

Herkimer County 2001

Teen **A**ssessment **P**roject **REPORT**



TAPPING into TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS and BEHAVIORS

October 2001

Survey sponsored by:

Herkimer County DSS /
Education Liaison Committee

Survey administered by:

Herkimer-Oneida Counties
Comprehensive Planning Program
and
Cornell Cooperative Extension of
Herkimer County

**Herkimer County
2001 TAP
(Teen Assessment Project)
Report**

October 2001

*Tapping into Teen Concerns, Perceptions and
Behaviors in Herkimer County, New York*

S*ponsored by:*

Herkimer County DSS /
Education Liaison Committee

F*or information regarding
the Herkimer County TAP Survey
and Report, contact:*

Herkimer-Oneida Counties
Comprehensive Planning Program
Boehlert Center at Union Station
321 Main Street
Utica, NY 13501
Tel.: (315) 798-5710
E-mail: cbassett@co.oneida.ny.us

A*dministered by:*

Herkimer-Oneida Counties
Comprehensive Planning Program and
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County

A*nalisis and Report by:*

Herkimer-Oneida Counties
Comprehensive Planning Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | ii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| TAP Survey Source | 1 |
| Background..... | 1 |
| Purpose | 1 |
| Comparing 1997 & 2001 TAP | 1 |
| Survey Implementation | 2 |
| TAP Results | 3 |
| Demographics | 3 |
| Findings - The Nine Foci | 3 |
| 1. Mental Health | 4 |
| 2. Perceptions of Self and Peers | 6 |
| 3. Sexual Behaviors and Perceptions | 9 |
| 4. Sexual and Physical Abuse | 10 |
| 5. Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs | 12 |
| 6. Violence in Schools and Communities | 15 |
| 7. Perceptions of School and Future | 17 |
| 8. Parent-Child Relationships | 19 |
| 9. Perceptions of Community | 21 |
| Conclusion | 22 |
| Addendum | 25 |
| Total Response Pattern for 1997 and 2001, and a Breakdown of 2001 TAP Data by Gender and by Grade | |

Acknowledgements

For the second time in four years, the Herkimer County DSS/Education Liaison Committee has sponsored the Herkimer County TAP Survey; and again, both the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program and the Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program worked together to conduct the survey. This year Catholic Charities of Herkimer County lent significant staff support toward the survey administration.

A community effort made the Herkimer County 2001 TAP Survey possible. Schools opened their doors, agencies lent their staff, key organizations provided financial support, and youth responded to the survey. Various people and organizations came together in the spirit of collaboration largely because they recognize the value of documenting what our young people are experiencing. The long list of people and organizations listed below shows that this project entailed a high level of collaboration and cooperation.

Sponsor:

Herkimer County DSS (Department of Social Services)/Education Liaison Committee

Funding and Organizational Support:

Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program

Herkimer County BOCES

Herkimer County Department of Social Services

Herkimer County Stop DWI Program

Herkimer County Youth Bureau

Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program

Youth Participants: The TAP survey is a confidential, voluntary survey of 7th, 9th and 11th grade students. Students are told in advance and told again when we administer the survey that it is voluntary, and yet almost every student participated. Based on their intent expressions and quiet work, students, with few exceptions, seemed to take the survey seriously.

Some 2,165 students from 11 school districts and the BOCES Pine Grove Academy took the survey. Without their active participation, there would be no TAP survey. They are the source of the data. In appreciation of their cooperation, we promise to share what they told us with others who want or need to know the information, and we will encourage more opportunities for youth to be involved in the public discussion and decision-making regarding youth issues.

Survey Administration:

Chip Bassett, *Principal Planner, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program*

Frances Trapanick, *Area Extension Specialist,*

Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program

Survey Analysis:

Dale Miller, *Associate Planner, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program*

Consultation and Data Processing:

Dr. Thomas Hirschl, *Associate Professor, Department of Rural Sociology, Cornell University*

Graphic Design and Presentation:

Michele Huther, *Senior Drafter, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program*

Herkimer County 2001 TAP Steering Committee:

- Chip Bassett, *Committee Co-chair, Principal Planner,
Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program*
- Frances Trapanick, *Committee Co-chair, Area Extension Specialist,
Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program*
- David Bruce, *Director, Catholic Charities of Herkimer County*
- Lucy Coher, *Director, Community Action in Herkimer County*
- Gina Giacobelli, *Director, Herkimer County Youth Bureau*
- Darlene Haman, *Planner, Herkimer County Integrated County Planning Project*
- Zachery Keep, *Student, West Canada Valley High School*
- Deborah Kinney, *Director of Services, Herkimer County Department of Social Services*
- Benjamin Lyndaker, *Student, West Canada Valley High School*
- Charles Malloy, *Superintendent, Frankfort-Schuyler Central School District*
- Dale Miller, *Associate Planner, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program*
- Michele Seaman, *Probation Supervisor, Herkimer County Probation Department*
- Denise Service, *Director, Community Maternity Services*
- John Speich, *Principal, Poland High School*
- Frank Sutliff, *Principal, West Canada Valley High School*
- Jim Sylvester, *Director, Herkimer County Rural Health Network*

Participating Schools and Supporting Officials:

Dolgeville Central School District
Robert Smith, Superintendent
James Donnelly, High School Principal

Frankfort-Schuyler Central School District,
Charles Molloy, Superintendent
Patricia Haynes, High School Principal

Herkimer Central School District
Robert Moorhead, Superintendent
Terry Dangle, High School Principal

Ilion Central School District,
Gary Tutty, Superintendent;
Joseph Collea, Jr., Principal

Little Falls City School District
William Gokey, Superintendent
Craig Fox, High School Principal
Kathryn Faber, Middle School Principal

Mohawk Central School District
Robert Service, Superintendent
Doug Burton, High School Principal

Mount Markham Central School District
Dick Young, Superintendent
Harry Bosch, High School Principal
Renee Rudd, Middle School Principal

Owen D. Young Central School District
James Christmann, Superintendent
Michelle DelConte, Guidance Counselor

Pine Grove Academy, Herkimer County BOCES
Joanne Norton, Director of Alternative Education
Jeffrey Ganeles, School Social Worker
Michael Stalteri, School Social Worker

Poland Central School District
John Stewart, Superintendent
Jon Speich, High School Principal

Town of Webb Free School
Alana Kempf, Superintendent
Colin Clark, Guidance Counselor
Cassandra Sheets, Social Worker

West Canada Valley Central School District
Richard Steet, Superintendent
Frank Sutliff, High School Principal

Volunteer Survey Administrators:

Chip Bassett, *Coordinator*

Francis Trapanick, *Coordinator and Trainer*

Regina Venettozzi, *Coordinator*

Susan Koziol, *Organizer*

Cheryl Staring, *Organizer*

Annmarie Adams

David Bruce

Cynthia Cardarellic

Mary Jane Chlus

Tracy Bush Clements

Barbara Collea

Fred Cook

Patricia Darling

Louann Day

Brent Dodge

Earl Epps

Joanne Favat

Donna Gage

Gina Giacobelli

Darlene Haman

Gail Hatch

Michelle Hazelton

Crystal Hemmerick

Mark Jasinski

Michael Kapala

Patty Karpovich

Deborah Kinney

Brigid Korce

Wendy Lamele

Penny Leavitt

Linda Maida

Dale Miller

Hal Muthig

Maureen Petri

Kent Rasmussen

Cindy Rhynestine

Lynn Riley

Joanne Salamone

Michele Seaman

Lydia Sexton

Kathy Stalteri

Michael Stalteri

Patricia Talaba

Deb Tayler

Carol Ursi

Jackie Ward

Marilyn Williams

Introduction

TAP Survey Source: The TAP survey is an anonymous and voluntary student survey that is designed to document the concerns, perceptions and behaviors of teens. The survey instrument was originally designed by Dr. Stephen Small at the University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension, and has been replicated throughout the United States. In New York, the Community and Rural Development Institute at Cornell University coordinates the TAP survey and in this capacity, they provide technical assistance, electronically scan the answer sheets and compile databases. Several other communities in New York State have used the TAP survey.

Background: The Herkimer County DSS/Education Liaison Committee sponsored the first Herkimer County TAP Survey in 1997. At that time they expressed interest in seeing the survey conducted every four years. In 2001, for the second time, both the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program and the Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program collaborated in the administration of the survey. During 2001, Catholic Charities of Herkimer County also lent staff support.

As in 1997, every school district, except one, that is in Herkimer County and also associated with the Herkimer County BOCES, participated in the survey. The one exception, Richfield Springs School District, participates in another student survey administered in Otsego County where the majority of their students reside. In 2001, the Town of Webb Free School, which is not associated with Herkimer County BOCES but is in Herkimer County, joined the list of schools participating in the TAP survey. This means that in 1997 a total of ten school districts, plus the Herkimer County BOCES Pine Grove Academy, participated, and that in 2001 eleven school districts, plus Pine Grove Academy, participated.

Though one more school district participated in 2001 than in 1997, more students actually took the survey in 1997. In 1997 - 2300 students took the survey; in 2001 - 2165 students. Both times about 80% of the total number of 7th, 9th and 11th graders actually took the survey. In 2001, there was simply a smaller population of 7th, 9th and 11th graders matriculated. Those youth who did not participate include those who were absent at the time of the sur-

vey and those who elected (or parents instructed them) not to participate. The survey also, obviously, does not include youth that dropped out of school.

Purpose: The purpose of the TAP survey is to provide youth, parents, schools, government, and agencies with accurate, timely information concerning our young people, so that as individual entities and together as a community we can identify the issues facing them, assess areas of need and respond appropriately.

The best way to know how our youth are doing is to ask them directly. The TAP survey provides a safe, confidential, anonymous and structured process for a large number of teens to respond directly to a wide range of questions. The fact that all the schools conduct the survey during the same two-week period means that all of the responses can be combined in order to derive a profile for Herkimer County. This information serves as the basis of this report. Each school receives the information for their students, so that they can then compare the profile of their students with that of the county.

Comparing 1997 & 2001 TAP: The 2001 TAP survey contains 154 questions, of those, 82 are the same, or similar to, questions found in the 1997 survey. Thus, the response to those 82 questions of the 2001 TAP Survey can be compared to those of the 1997 TAP Survey in order to determine whether there have been changes in youth concerns, perceptions and behaviors over the past four years.

The main reason that the 2001 TAP survey instrument includes some different questions is that in 1998 Herkimer County initiated the Integrated County Planning (ICP) Project in an effort to better coordinate planning for human services. The ICP Project adopted as a planning process the Communities That Care model from Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., in Seattle, Washington. The 1997 TAP data was used extensively for the ICP needs assessment, however, the questions did not adequately address some of the issues, or risk factors, identified by Communities That Care. Many of the new questions were added in order to better assess these risk factors. In the addendum at the back of the report, all of the questions from the 2001 TAP Survey are

listed with the response rate, as well as the comparative rate from the 1997 survey for those 82 questions that are the same.

There are several reasons why it is valuable to continue to conduct this survey every four years. First, it is important so that over time changes and trends can be discerned. Having conducted the survey now twice in four years, it is possible to indicate changes in youth concerns, perceptions and behaviors, but still presumptuous to suggest a trend unless, perhaps, the change is consistent with a longer range trend seen nationally or statewide. If the TAP survey is conducted again in 2005, then trends can be better discerned. Second, this information is critical for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of various services and programs. Agencies are expected to measure, often by their funding source, the impact of their programs and services. There are a host of programs designed to reduce risky behaviors by youth, or to improve their emotional well being, their performance in school or their relationship with parents or the community. The TAP survey data helps in evaluating whether programs and services are achieving their intended purpose. A third reason for conducting the survey every four years is that it enables one to potentially follow a cohort of students first when they are in 7th grade then again the next time when they are in 11th grade. Many of the 11th grade students surveyed in 2001 were surveyed in 1997 when they were 7th graders. Given that this is the first cohort examined, there is nothing with which to compare them. The cohort information will be more pertinent if the survey is repeated in 2005, then there will be another cohort of 2001 - 7th graders and 2005 - 11th graders to compare to this year's cohort.

Survey Implementation: A Principal Planner from Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program and the Youth Development Specialist from Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program served both as co-directors of the Herkimer County TAP Project and as co-chairs of the Herkimer County TAP Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is comprised of educators, service providers and students. As a subcommittee of the sponsoring group, the Herkimer County DSS/Education Liaison Committee, they assumed responsibility for preparing the 2001 TAP survey instrument and for reviewing the survey implementation process.

Without the help and cooperation of school officials, the TAP survey does not happen. So, as a first step, all of the school district superintendents in Herkimer County were contacted and their schools invited to participate. All but one school district had participated in the 1997 TAP survey, so school officials were familiar with the process. They readily accepted the invitation.

A Memorandum of Understanding was sent out to each school. In signing the Memorandum, schools agreed to dedicate one hour of class time for students to fill-out the survey and to allot sufficient space to ensure that survey participants would feel their answers would not be seen by others. Plus, they agreed to notify parents in advance of the survey, to provide parents an opportunity to review the survey instrument and to enable them to withdraw their child from participation.

In order to ensure that students take the survey seriously and answer the questions honestly, it is critical that the survey is administered effectively. Students need to understand the purpose of the survey, to see the value of the survey to them, and to recognize that their confidentiality will not be compromised. For this reason, the TAP survey relies on trained volunteers to administer the survey. Staff from Catholic Charities of Herkimer County recruited and helped organize the volunteer survey administrators, and the Youth Development Specialist from Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Youth Development Program trained them.

In a two-week period, April 2nd to April 12th, 2001, all twelve schools - 2165 students - were surveyed. In each school, the trained volunteer survey administrators introduced the TAP survey, distributed the materials, supervised the students, answered students' questions, and collected the survey instruments and answer sheets. Most 11th grade students were able to finish the survey in one-half hour; the 7th and 9th graders took on average a little longer; all but a very few were able to complete the survey in the allotted time.

Once the survey administration was completed, all of the answer sheets were delivered to Cornell University. Their demographer with the Department of Rural Sociology tabulated the data and provided a basic breakdown of the students' responses to each question. The demographer performed this tabulation for the county and separately for each school district. The Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program received the countywide tabulations; each of the school districts received their respective tabulations. Staff of the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Comprehensive Planning Program had primary responsibility for conducting further analysis, for presenting the survey results, and for preparing this report.

TAP Results

Demographics

Two thousand one hundred and sixty-five (2165) youth in 7th, 9th and 11th grades participated in the Herkimer County 2001 TAP Survey. This represents 80% of the targeted population, a sample more than large enough to ensure it accurately reflects the concerns, perceptions and behaviors of Herkimer County youth.

The TAP Survey included several demographic questions. Four related to the respondent directly: gender, age, grade level and whether they had any special needs. Four more questions related to their living situation. Given the predominately homogeneous racial composition of the population, there were no questions concerning their cultural or racial background.

In terms of gender, the sample was evenly split between males and females. The sample does not divide evenly between the three grade levels. As in the 1997 TAP Survey, a larger proportion of the sample was from the 7th and 9th grades (33% and 37% respectively), though 11th graders represent a fair portion (29%). (See Figure 1) The age distribution reflects this grade breakdown. The great majority of respondents (86%) report that they have no special needs such as learning, emotional or physical disability.

Just over 59% of youth indicated that they live with both their natural or adoptive parents. This is a lower percentage than found in the 1997 TAP survey when 64% of respondents said that they live with both parents. More youth in 2001 than in 1997 re-

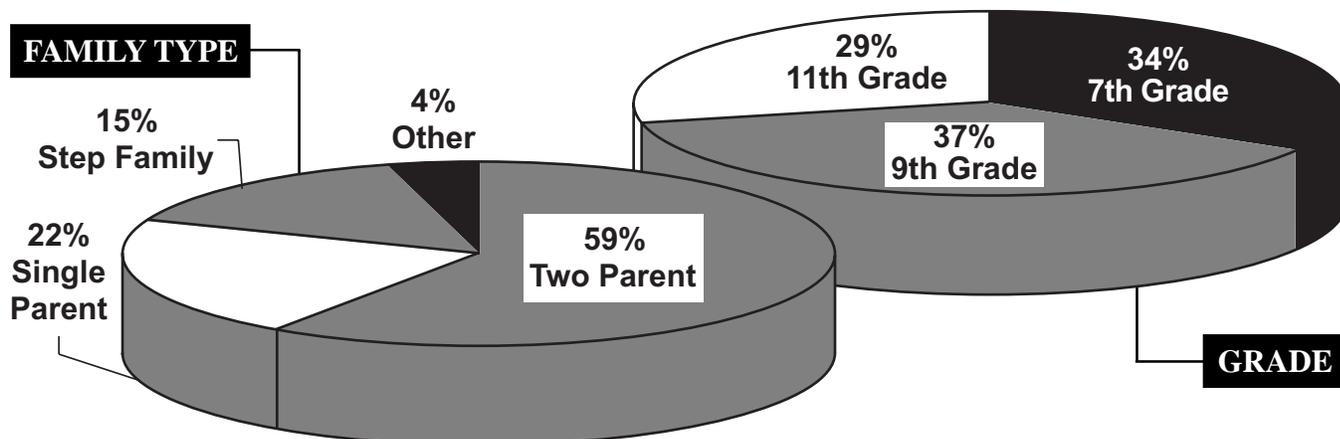
port that they live in either a parent/step-parent household (1997 - 12%, 2001 - 15%) or a single-parent household (1997 - 18%, 2001 - 21%). The remaining youth (less than 4%) live with other relatives, in a foster home or alone. (See Figure 1)

About one in four youth (27%) indicated that they qualify for either free or reduced price lunch. When asked what was the highest level of education completed by their mother and father, about a quarter reported that their mothers and a quarter reported that their fathers completed just high school. Based on the youth responses more of their mothers than fathers earned higher degrees. As far as a two-year college degree, 14% of the mothers and 9% of the fathers had completed them. And, as for a four-year degree, 15% of the mothers and 12% of the fathers had completed them. About 8% of both mothers and fathers had master's or doctorate degrees.

Findings - The Nine Foci

The Herkimer County 2001 TAP Survey is broken into nine component issue areas or foci. These include: 1. Mental Health, 2. Perceptions of Self and Peers, 3. Sexual Behaviors and Perceptions, 4. Sexual and Physical Abuse, 5. Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs, 6. Violence in Schools and Communities, 7. Perceptions of School and Future, 8. Parent-Child Relationships, and 9. Perceptions of Community. Each of these foci will be summarized in the following sections.

figure 1 Percentage of Respondents by Grade and by Family Type



1. Mental Health

Foci defined: Adolescence is a difficult time for many youth as they rapidly develop emotionally, physically and socially. Not surprisingly, many of the youth in the sample experienced various levels of self-doubt and despondency. As in 1997, mental health issues were narrowly defined by the survey instrument. For purposes here, they were limited to issues of despondency, as defined by a prolonged bout of depression, and thoughts of suicide.

2001 Synopsis: About 20% of all youth indicated that they were not particularly happy with themselves most of the time. About 30% of youth worry that no one loves or cares about them. As many as 40% indicated that they had been despondent in the past six months (i.e. felt depressed, helpless, hopeless or very sad for a period of two weeks or longer). More than one in ten youth (12%) said that they had felt this way many times over the past six months.

One common escape from such feelings is to run away from home in order to avoid situations that may be contributing to these feelings. Nearly 40% of all youth said that during the past year they had seriously thought of running away from home. Among youth thinking of running away, almost one in thirteen (7.7%) said they actually did leave the home at some point during the past year.

A more serious reaction to despondency is the consideration of suicide by youth. In order to have a clearer understanding of the impact such ideation has

on youth, it is important to view suicide as a problem within the general population, and then as it applies to the youth actually expressing such feelings.

Based on responses to the TAP survey, almost one quarter (23%) of the general teen population had seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months. About one out of every six youth (18%) in the Herkimer County survey said that they had actually planned how they would commit suicide. One out of every ten youth (10%) indicated that they had actually attempted suicide in the last 12 months. Unfortunately sometimes these attempts to harm themselves resulted in injuries requiring medical treatment. Among all TAP respondents, about one out of every 30 youth (3.3%) said that, during the last 12 months, they had injured themselves to the point that medical attention was required as a result of a suicide attempt. So while about one out of every four youth in the general population claim to have seriously considered suicide, about one out of every thirty actually harms themselves. (*See Figure 2*)

But what does this mean then, when someone says they are thinking of hurting themselves? Focusing on just those youth who claim to have seriously considered suicide, nearly four out of five of these youth (79%) go on to make a plan about how they might attempt suicide. Slightly less than half (45%) of youth who say they have seriously considered suicide also claim to have followed through on these plans and actually attempted suicide. While such “attempts” are

not defined in the survey, one out of every seven youth that say they have seriously considered suicide (14%) indicated that they harmed themselves to the point of needing medical attention as a result of a suicide attempt. (*See Figure 3*)

Having seen what the responses to the TAP survey questions have meant for the general sample as well as among teens that have seriously considered suicide, it is also important to place them within the context of state and national data. The questions

figure 2 From Suicide Ideation to Attempts: Percentage of All Youth Thinking of, Planning for, and Attempting Suicide in the Past 12 Months (2001)

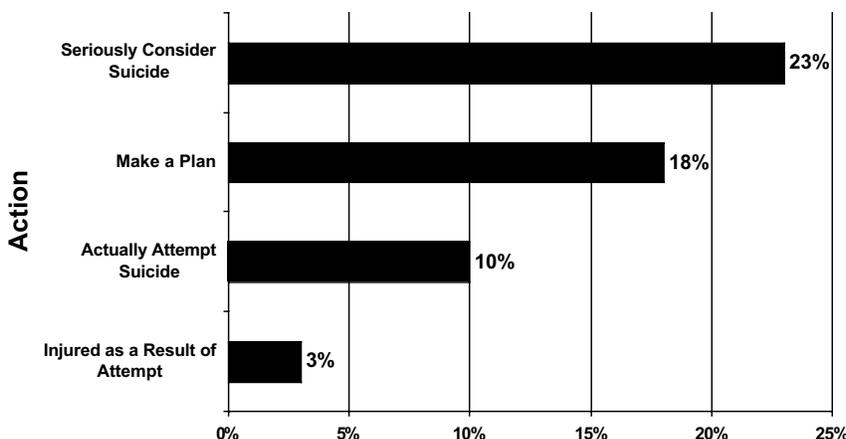
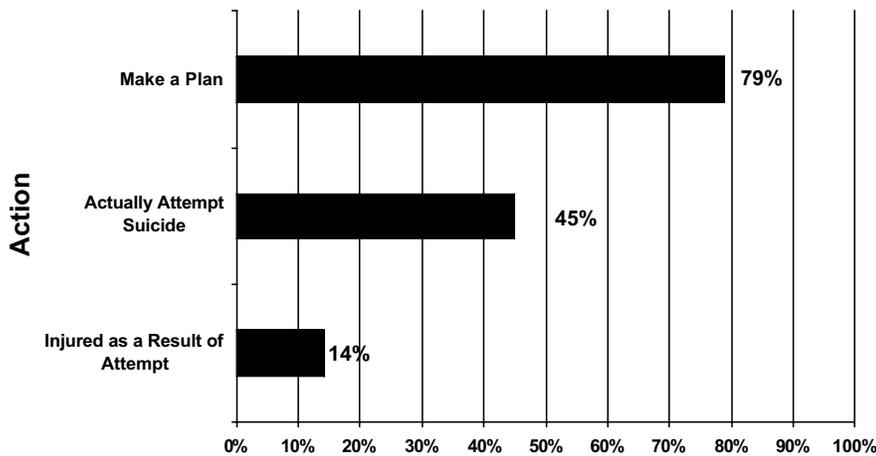


figure 3 Among Respondents with Suicide Ideations: Percentage that Made the Progression from Thoughts to Actions (2001)



- more Herkimer County youth indicated that they had seriously considered attempting suicide (Herkimer County - 23%, U.S. - 19%, NYS - 18%);
- more Herkimer County youth said they had made a plan about how they would attempt suicide (Herkimer County - 18%, U.S. - 15%, NYS - 14%); and
- more Herkimer County youth reported they attempted suicide (Herkimer County - 10%, U.S. - 8%, NYS 8%).

concerning depression and suicide ideation are derived directly from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In comparing the responses of Herkimer County youth to youth from throughout the United States and New York State who participated in the 1999 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, several differences can be seen:

- more Herkimer County youth said they felt depressed, helpless, hopeless or very sad during the past six months for a period of two weeks or longer (Herkimer County - 41%, U.S. - 28%, NYS - 30%);

The most commonly cited contributing factor in the Herkimer County TAP sample around which teen suicide ideations seem to emanate are problems at home. About 25% of all youth indicating that they have thought of harming themselves said that problems at home or with their parents were the presenting issue the last time they had these types of thoughts. The second most commonly cited reason were feelings of isolation or aloneness. As many as 13% of all youth indicated that this was the reason they had suicide ideations. About a third of all youth who have thought of suicide cited unspecified reasons or pressures as the main factor

the last time they had thoughts of committing suicide. (See Figure 4)

Another issue of concern is what youth do, or perhaps what they don't do, in response to these feelings of despondency and suicide ideation. The most common response to these types of feelings is for youth to do nothing, or simply try to solve their problems on their own. Almost half (45%) of youth who have thought of suicide take this approach. A significant number (17%)

figure 4 Most Commonly Cited Factors for Suicide Ideations by Youth Who Have Seriously Considered Suicide (2001)

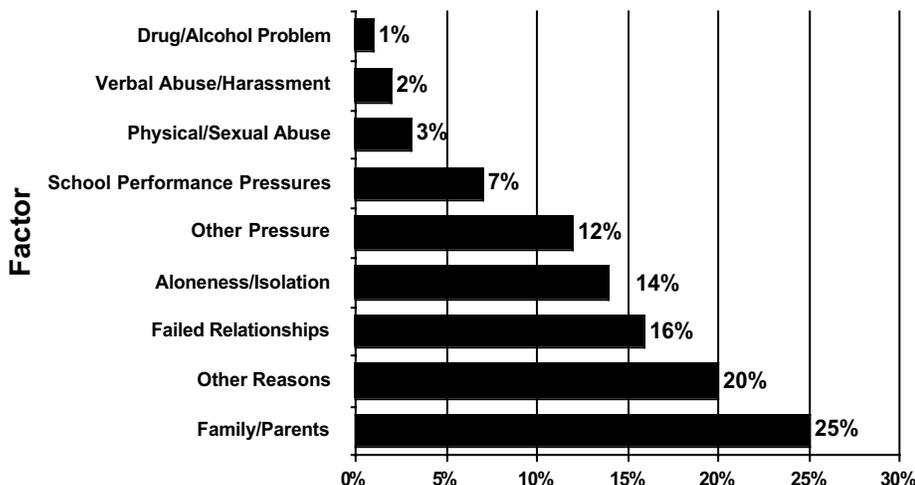
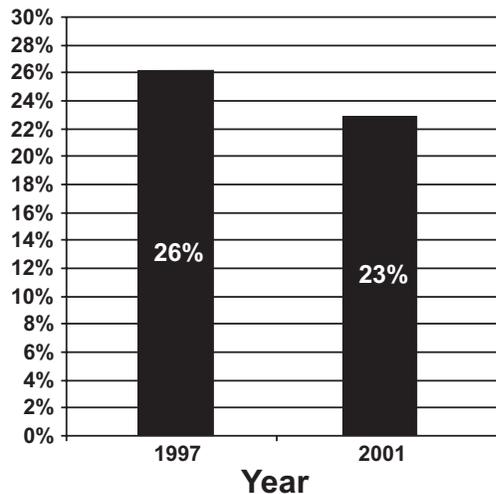


figure 5 Comparison of the Percentage of Respondents Who Seriously Thought About Suicide (1997 and 2001)



said that they turn to a teen friend for help. About 10% said that they specifically turn to alcohol or drugs as a result of these feelings. Only one out of every 15 youth who have had thoughts of suicide said that they seek help from a parent, other caring adult, or from mental health professional services.

2. Perceptions of Self and Peers

Foci defined: Adolescence represents an often tumultuous journey from youth to young adulthood. Accompanying this journey is a wide array of emotions, ranging from self-doubt one minute to self-confidence the next. For some youth the transition is a difficult one; for others it is relatively smooth.

2001 Synopsis: As youth traverse the years from childhood to adulthood, self image is often one of the more difficult issues they face. These range from perceptions of how they look to how they feel about themselves. For example, many youth (60%) worry a fair amount to a lot about how they look. Almost two out of three teens (64%) worry that they are too fat or too thin.

Along these lines, almost one out of every two youth (49%) have tried losing weight in the past month through various methods. About 30% of all respondents said that they had tried a healthy diet or exercise. Three percent (3%) of teens said that they

TAP Trends: Comparisons of the 1997 and 2001 Herkimer County TAP results show several interesting changes over the past four years. For example, youth still express similar levels of depression. About 40% (41.3% in 2001 and 40.4% in 1997) of Herkimer County youth indicated that they felt “depressed, helpless, hopeless or very sad for a period of 2 weeks or longer” in the past six months. The differences between 1997 and 2001 were statistically negligible.

However, when comparing youth and suicide ideations, significantly fewer respondents indicated that they had thoughts or plans to harm themselves in the 2001 sample. While 26.1% of the 1997 sample said that they “seriously considered suicide” in the past 12 months, about 22.5% of youth in the current sample said they had similar thoughts. (See Figure 5) This is a significant decrease over the four year period. In addition, but not surprisingly, statistically fewer youth actually planned how they might attempt such action in 2001 versus 1997.

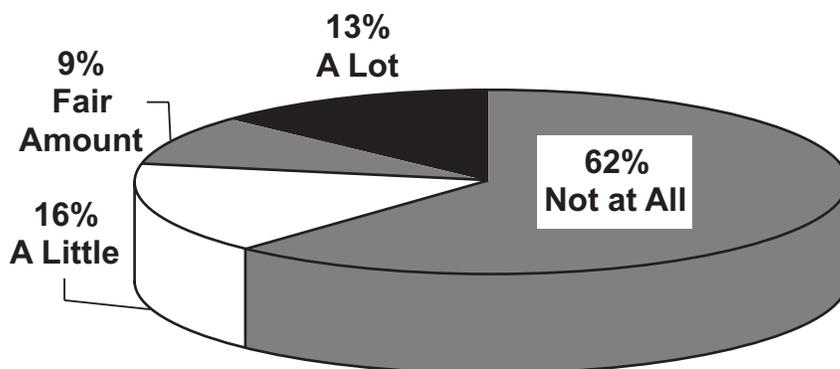
Despite these very important changes, the percentage of youth actually harming themselves as a result of suicide attempts remains similar to what it was in 1997. It remains a fact that about three to four percent of youth in our communities have harmed themselves to the point that they required medical attention during the course of a suicide attempt.

had used a dietary supplement such as pills, drinks, or laxatives as a means of stimulating weight loss. Another 2% said that they had vomited in order to lose weight in the past month. More than one in ten teens said that they used some other method of weight loss.

Among youth that are attempting to lose or control their weight, only about 60% are using methods that have been suggested as being medically sound - namely exercise and a healthy diet. As many as 4 out of 10 youth who are trying to control or lose weight are using methods that, in many ways, can be harmful to their health and pose a danger.

Despite this focus among many teens on their physiques, 80% are otherwise happy with themselves most of the time. While this might not mean that they are happy about the way they look, they seem to be happy, at the very least, about who they are. Despite this seemingly widespread confidence in themselves, it is not without some degree of self-doubt. A substantial portion of the sample (38%) worried at least a little that

figure 6 Percentage of Youth by How Much They Worry No One Loves or Cares for Them (2001)

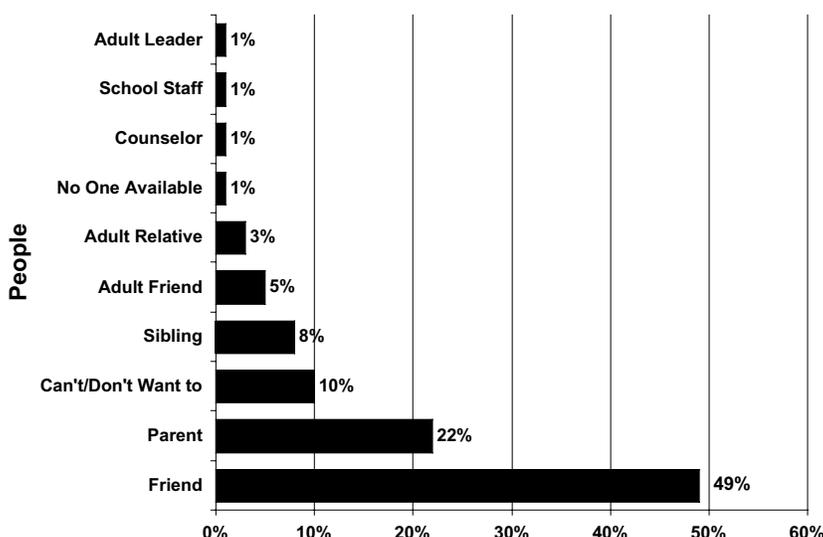


no one loves or cares about them. More than 20% of all youth worried about this a fair amount to a lot. (See Figure 6)

This self-doubt and sense of being unloved continues to manifest itself in two ways. First, there is a discernible subculture of silence among youth. Second, there is a significant relationship between youths' perceptions of themselves as being unloved and their participation in destructive behaviors.

When asking youth about whom they turn to when they have a problem, about half (49%) said they turn to a friend. Far and away, this was the most common source teens turned to when they need help. Parents were the second most common source (22%). (See Figure 7) If other family members are included

figure 7 Percentage of Youth by the People Who They Turn to When They Have Problems (2001)



in the equation, as many as one out of every three youth (33%) turn to their families for assistance in a time of emotional need. However, a substantial number of respondents (11%) also choose to do absolutely nothing, either because they don't feel comfortable approaching others or because they don't feel they can turn to anyone. Youth that particularly feel unloved are significantly less likely to turn to family members with problems. In addition, these youth are more likely to remain silent and internalize the issues than are other teens.

Of course the teens that perceive themselves as unloved are also more likely than their peers to engage in various destructive behaviors. One clear-cut relationship is between teens who feel unloved and those that seriously consider suicide. While about 23% of all youth have seriously considered suicide at some point in the last 12 months, youth that feel unloved are 80% more likely to seriously think about suicide than those that don't worry about being loved. In addition to being more likely to have seriously thought about suicide, teens that feel unloved are also:

Of course the teens that perceive themselves as unloved are also more likely than their peers to engage in various destructive behaviors. One clear-cut relationship is between teens who feel unloved and those that seriously consider suicide. While about 23% of all youth have seriously considered suicide at some point in the last 12 months, youth that feel unloved are 80% more likely to seriously think about suicide than those that don't worry about being loved. In addition to being more likely to have seriously thought about suicide, teens that feel unloved are also:

- almost 10% more likely to drink alcohol than other youth;
- about 11% more likely to use marijuana than other youth;
- almost 20% more likely to smoke tobacco than other youth;
- a third more likely to use someone else's prescription, or to use steroids than other youth;
- about 40% more likely to use drugs such as ecstasy, speed or inhalants than other youth;
- nearly 90% more likely to have used cocaine than other youth;
- about 20% more likely to have skipped classes in the past month than other youth;

- about a third more likely to have gotten detention from school than other youth;
- almost 20% more likely to have engaged in sex than other youth; and
- nearly 25% more likely to be promiscuous than other youth.

Issues of causality aren't addressed here. For example, whether a youth feels unloved and turns to drugs and alcohol for some sense of relief, or whether the use of drugs and alcohol are contributing to a teen's feelings of low self-esteem is not the issue in this report. What is at issue is that many high risk behaviors tend to have a relationship to one another. Those that experience low self-esteem and feelings of depression are also likely to act out in ways that might be self-destructive.

Besides family, another great influence in a teen's life is their peers. A teen's friends can greatly influence many of the choices they make and often are an important sounding board about the issues of adolescence. Of course, fitting in with one's peers is a primary concern of most teens. Almost three quarters of all respondents (72%) said that they worried at least a little about not fitting in with other kids at school. Some, about 40%, worried a fair amount to a lot about fitting in with other youth.

The youth with whom teens associate have considerable influence on their lives. Peers often can have a very positive influence on one another. For example, more than 70% of all respondents said that their friends think getting good grades is important. More than 80% talk with their friends about their future

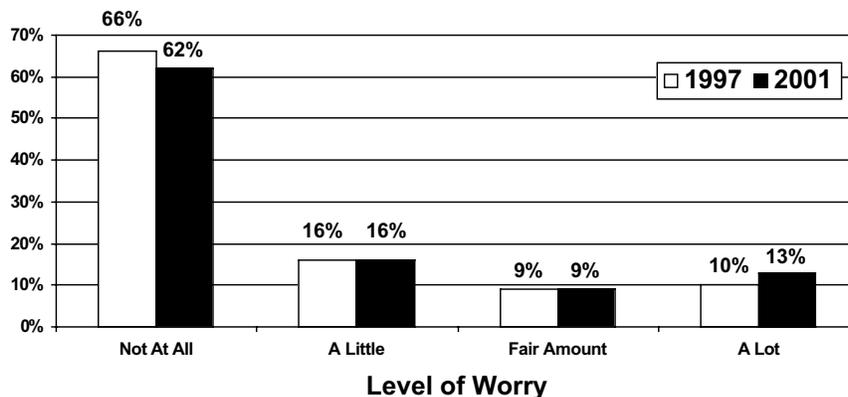
plans. Slightly more than half of all teens said their friends feel that contributing to their community and to society is important.

Friends also serve as boundary setters - helping to set the guidelines for acceptable behavior. Almost two thirds (66%) of all teens said that their friends don't think that they need drugs or alcohol in order to have a good time. Slightly more than 40% said that their friends think that postponing sex until later in life is also a good idea.

Teens' friends also are a resource - helping to keep them from getting in trouble, as well as helping them when they are faced with a problem. Almost 85% of all teens said that they can turn to their friends if they have a real problem. And almost as many said that their friends would stop them from doing something foolish or dangerous. Clearly, a teen's peers offer guidelines, as well as support, as each respondent finds their way through adolescence.

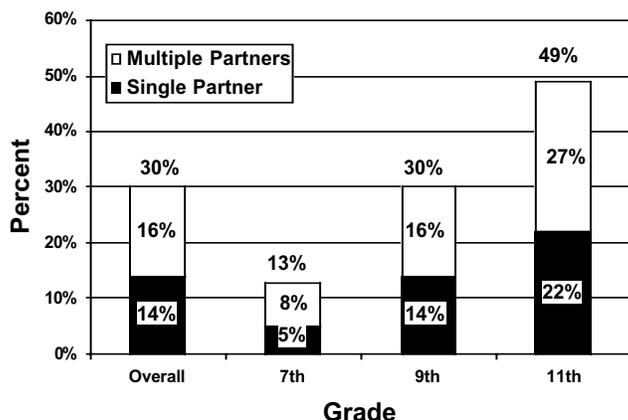
TAPTrends: Given the importance of feelings of self-worth in relation to the likelihood that teens have participated in various destructive behaviors, it is troubling to find that a significantly greater number of teens are feeling unloved and uncared for in 2001 than they were in 1997. Not only were youth in the 2001 sample more likely to feel unloved, but their level of concern about this perception was greater than in 1997. (See Figure 8) In 1997, slightly more a third of all respondents (34%) said that they felt no one cared about them. In 2001, nearly 40% of youth said that they felt no one cared. In addition, almost 20% more teens said that they worried a fair amount to a lot that no one cared about them in 2001 than four years earlier.

figure 8 Comparison of Percentage of Youth by How Much They Worry No One Loves or Cares for Them (1997 and 2001)



3. Sexual Behaviors and Perceptions

figure 9 Percentage of Sexually Active Youth by Number of Sexual Partners, Overall and by Grade (2001)



Foci defined: Teen sexuality and issues surrounding pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control and abstinence continue to generate controversy locally and nationally. That some youth are sexually active is not unexpected. However, it is important to understand the degree to which some youth are active, and the ways in which those youth might best protect their futures. It is also important to recognize the role that abstinence, birth control, and responsible decision-making plays in youths' lives when it comes to personal relationships.

2001 Synopsis: About 30% of all Herkimer County youth appear to have been sexually active, meaning have had sexual intercourse, at some point in their lives. More than half (55%) of all sexually active youth in the 2001 TAP survey have had more than a single sexual partner. (See Figure 9) As many as a quarter (24.3%) of all sexually active youth have had 4 or more sexual partners. This equates to about one out of fourteen youth in the general population (7.4%).

Obviously as one grows older there are more opportunities for sexual encounters. Therefore as youth grow up, the number of partners could only climb or remain steady, as opposed to decline. This is why, for example, while only about 13% of all seventh graders said that they had been sexually active, almost half of all 11th graders had been.

Despite this correlation between a youth's age and the likelihood that they have been sexually ac-

tive, the level of promiscuity among teens, when examined by grade level, is still fairly constant. If the percentage of sexually active youth in each grade who have had multiple sexual partners is compared, statistically there is no difference between 7th, 9th or 11th graders. In each case, somewhere around one in four sexually active youth, regardless of grade level, have had four or more partners. So while fewer 7th graders might be sexually active overall than, say, eleventh graders, those that are sexually active are just as likely to have had a large number of sexual partners as their older counterparts.

The questions in the Herkimer County TAP Survey concerning youth sexual activity are very similar to those used in the Center for

Disease Control (CDC) 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The two surveys, however, are administered to different grades. When only students in 9th and 11th grades are examined, it appears that Herkimer County youth have not been as sexually active as other youth in the national sample. In Herkimer County, just over 38% of 9th and 11th graders have ever had sexual intercourse. Based on the 1999 CDC Survey, 45% of 9th and 11th graders in the U.S. have had intercourse. Similar patterns are seen when examining the percentage of 9th and 11th graders that reported having sex before age 13, as well as those that reported having had four or more sex partners. Locally, fewer youth indicated that they had had sex by the age of 13 than did those in the national sample (5.5% in Herkimer County, 8.3% nationally). Local teens also were less likely to have had a high number of multiple partners (i.e. four or more partners) than were youth in the national sample (9.2% in Herkimer County, 14.3% nationally).

One of the concerns of such levels of sexual activity is, of course, pregnancy. Among TAP survey respondents, about 70% of all sexually active youth said that they specifically used some form of birth control to prevent pregnancy on a regular basis. Almost 60% of all sexually active youth indicated that they used birth control during every sexual encounter.

Another issue of concern for sexually active youth is concern with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). While various methods of disease prevention are pos-

sible for fighting the possibilities of STD transmission, condom use was specifically asked about in the survey. Two out of every three (67%) sexually active youth indicated that a condom was used on a regular basis as a means of combatting STDs. More than half of all active youth said that they used condoms during each sexual encounter.

When asked specifically about their concerns with AIDS and other STDs, many youth expressed no concern at all. Slightly more than 60% of all youth indicated that they didn't worry at all about AIDS or STDs. Looking further into the responses, youth that haven't been sexually active are significantly more likely than those that have been active to say they have no concern with AIDS or STDs. While about half of sexually active teens (54%) said that they didn't worry about disease transmission, almost two thirds (65%) of youth that have never been sexually active felt the same way.

One new topic approached in the 2001 TAP Survey was the issue of abstinence. Defining abstinence as refraining from sexual intercourse until marriage, youth were given an opportunity to indicate whether they considered themselves to be abstinent. When asked about their level of sexual activity, about 5% of all youth chose to say they were currently abstinent. This option did not preclude them from having ever been sexually active; merely, it was an opportunity for them to indicate that, currently, they were abstaining from sexual activity until they were in a marriage.

While these numbers translate into about one out of every 20 youth, much higher numbers of youth place a value, if not a practical embracing of the concept, on abstinence. When asked about whether they agreed that it was important to be abstinent, more than half (55%) said that they either agreed or strongly agreed abstinence is important to them personally.

Some of the discrepancy between how teens feel about abstinence and whether they personally practice abstinence might be a result of the role peer pressure plays in youth behavior. When respondents were asked whether their friends felt that postponing sexual intercourse until later in life was a good idea, more than half said no. So while large numbers of youth say that they feel abstinence is important, smaller numbers think that their friends would agree, and even fewer see themselves as being personally committed to the idea of postponing intercourse until marriage.

TAP Trends: While the percentage of teens that are sexually active in 2001 and 1997 appear fairly close (30% versus 34%), this does represent a significant decline in this behavior. Clearly, fewer youth have chosen to become sexually active when the two survey samples are compared.

In addition, sexually active youth in the current survey are less likely to have had a high number of sexual partners. While about one in three (30%) of all sexually active youth in 1997 had been involved with four or more partners, only about one in four (24%) from the 2001 sample indicated they had a similar number of partners.

Youth in the 2001 sample clearly have expressed less concern with AIDS and STDs than did youth in the 1997 sample. While half (51%) of the 1997 sample indicated that they weren't worried at all about AIDS or STDs, almost 62% of teens in 2001 expressed no concern at all about such matters. Whether this is a function of decreased sexual activity, or the result of such things as national news accounts concerning the declining rate of HIV infections is hard to say. However, it remains that all youth, as well as adults, should have a reasonable level of concern for such issues regardless of personal experiences or preferences.

4. Sexual and Physical Abuse

Foci defined: Unfortunately, youth sometimes find themselves the recipients of unwanted physical or sexual attention. This includes a wide range of acts, including physical intimidation, physical assault, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. While all members of our communities have the right to enjoy a life free from such conflicts, those perceived as having the least amount of ability to fight back, as it

were, are often the most likely victims. Young people often fall into this category.

2001 Synopsis: The TAP survey asked youth a variety of questions about situations in which they were either intimidated, threatened or actually assaulted. These types of encounters can be broken into two categories: sexual and physical abuse.

figure 10 Percentage of Respondents that Experienced Sexual Harassment from Another Teen and by Number of Times (2001)

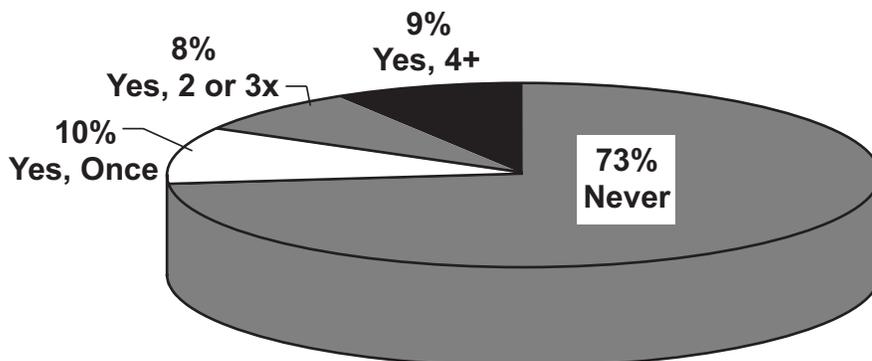
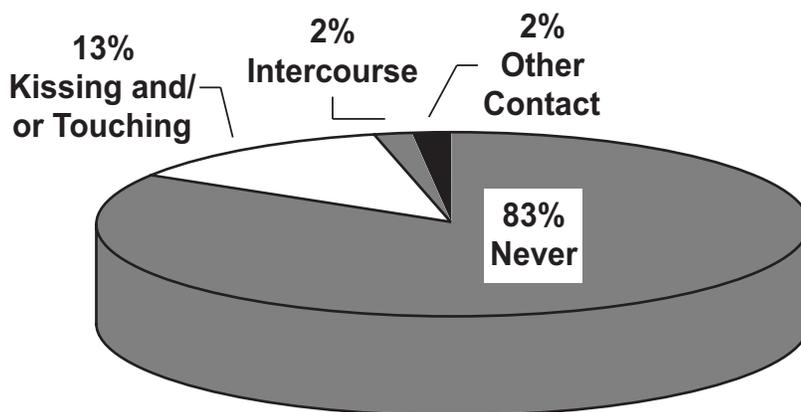


figure 11 Percentage of Respondents that Experienced Teen-Teen Sexual Abuse by Type of Abuse (2001)



Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse takes many forms, ranging from sexual harassment to sexual assault. Most of the sexual harassment that teens experience seems to come from their peers. Many youth (30%) said that they felt pressure to have sexual relations. Almost half of these teens said that they felt that pressure fairly strongly in their lives.

More than a quarter of all respondents (27%) said that they had been sexually harassed by another teen. (See Figure 10) Only about one in ten youth (11%) felt they had been sexually harassed by an adult. Unfortunately, sexual harassment doesn't tend to be a singular incident. Nearly 10% of all youth said that they had been harassed by either another teen or an adult four or more times within the past year.

Sometimes harassment is only the tip of the iceberg. Sexual abuse, in the form of sexual assault, is

also a problem some teens face. Nearly one out of every five youth (17%) said that they had been subject to physical/sexual contact with another teen that was unwanted. Some of these involved acts such as kissing and/or touching (13%), while others involved unwanted sexual intercourse. Almost one out of every fifty teens (1.8%) has been forced into unwanted intercourse by another teen. (See Figure 11)

While the number of youth experiencing sexual assault by an adult is lower than those being assaulted by a peer, they are still troubling. Slightly less than one in twelve youth (8%) reported having had an adult do something sexually to them that they did not want. While the majority of these cases involved unwanted kissing and/or touching (5%), unwanted sexual intercourse was still present. About one out of every seventy youth (1.4%)

said that they had experienced unwanted sexual intercourse with an adult.

Of course, one of the desires of parents, community members and professional service providers is that youth will come forward and seek help when facing such issues. Given that as many as 85% of all youth have never been sexually harassed or assaulted, it is not surprising that many youth haven't used any of the services that might be available to them within their communities and schools. What turns out to be significant is the fact that if a teen turns to someone - ANYONE - for help, the harassment or physical abuse is far more likely to stop than if they are simply quiet about the problem. Whether they turn to a parent, another adult, a professional service provider or even another teen, youth are significantly more likely to see some sort of action taken to stop the harassment

and abuse. The likely result of that action is that the abuse will stop.

Physical Abuse: In addition to sexual abuse, many teens face physical abuse in their homes or their communities. Sexual abuse, of course, isn't the only type of abuse teens face in their lives. While community and school violence is covered in another part of the TAP report, violence at home is examined here.

Many youth have concerns about the degree to which their parents get along. More than half of all respondents (53%) said that they worried a fair amount to a lot about their parents' relationship. Along with that worry also comes a certain level of concern for the safety of those at home. About one out of every four (25%) youth worried at least a little that someone at home might be hurt by another person in the home. A number of respondents said they had been physically hurt by an adult in the home. One out of every ten teens said that an adult had physically hurt them at home over the past year. Half of these youth had been hurt multiple times.

TAP Trends: Comparing the 1997 and 2001 TAP survey results reveals some interesting changes in regard to issues of sexual and physical abuse. For example, youth are more worried in the 2001 sample than the 1997 sample about how well their parents are getting along. About 55% of the 1997 sample indicated that they were worried about how well their parents got along; in 2001, more than 70% expressed

some level of concern about their parents' relationship.

In terms of sexual harassment and abuse, two interesting patterns have emerged. First, overall, significantly fewer teens are feeling pressure to engage in sex in 2001 than they were four years earlier. In 2001, only 30% of teens said they had any worries about being pressured for sex. In 1997, as many as 37% said that they worried about such peer pressure.

While the incidence of sexual assault is not significantly different for teens in 2001 than it was in 1997, the type of assaults taking place have changed somewhat. A statistically greater percentage of cases involving incidences of unwanted sexual touching by other teens were found among the 2001 sample than had been the case in 1997.

Who teens are turning to for help hasn't changed since the 1997 survey. Roughly 21% of those youth that have been subject to sexual or physical abuse turned to their parents for help. A third (33%) turn to other teens. Another third remained quiet and told no one. This is as true in 2001 as it was in 1997. However, a significant change in 2001 is the percentage of cases in which some action is taken and the abuse stops, after the teen victim tells someone. Whereas only 25% of those youth who had suffered sexual or physical abuse told someone and got the abuse stopped in 1997, as many as 40% of youth in the 2001 sample had success in getting the abuse stopped by telling someone about it.

5. Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

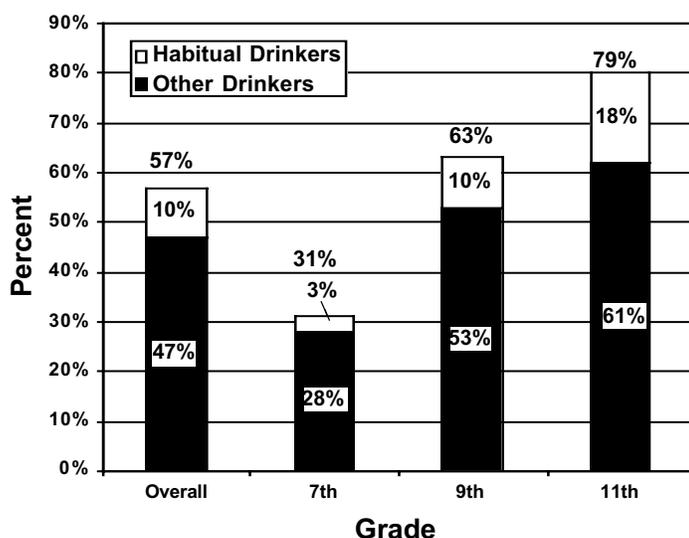
Foci defined: Drug use among youth in America has seen great increases in regard to some types of substances, and declines in others. The use of drugs such as alcohol or tobacco, is seen as providing a gateway for the use of more dangerous ones. In addition, drug use is also seen as being a prime contributor to other behaviors such as criminal activity and sexual activity. The TAP survey asked a variety of questions about drugs - their introduction, availability, and use.

2001 Synopsis: Information from the TAP survey has been generally categorized into the areas of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Within each area, issues of the introduction of these substances into a youth's life, their availability, and their frequency of use are examined.

Tobacco: Almost three out of every five teens (59%) in the 2001 TAP survey stated that they had never smoked a tobacco product. Of course this varies significantly based on the age of the respondent. For example, only about a quarter of all 7th graders indicated they had ever smoked a whole cigarette. In comparison, more than half of all 11th graders had smoked at some point in their lives. The likelihood that teens have used tobacco climbs significantly as youth get older - beginning with 26.4% of 7th graders, to 43.4% of 9th graders, to 54.9% of 11th graders.

Among youth that do smoke, a third (33%) are regular smokers (having smoked at least 10 out of the last 30 days), with about 20% of teen smokers being habitual in their use of tobacco (they smoked almost every day).

figure 12 Percentage of Respondents Using Alcohol by Level of Drinking, Overall and by Grade (2001)



Attempts to reduce teen smoking take on many fronts, but getting smokers to stop smoking is one tactic. Among respondents who smoked, nearly 80% had tried to quit smoking at some point. More than half of these teens have quit and haven't returned to smoking. The remainder said they had tried to quit, only to begin smoking again.

Alcohol: Slightly less than half (43%) of all teens surveyed indicated that they had never used alcohol. Among the 57% of students who have used alcohol, more than half were regular users (54% of drinkers consumed alcohol at least a few times per month). In the general population, this equates to about three out of every 10 youth (29%). As many as one in ten drinkers (10%) indicated that they were habitual users of the substance - they used alcohol at least a few times per week.

Introduction of alcohol to youth takes place fairly early and continues rather steadily throughout their adolescence. About a third (31%) of all 7th grade respondents indicated that they had used alcohol at some point. In comparison, about two thirds (63%) of all 9th graders used alcohol. Among 11th graders, almost four out of every five (79%) had ever drunk alcohol. (See Figure 12)

The magnitude of alcohol consumption varies in a similar pattern. While about one quarter (25.6%) of all youth have gotten drunk (i.e. had 5 or more

drinks in a 2 to 3 hour period) in the last month, this "binge" drinking increases significantly as the teen grows older. Only about 7% of all seventh grade respondents indicated that they had binged on alcohol in the past 30 days. Slightly more than a quarter (28%) of all ninth graders had done so. But among 11th graders, the percentage of all respondents who have engaged in binge drinking in the past month jumps to almost half (45%). High school juniors are nearly seven times as likely to binge drink than are 7th grade students.

Sources of alcohol vary considerably. Among youth that drink, about 30% have someone of legal age buy the alcohol for them. Almost 13% get their drinks from a friend's home without parental knowledge. Nearly as many youth (10%) said that they actually get their alcohol at home from their parents.

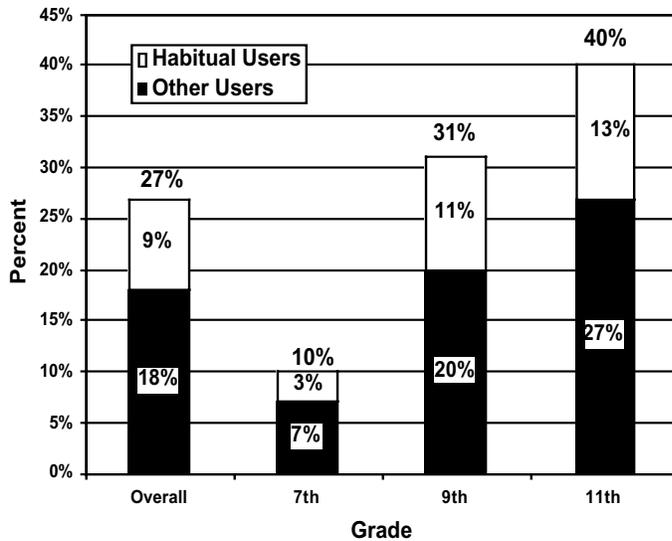
Marijuana: A large majority of respondents (73%) indicated that they had never used marijuana. Among the 27% of students who have used marijuana, more than half (55%) said they used marijuana at least a few times per month. More than a third (35%) of marijuana users indicated that they smoked marijuana at least a few times per week.

Increased likelihood of marijuana use occurs as youth grow older. While only about one out of ten (10%) of all 7th grade respondents indicated that they had used marijuana at some point, two out of every five 11th graders (40%) claimed to have smoked marijuana. (See Figure 13)

Among users of marijuana, the most common source for marijuana was a friend. More than half (51%) of all users said that friends were their main source of marijuana. Dealers and other sellers were the main source for another 21% of users. Almost one in ten youth (8.4%) said that they grew their own marijuana.

Other Drugs: The use of other drugs was relatively small in comparison to alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Only about 5% of all teens indicated that they had ever used cocaine; about 1.5% might be considered habitual users of the substance. About 9% of all youth have ever used inhalants. About 1.5% said that they use them on a habitual level. Slightly less than

figure 13 Percentage of Respondents, Overall and by Grade, Using Marijuana (2001)



4% of youth said that they had ever used steroids, and almost none of them (less than half a percentage point) used them with any regularity.

Other drugs, such as Ecstasy, LSD, PCP, speed, etc., had slightly more use as a group of drugs (10%), but since they were grouped together it is hard to say anything about any of them on an individual basis.

Interestingly, the sharing of prescription drugs isn't totally uncommon among teens. About 10% of

all teens stated that they had used a prescription, such as Ritalin or codeine, made out to someone else in the past year.

Ease of access of drugs is an ongoing concern, not only among parents and community members, but also among law enforcement. In rating the ease of access that they had to various drugs, youth found alcohol as the easiest drug to get. Nearly 60% of teens said it would be easy or very easy to get alcohol. Almost as many (57%) said it would be easy to get tobacco products as well. And while marijuana is a controlled substance not legally sold in this country, more than 2 out of 5 youth (43%) said that they could easily get marijuana as well.

If local data are compared to national statistics, some interesting patterns can be seen. While the percentage of youth ever having used tobacco and alcohol products appears

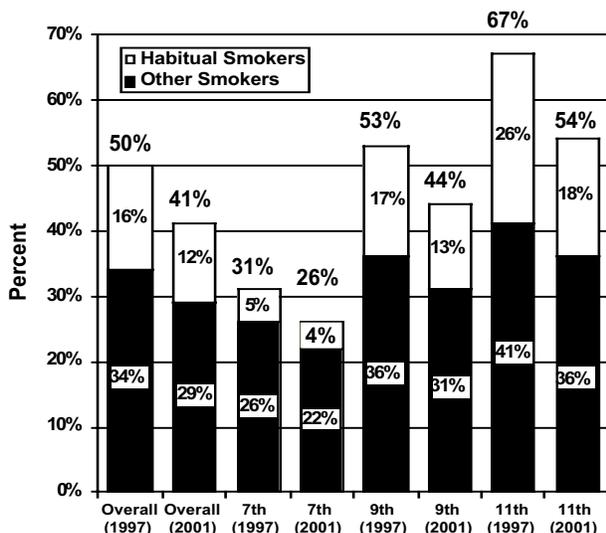
to be similar to national figures, there are some difference in terms of use patterns. A comparison of the responses of 9th and 11th graders from the 1999 CDC Youth Risk Behavior data to those in the 2001 Herkimer County TAP data suggests that while:

- similar percentages reported smoking a cigarette in the past 30 days (Herkimer County - 28%, U.S. - 31%);
- similar percentages reported having smoked a whole cigarette before age 13 (Herkimer County - 23%, U.S. - 25%);
- similar percentages reported ever having had a drink of alcohol (Herkimer County - 75%, U.S. - 77%); and
- similar percentages reported smoking marijuana before age 13 (Herkimer County - 9%, U.S. - 11%),

Herkimer County youth were:

- more likely to have gone binge drinking during the past month (Herkimer County - 35%, U.S. - 27%);
- less likely to have tried alcohol before age 13 (Herkimer County - 26%, U.S. - 32%); and
- less likely to have reported having ever used marijuana (Herkimer County - 35%, U.S. - 41.5%).

figure 14 Comparison of Percentage of Respondents, Overall and by Grade, Using Tobacco (1997 and 2001)



So while tobacco use is pretty much in line with national trends, and the percentage of youth having ever used alcohol is not atypical of national data, Herkimer County youth appear to have tried alcohol at a later age. This, however, doesn't mean that they don't drink, or don't drink to excess. In fact, compared to the national data, Herkimer County youth appear more likely to have experienced episodes of binge drinking. In terms of marijuana use, Herkimer County teens don't seem to be exposed to it as early as other youth, and are less likely to have ever tried the substance.

TAPTrends: Comparisons between the two surveys conducted in Herkimer County over the past four years show a significant decline in smoking among

respondents. While about half of all teens said that they had smoked in 1997, that number declined considerably, to around 40% by 2001. (*See Figure 14*) While this is encouraging, the same can't be said for alcohol consumption.

Alcohol use has remained rather steady between the two periods covered by the surveys. In each case, the percent of youth using alcohol has remained consistently around 60%. In addition, use patterns have remained relatively consistent within grade levels over the past four years. Similar numbers of youth are regular and habitual users of alcohol among the 2001 sample as were found in the 1997 sample. There were no significant differences in marijuana use between the samples either.

6. Violence in Schools and Communities

Foci defined: A sense of safety and comfort in a teen's surroundings is important in the development of positive self esteem and necessary in the creation of an environment conducive to the learning process. The TAP survey gave youth an opportunity to provide information about their surroundings and the degree to which they felt comfortable in them.

2001 Synopsis: While the majority of youth said that they felt safe in their communities and in school (82% and 70%, respectively), there is a substantial portion of the teen population that does have safety concerns in both settings. Almost one in five youth feels less than safe while in their community or neighborhood; and nearly one in three feels unsafe while at school.

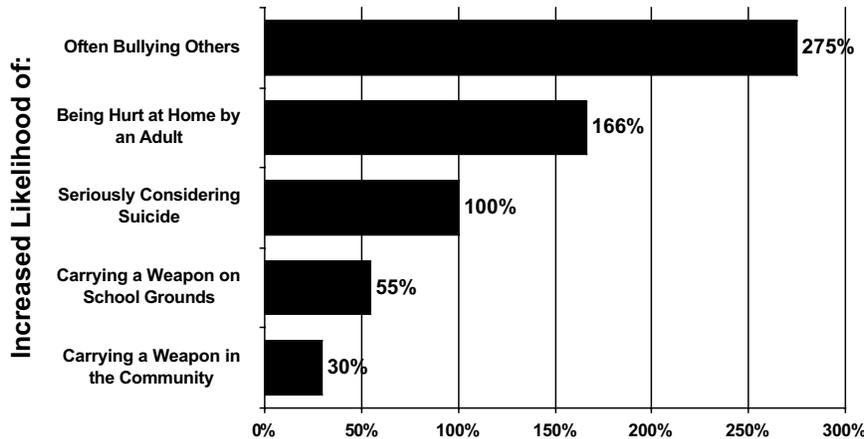
A major focus of recent work concerning youth violence is the role of "bullying" by youth toward other teens. In some well publicized cases, youth who have acted out in a violent fashion have cited "bullying" as one of the prime reasons for their desperation. When asked in the TAP survey whether they felt constantly teased, threatened or harassed by another youth, almost one out of every five respondents (18%) said they did feel that way. When the question was turned around, and youth were asked whether they had used physical force or threatened others in the past six months in order to get their way, about 45% said that they had. Slightly less than one in ten teens (8%) indicated that they used such tactics fairly often as a means of winning an argu-

ment or getting their own way. So while there are great concerns with helping youth learn to deflect the negative effects of being bullied, obviously, there is also a need to teach our youth alternatives to using threats and violence as a means of persuasion.

For some youth, a fear for their safety translates into a need to protect themselves or to react in a violent way to stop those they perceive as being threatening. While many youth obviously find other avenues, such as avoidance, to deal with this fear, some choose to take more aggressive, drastic steps. Unfortunately, one of those options includes use of a weapon against others. Respondents were asked whether they had ever specifically carried a weapon such as a gun or knife, in their school or community, with the expressed intent of harming someone or as a means of protection. While most youth haven't taken such drastic measures, a considerable portion have. More than one in seven youth (15%) indicated that they have carried a gun or knife within their community setting as a means of protection or with the intent to harm someone else. Nearly one in eight youth (12%) said they had done the same thing while attending school.

Naturally one of the barriers to such behavior is access to a weapon. While access to the use of a knife is relatively open, access to a gun is limited to those that have, assumedly, registered firearms within the home. Of course, this doesn't preclude a youth from illegally acquiring a weapon. Regardless, when asked in the TAP survey about their ease of access, more

figure 15 Among Those Feeling Bullied, Percentage Increased Likelihood of Potentially Dangerous Behaviors and Experiences (2001)



than 25% of all youth indicated that it would be easy or very easy to get a gun if they wanted.

While the potential for violence among the general youth population is a serious one, not enough can be said about what appears to be a cycle of bullying. According to respondents in the TAP survey, those that feel bullied offer some telling insights. For example, youth that are bullied may be experiencing physical intimidation at home as well as in other settings. Bullied youth report that they are more than twice as likely to have been hurt in the past year at home by an adult than youth that aren't bullied.

It's also clear from the responses that bullying is a vicious circle. The bullied are often the "bulliers." Youth that have been bullied are almost four times as likely to frequently bully others than youth that haven't been. They also appear to be more likely to be prepared to take drastic, and potentially deadly, actions. Youth that have been bullied are 30% more likely to have carried a weapon such as a gun or knife in the community with the intent of either protecting themselves or harming someone else. They are nearly 55% more likely to have carried a weapon for the same reasons while on school property. (See Figure 15) The obvious potential tragedy this represents is one that should not be ignored.

While the danger to others that potentially arises from bullying is a concern, it is important to recognize the danger that also exists within those feeling constantly teased, threatened, and harassed. Those that feel bullied are twice as likely to seriously con-

sider suicide than are others. This cycle of bullying is one that needs to be broken, for not only the sake of those suffering from constant harassment but, also, for the protection of all involved.

While some youth might choose a violent path, others choose avoidance. While questions weren't asked about avoidance of confrontation within community settings, the survey did ask teens if they had ever missed school specifically because of a concern for their safety. Approximately one out of every six youth (16%) stated

that they had stayed home from school because of a fear for their safety within the school setting. As many as one out of every twenty youth had done so multiple times in the past year.

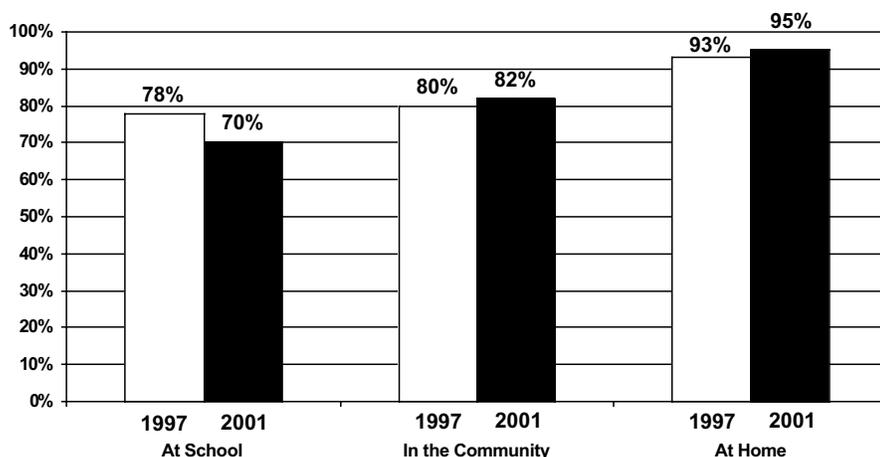
TAP Trends: Interestingly, respondents to the 2001 TAP survey feel significantly less safe within their schools and communities. In terms of teens' fear for their safety within the school setting, clearly youth are expressing a greater fear level in 2001 than they did in 1997. While nearly 80% of youth in 1997 said that they felt safe at school, this number has dropped to about 70% in 2001. (See Figure 16)

The basis for this drop in confidence is hard to pinpoint. However, given the dramatic declines in crime rates among the general population over the past ten years, as well as a drop in crime rates among teens, this is especially troubling. One potential source of concern among youth may be in part due to an increase in perceptions of the level of school-based violence. With several widely covered school violence episodes over the past several years, it may be that teens are more sensitized to the issue than they previously were.

While there has been a clear change in attitude among teens concerning school-based safety issues, the differences between the 1997 and 2001 samples are a little more subtle when it comes to community-based safety. However, the changes are still statistically significant.

On the surface, the percentage of respondents in-

figure 16 Comparison of the Percentage of Respondents that Feel Safe by Location (1997 and 2001)



dicating that they feel safe in their communities hasn't changed much from 1997 to 2001. In 1997, about 80% of all teens agreed with the statement that they felt safe in their community. In 2001, about 82% of

teens' perceptions of their level of safety within familiar surroundings (namely their neighborhoods and community settings) has declined significantly.

youth agreed with that statement. So overall, youth still express a similar level of feeling safe within their communities.

The difference is in terms of how strongly they agree with the idea that they are safe. While a similar percentage agree overall that they feel safe in their community, the number of youth that feel strongly that they are safe has dropped from 25% in 1997 to about 17% in 2001. This suggests that

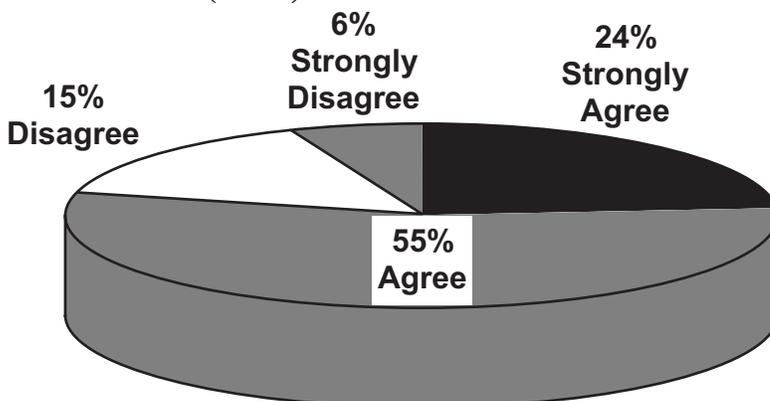
7. Perceptions of School and Future

Foci defined: School is a place where teens spend a substantial portion of their time. While youth gain insight into their own intellectual, social and emotional underpinnings, they are also developing long term life skills and goals. The TAP survey asked youth a variety of questions about these issues.

2001 Synopsis: School, at least for the majority of youth, continues to be an enjoyable experience. About 60% of all respondents stated that they enjoyed being in school. Many show considerable concern with their grades. More than 80% expressed a high level of concern about getting good grades.

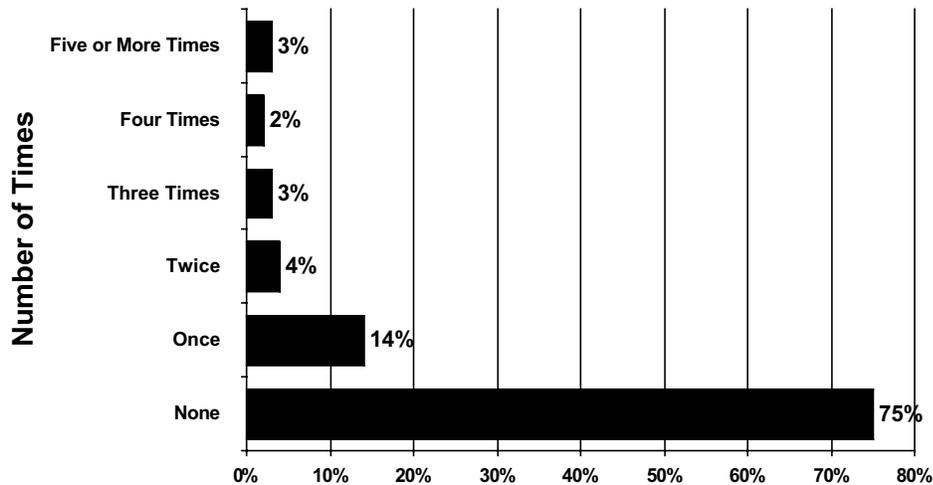
Teachers are generally seen as having high expectations for students. About 80% of all respondents

figure 17 Percentage of Respondents by Degree that They Feel Teachers Have High Expectations of Them (2001)



agreed that teachers have high expectations for them. (See Figure 17) Not only are teachers seen as having high expectations, but they are also seen as caring about teens as individuals and about how well they do in school. More than 75% of all respondents said that teachers care about them and how they perform educationally. Teachers' support and their high expectations undoubtedly play a role in molding the future educational desires of teens. Among respondents, more than two out of three (71%) have plans that include higher education. Among juniors,

figure 18 Percentage of Respondents by Number of Times that Have Had to Change Schools Due to Moving in the Past Five Years (2001)



more than 80% expect to pursue a two-year or four-year college degree.

Of course, not all students find the educational process enjoyable or easy. In some cases, the problems lie with other teens. For example, about two out of every five (41%) teens said that they worry a fair amount to a lot about fitting in with other kids at school. To some extent concern over “fitting in” is a very natural part of adolescence. But some youth also see the school setting as being less than fair in their treatment of teens. Respondents were evenly divided when asked if they felt that the rules that govern their schools were equally applied to everyone. About half (49%) said that the rules were not applied the same for everyone at school. While the majority of youth (73%) haven’t skipped a class in the last month, this means as many as 25% have. More than 10% of all teens said that they had skipped three or more classes during that period. And nearly one in ten (9%) had been suspended from school in the past year.

One of the more difficult experiences of any youth is moving from one community to another. This often results, of course, in a change of school districts as well. The stresses associated with such moves can be considerable and contribute to feelings of alienation as well as difficulties in school work per-

formance. When asked how often they had moved to a new school in the past five years, most students (75%) had remained in the same district over that period. However, one in four had experienced at least one change of district. Many students (10%) have experienced multiple moves over the last five years, with as many as one out of every twenty-five youth changing schools four or more times. (See Figure 18)

TAP Trends: Teens in the 2001 TAP survey appear to be more worried about their academic performance and their ability to fit in socially than did those in the 1997 sample. For example, in 1997 about 25% of all youth expressed a high level of concern over “fitting in” with other kids at school. In the 2001 sample, as many as 40% of teens felt that way. This represents a significant jump in the level of concern. Although the numbers of youth concerned over their grades appear relatively stable between the two samples (80% in 1997 and 83% in 2001), these are also statistically significant. Youth in the 2001 survey expressed a greater level of concern with their grades. While there is no definitive reason for this change, it may reflect the considerable attention focussed on the changes in graduation requirements coming through the NYS Department of Education.

While a large portion of youth are concerned over the fair application of school rules to everyone (about 49% said that they felt such rules were not applied equally at their school), this does represent a decline in concern over the 1997 sample. In 1997 as many as 52% of youth felt that the rules were unevenly applied.

8. Parent-Child Relationships

Foci defined: Families and parent-child relationships are the basic building blocks of a child's development. Parents are the single greatest contributor to the social, emotional and intellectual development of a child. While many different people and institutions influence children along the way as they move from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, parents and families are the centers from which children assimilate the necessary values to become productive and contributing members of our communities. The TAP survey asked youth about their experiences and their relationships within the home setting.

2001 Synopsis: In many ways, parents and families serve dual roles for youth. They provide a variety of insight and opportunity for exploration of family and cultural values, while at the same time they are barriers to youth involvement in a variety of activities or association with a variety of issues. This duality of purpose, while sometimes in conflict, is recognized by many youth.

The messages that parents are trying to convey are, for the most part, heard, if not heeded, by teens. Many youth (75%) have had some level of conversation with their parents about their family history, their faith, or the values that are important to the family. More than one in four teens (26%) said they had these conversations on a fairly regular basis. Almost 95% of all youth said that their parents care about their interests and encourage them in their activities to some extent. More than half (56%) said parents always offer such encouragement. Parents are also seen as emphasizing the importance of school work. The vast majority (95%) of teens indicated that their parents are interested in their school work on some level, and more than 85% said that their parents are often or always concerned with how they are doing in school. Almost 90% of youth understand that parents feel that postponing sexual activity until they are older is a good idea. And almost as many (85% and 90%, respectively) understand that their parents feel that using alcohol or tobacco is something teens shouldn't be doing either. Clearly parents' desires, and their associated values, are being understood by a large number of teens.

Parents are also gatekeepers in many ways for teens. Two out of every three youth said that their

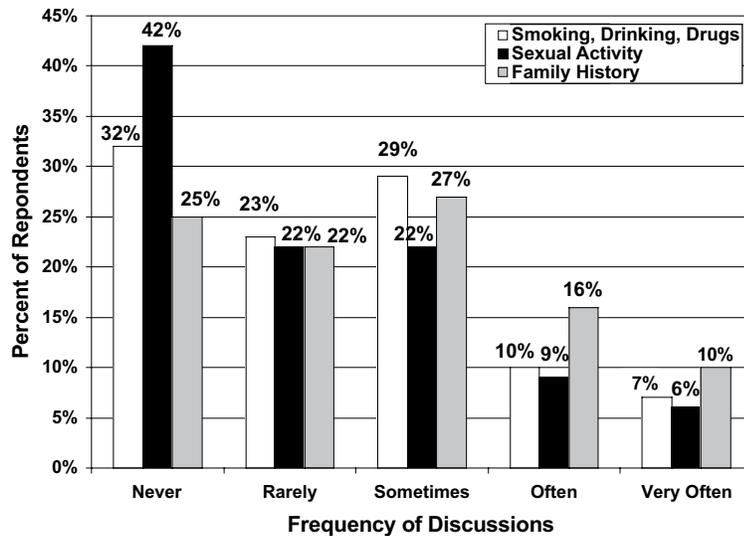
parents always, or at least often, set clear rules for them to follow. And a majority of youth (55%) expect to be punished by their parents if they don't follow these rules. Parents, according to teens, generally want to know who their kids are hanging around with (81%), what they're doing after school (81%), and where they are when they go out (88%). And, according to respondents, most parents (83%) expect teens to call them when those teens are not at home. Clearly parents are trying to be involved and keep their finger on the pulse, as it were, of their children's development.

As much as parents are rule-setters and disciplinarians, they are also seen as potential harbors of safety and assistance for many youth. Moms and dads are, in fact, seen as resources by many youth when they are in need of help. About 80% of teens said that they could turn to their mothers, and 65% to their fathers, if they had a serious personal problem. When given a scenario in which they were in need of a ride in order to avoid getting involved in a bad situation, more than four out of five teens (82%) indicated that they would be willing to call their parents for a ride, even if it meant getting in trouble.

However, the reality is that many youth don't seem to interact with their parents as much as might be desired. About 13% of all respondents spend more than 10 hours at home alone each week. Given that the typical teen probably has about 60 hours per week that they are not in school or asleep at night, this means that one out of every eight youth spends more than 20% of their "home-time" home alone. Interestingly, the time that is spent together between teens and adults at home isn't being spent in what has been seen as a traditional family encounter - the family dinner hour. Less than half of the teens surveyed (47%) said that they sat down to dinner with their whole family five or more times each week. More than a third only do it once or twice a week.

The reality of modern families, at least for a portion of youth, seems to be a conveyance of values, and a willingness to consider members as important resources, but a lack of interaction. More than half (54%) of all respondents said that they had almost never had a conversation with at least one parent about the risks of smoking, drinking or using drugs over the last year. In regard to the risks of being sexually

figure 19 Percentage of Respondents that Talk to Parents About Various Issues by Frequency (2001)



active, almost two thirds (63%) of teens said they had almost never talked to a parent about the issue. (See Figure 19)

This limited, if sometimes non-existent, interaction about important issues has a very real impact on where youth turn when they are faced with problems. When teens were asked whom they would generally talk to when they had a problem, only about 22% of respondents said that they would turn to a parent first. The most common answer was that they would turn to a friend (49%).

While this is somewhat disheartening, there is an interesting relationship between the likelihood that a teen turns to a parent for help and the level of open discussion that occurs between parents and their children. Teens who have had fairly regular discussions with parents about issues such as drug use or sexuality are one third more likely to turn to a parent if they have a serious problem than are youth who haven't. In addition, these respondents are about 25% less likely to simply hold back and not approach anyone with their problems. So while youth who seem to have more open communication with their parents are more likely to seek out their help when serious problems arise, they are also more likely to seek help from other sources as well. This is at least preferable to remaining silent and, typically, accomplishing little to resolve the issue at hand.

Unfortunately, there are a fair number of situa-

tions in which the level of communication, and in fact the degree to which teens get along with their parents, is far from the ideal. When youth were asked how much they worry about getting along with their parents, about 60% said they worried a fair amount to a lot. In addition, a substantial number also worry about how well their parents are getting along with one another. More than half (53%) worried considerably about how their parents got along as a couple.

Youth are concerned about other issues at home as well. For example, four out of ten youth said that they worried at least to some degree about their parents drinking or their use of drugs. Two out of three (67%) were quite concerned about their family's financial standing and whether there was

enough money for them to "get by." Although the majority of youth don't have a great deal of fear for their personal safety at home, as many as one in four (24%) expressed at least some concern that someone at home might get hurt by another person in the household.

TAP Trends: Comparisons between the 1997 and 2001 TAP data for Herkimer County suggest, at the very least, that youth have become more sensitive to the nature of their relationship with their parents. For example, teens were more likely to be worried about how they got along with their parents in 2001 than they were in 1997. In addition, they were much more likely to be worried about how well their parents were getting along.

This is not to say that youth felt less safe at home in 2001. In fact, statistically, significantly more youth indicated that they felt safe at home in 2001 than did in 1997. In addition, the rules by which teens are expected to live in the home are apparently being conveyed more clearly and violations of these rules are being dealt with more consistently in 2001 than in 1997. A significantly greater number of youth say that their parents are setting clear rules for them, and that they expect to be punished if they fail to follow these rules, now than they were four years ago.

While there are still large numbers of youth that don't have open conversations with their parents about

issues of importance, there has been significant improvements in the levels of communication between teens and their parents since 1997. For example, while only slightly more (an additional 4%) teens talked with their parents in the past year about family history and values, the frequency of those conversations improved significantly. The number of teens reporting that they had frequent conversations with their parents about family values more than doubled in 2001 over 1997.

9. Perceptions of Community

Foci defined: The communities and neighborhoods in which youth grow up are one of the strongest influences in their lives. Neighborhoods and communities both influence, and are influenced by, our youth. Community involvement, both in terms of the youth's involvement in shaping his neighborhood and the neighborhood's influence on the youth's development, is an important part of helping teens define their lives. The values and interests of the community are often shared by the young people found living there. Communities offer the opportunity for self-fulfillment, as well as providing a guide in terms of what might be acceptable or unacceptable activities. They offer safe haven as well as providing restraints against undesirable behavior.

2001 Synopsis: As indicated earlier, most youth feel relatively safe within their community. Nearly 85% of all respondents agreed that they felt safe while in their community. A large number of youth see their neighborhoods and communities as caring about them and as a resource if needed. For example, more than half (55%) of all youth indicated that they felt adults in their community cared about, and valued, kids their age. Teens also see the adults in their neighborhoods and communities as being problem-solving resources. Almost three out of four youth (74%) felt that they could count on adults in their community to help them if they had a problem. Slightly more respondents (80%) agreed that the adults in their community would also be likely to tell their parents if they were doing something wrong.

While adults in the community are clearly seen as an informal resource for youth, they are not the only resource, of course. More formal options exist for youth who need help. One obvious one would be the local police. Half of all youth surveyed (50%)

When it comes to more sensitive topics, such as teen sexuality or drug use, the data suggest that, to some extent, there has been some ground lost in terms of the percentage of parents and youth talking about such topics, particularly drugs and alcohol. While there is no significant difference in the number of youth and parents talking about teen sexuality issues (it remains around 60%), the numbers of families talking about drugs and alcohol has declined from 72% to about 68%. This is a statistically significant change.

indicated that they were comfortable in talking to the police if they had a problem or needed help. A fair number of youth are also aware of other specific community resources - such as pregnancy/birth control/abstinence counseling services (42%), services to help address sexual or physical abuse (39%), alcohol/drug abuse services (38%), or suicide prevention services (37%). However, these numbers suggest that many still remain unaware of the availability of community-based programs. Nearly six out of every ten youth were unaware of the availability of these types of services, even though most are present in every community in some form.

Youth also see their community settings in terms of what they offer. For example, some youth see economic opportunities in their local communities. More than half (55%) of all respondents indicated that they saw their communities as places they could earn money or find a job. But while local settings offer youth an opportunity to be productive, they don't seem to offer opportunities for entertainment. Less than one third (32%) of youth said that there were fun things to do in their community. Despite this perceived shortcoming, youth seem to view their neighborhoods and communities as more than just a place to reap benefits. They also have some perspective on giving back to the places they live. Seven out of ten teens (70%) said that they felt that it was important to contribute to their communities and society.

TAP Trends: While only about a third of all youth said that there were fun things to do in their community in the 2001 survey, this does represent a statistically significant improvement over the 1997 numbers. In 1997, about 27% of teens said there were fun things to do where they lived; by 2001 that number had climbed to 32%.

Conclusion

This TAP survey is the second conducted in Herkimer County. It offers some new insights, some old confirmations, and an opportunity to continue the process of listening, as well as talking with, our young people about the issues that concern them. The information contained in this report is NOT intended to be static and remain here as a part of a scholarly work. Rather it is hoped that service providers, school personnel, community leaders, parents and teens themselves will use the information as the basis for new discussions on ways in which we might all work together to make the transition from youth to young adulthood a safer, more enjoyable one for the youth in our communities.

Based on the findings of the 2001 TAP survey, it is clear many youth are successfully making their way through this maturation process. At the same time some youth fall prey to the pitfalls of modern adolescence - alcohol use, drug use, irresponsible sexual activity, suicide ideation, etc.

There is a common thread, however, within the 2001 survey, as well as in light of the 1997 survey, that continues to offer hope and encouragement. Involved parents and families continue to be a primary resource for teens. They continue to see parents and families as being important factors in their own social, emotional and intellectual growth. It is what they desire, what they need, and what they see as being important in helping them along the path of adolescence.

While parents continued to lag behind celebrities/athletes as the most popular role model, they have shown some gains since 1997. In the 1997 survey, 22% of respondents indicated that either a parent or adult relative was their role model. In 2001, 28% saw parents or adult relatives as being their role models. (See Figure 20) This is a significant increase over the last four years.

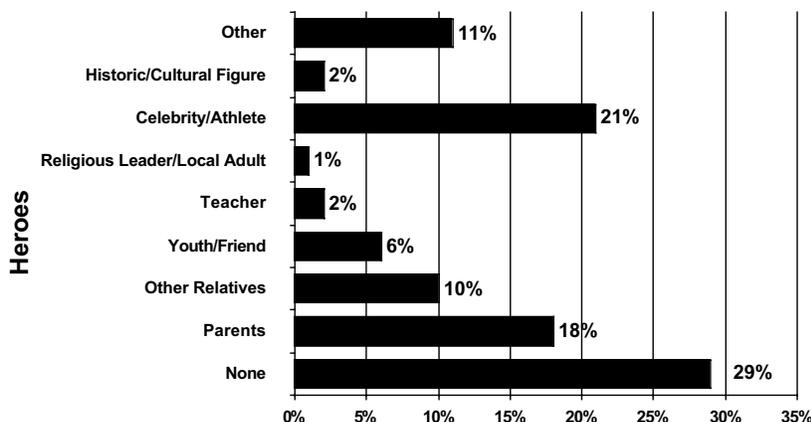
In addition, teens continue to see involved parents and families as the single greatest factor keeping them from becoming involved in various harmful activities. More than 80% of all respondents saw their parents and involved families as being helpful in keeping them from being involved in destructive behaviors. (See Figure 21) Positive role models (of which 28% of teens said their parents were their role models) were the second most important factor (73%) in this regard. After school activities was cited by as many as 70% of teens as helping them keep from becoming involved in harmful activities.

Clearly, involved parents and families continue to have an important role to play in helping teens through the difficulties of modern adolescence. For example, youth that have talked to their parents about drug use and the danger of alcohol use are significantly less likely to be involved in those activities. But it cannot be simply an occasional message to teens. If the responses to questions about the frequency of teen parent discussions about drugs and alcohol are viewed closely, what is found is that the

greatest impact (and in some cases the ONLY impact) occurs when teens report having talked often, or very often, about such issues. Those that only have occasional talks with their parents, or those that have almost no such conversations, tend to be more likely to participate in such activities.

Clearly, communication can work. At issue of course is the level of communication. Just as parents play an important role in overseeing their child's homework and school performance, they need to also realize that they

figure 20 Percentage of Youth that See Certain Figures as Heroes (2001)



can play a positive role in helping to keep their children safe from many of the other difficult issues they face while growing up. Discussions about issues such as substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, physical abuse, etc. are equally, if not more, important than ones about family values and family history.

To point to communication as the catchall for all of the pitfalls of adolescence, however, is too simplistic, of course. The difficulties of parenting and growing up in our world is sometimes overwhelming, if not at least daunting, for many families and youth. Many youth, and many families, fall prey to the difficulties of day to day survival in the face of various difficulties despite good communication and the best laid plans. Parents and youth have difficulties fulfilling needed roles and contributing in positive ways to the good of the familial unit.

The community as a whole, including religious institutions, service providers, schools, and other community-based groups such as neighbors and friends, plays an important role in the development of our youth as well. These institutions, and the people that comprise them, are important in defining positive activities, in supporting parents and families in need, in preparing young people to be productive contributors, and in filling the gaps when parents fail to be able to fulfill their roles in youth development.

At the core of all of this are the youth themselves. They also have responsibilities - responsibilities to

be committed to self-improvement and to make positive contributions to their families; responsibilities to uphold and assist community well-being; responsibilities to value learning and to contribute to their schools; responsibilities to assist their peers in finding help when needed and to improve the quality of their social interactions; and responsibilities to be good to themselves, to see themselves as important parts of the social fabric.

This report re-confirms something that was found in the 1997 survey - that involved parents and families CAN make a difference. Parents need to know that their children continue to need their advice and guidance, not just about school work and future life plans, but also about other issues that represent serious challenges to them as they mature: drug use, alcohol use, teen sexuality, violence, and abuse. This is not the voice of distant “experts.” This is the voice of our youth. It is what they told us four years ago. It is what they are telling us still - be involved with us, and help us.

By using the information contained in the 2001 Herkimer County Teen Assessment Project for such things as project planning, program development, and funding applications, work can progress toward strengthening communities as well as families. It is important that this data, and the teen voices it represents, is used as a means to assist our young people as they become productive contributors to our social fabric.

figure 21 Percentage of Respondents that Report that Certain Factors Help Keep Youth From Being Involved in Harmful or Negative Activities (2001)

