in the home were each notable findings related to healthy eating and nutrition.



Healthy Weights

Percentages of students categorized as being overweight and obese in grades 6 to 10 have not changed substantially since 2002. Higher percentages of girls than boys report thinking that their body is “too fat”, while higher percentages of boys than girls report thinking that their body is “too thin”, illustrating the complex social pressures faced by students with respect to their body image.

Injury and Concussions

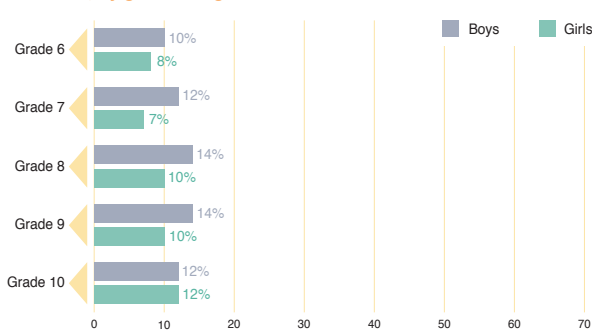
Injuries remain one of the leading causes of death, disability and lost productivity among students. Most serious injuries occur in three types of environments: sports facilities, schools, and at home, offering targets for intervention. About 1 in 10 Canadian youth report that they were diagnosed with a concussion in the past year.

Bullying and Teen Dating Violence

The percentages of students who report being bullied have remained relatively stable over time. Involvement in bullying is a gendered issue with more girls than boys report being bullied and more boys than girls report bullying others. More girls than boys report being victimized in their dating relationships, but boys and girls are equally likely to perpetrate teen dating violence. Supporting youth in engaging in healthy relationships can help to prevent bullying and teen dating violence.

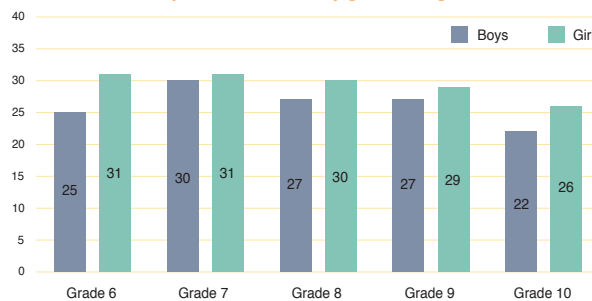


Percentage of students reporting one or more concussions in the past 12 months, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

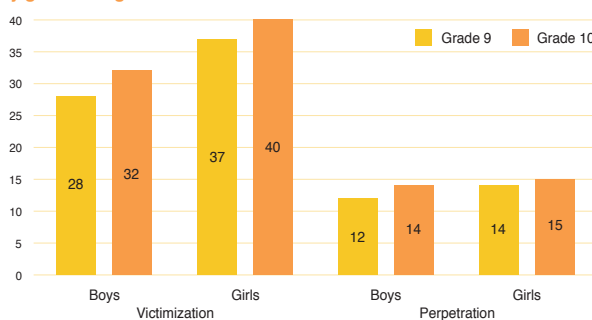
Percentage of students who report being bullied at school more than once or twice in the past two months, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

In the HBSC international report, the percentage of students being bullied and bullying others are each based on a single question. In Canada, a more comprehensive method is used: the percentage of students being bullied and bullying others are each based on six questions that measure frequency on specific types of bullying behaviours, in addition to the question used in the international report. The international approach results in lower percentages compared to the approach used in this report.

Percentages of students in grades 9 and 10 who report being victimized and perpetrating dating violence in their dating relationships, by grade and gender

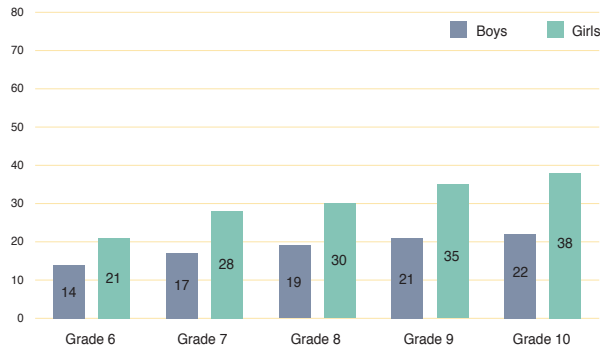


Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

Mental Health

Compared to the other grades, girls in grades 9 and 10 consistently report the most negative mental health experiences. They have the highest likelihood of reporting feeling hopeless, sad, lonely and nervous, as well as having low confidence and subjective health complaints. They are also reporting lower quality relationships with parents, teachers, and peers. It is concerning that these girls are reporting experiencing the most negative mental health concerns and problems in their relationships.

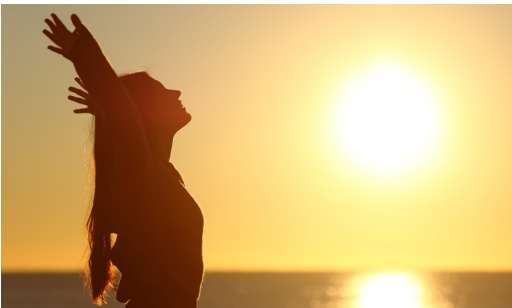
Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree that they often feel lonely, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

Spiritual Health

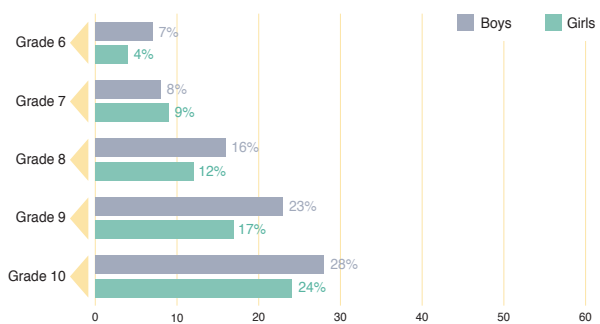
The right to a healthy spirituality has been recognized as a fundamental human right for children and HBSC researchers have been measuring spiritual health since 2014. Of the four domains used to measure spiritual health, connections to self seems to be most important to young people, followed by connections to others, to nature, and to the transcendent.



Substance Use

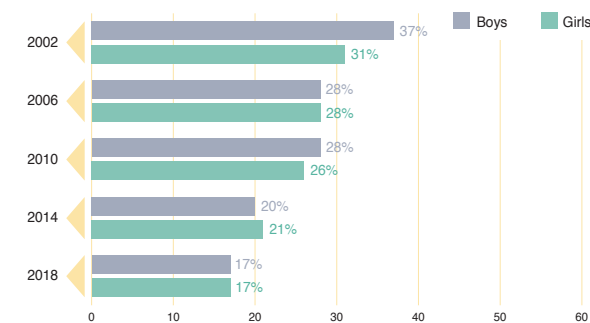
The percentages of students who report daily smoking continue to be very low. However, one in four grade 10 students are reporting e-cigarette use. The continued decline in the use of cannabis among young people is encouraging.

Percentage of students reporting use of e-cigarettes in the last 30 days, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

Percentage of grade 9 and 10 students reporting using cannabis in the last 12 months, by gender and year of survey



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018



Sexual Health

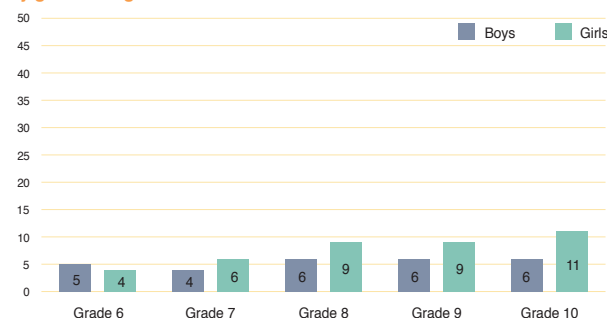
Over time, fewer students are reporting having had sex and about two-thirds of those reported using condoms the last time they had sex. Ongoing healthy relationship education for Canadian youth will support their healthy sexual development.

Social Media Use

While a high proportion of students report intensive social media use, a small proportion of students report problematic social media use. However, both intensity of social media use and problematic use increase with grade. Canadian students report frequent use of social media for homework and social connection, as well as gaming. Understanding when the intensity of use becomes problematic is critical to support healthy engagement with social media.

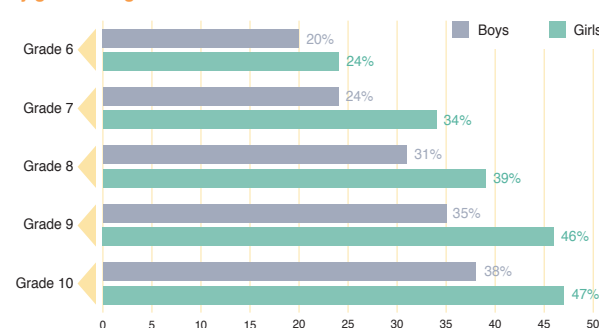


Percentage of students who report problematic social media use, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

Percentage of students who report intensive social media use, by grade and gender



Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Canada, 2018

The Last Word: What young people in Canada told us

- The first theme identified pertained to issues of **gender, gender norms, and their impacts on health**. Illustrative examples included gendered ideals of body shapes and sizes, and differing social expectations on boys and girls associated with physical activity, mental and spiritual health, and aggression.
- The second theme surrounded the **transition from childhood to young adulthood and its impacts on health and well-being**. Such transitions had notable impacts on the self-confidence and sense of well-being of children, as young people became more disconnected from traditional adult supports.
- The third theme was the **influence of technology and social media on health**. Young people emphasized the existence of both positive and negative aspects of technology in their lives, the need for balance in the use of technology and that social media was important to them.
- And finally, as a fourth theme young people identified that **they are currently facing many new and emergent risks** in their lives. Health issues such as social media use and e-cigarettes/vaping represent prime examples of new types of health behaviours to be tracked, monitored and better understood in the future.