# Chesterfield County Coordinating Council

# Stop the Violence Project

## Findings from the Student Survey

## 2003-2009

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## Introduction

The Student Survey gauges middle and high school students' attitudes toward family and dating violence; experience of violence in theirs' and their friends' lives; views of the acceptability of violent behaviors in dating and family relationships; views on more general aspects of dating relationships; substance use; and perceptions of the extent of and community response to relationship violence in the community.

The survey began in 2003 as part of a broader effort to examine a range of factors implicated in dating and family violence and included some questions regarding general risk behaviors. For the 2006-2007 school year, the survey was revised to include new items related to substance use and the student's own and perceived parental attitudes toward substance use. For some substance use factors, then, three years of data are available while other factors may are reported across six years.

## Methods

The survey was administered to a convenience sample of middle and high school students in the spring or fall during each of the academic years from 2003 to 2009. Data were collected from at least one classroom at each grade level in all middle and high schools in the County; in the first year of the survey, however, one high school opted not to participate due to competing demands.

An introductory letter that included the date and time for survey administration and the consent and assent forms were sent home with all of the students in the classrooms selected, and students returned these to the school by a specified date. A reminder was sent home with students prior to the date of administration. Various incentives (e.g., pizza party) were used to assure an adequate response. The survey was administered in a group setting by a staff member of the Chesterfield County Coordinating Council (CCCC) or a community volunteer. The sample consisted of 273 students in year 1; 173 in year 2; 327 in year 3; 498 in year 4; 428 in year 5; and 351 in year 6.

## Results

### Characteristics of the Students

Table 1 shows the age, gender, race or ethnicity, and grade level of students in each of the survey years. As may be seen, the average age of students completing the survey has remained fairly consistent across the six years of data collection. So, too, has the gender of participants, other than in the first year. In addition, the sharp shift in grade level that occurred in year three has

begun to move back toward the distribution of earlier years. Finally, it is interesting to note that the percent of African-American students has remained consistent while the percent of Latino participants has increased and the percent of White students has decreased, albeit not to a large extent.

Table 1: Average age, gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level, 2003-2008

| | | **Y1** | **Y2** | **Y3** | **Y4** | **Y5** | **Y6** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average age in years | | 14.3 | 14.7 | 14.3 | 14.2 | 14.1 | 14.2 |
| Gender | Female | 72.7% | 61.9% | 64.9% | 65.3% | 62.7% | 65.2% |
| | Male | 27.3% | 38.1% | 35.1% | 34.7% | 37.3% | 34.8% |
| Race/Ethnicity | Black or African-American | 35.3% | 37.3% | 34.0% | 34.7% | 36.2% | 34.1% |
| | Hispanic and other minorities | 5.3% | 9.6% | 5.9% | 7.4% | 5.2% | 8.0% |
| | White | 59.5% | 53.0% | 60.0% | 57.9% | 58.2% | 57.9% |
| Grade level | Middle school | 45.0% | 42.6% | 29.8% | 38.5% | 50.4% | 46.1% |
| | High school | 55.0% | 57.4% | 70.2% | 61.5% | 49.6% | 53.9% |

Substance use[1]

The survey included questions regarding students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs[2] over the previous six months, age of first use, and students' own and perceived parental attitudes toward substance use. Figure 1 shows the results of past 6 month substance use. There has been a significant decrease in past 6 months tobacco use, $X^2$ (5) = 14.1, $p < .05$ from 25.3% in 2003 to 18.8% in 2009. Alcohol use has increased over time from 29.2% in 2003 to 36.8% in 2009. Illicit drug use has declined slightly over time from 14.4% of students in 2003 to 10.8% in 2009. These changes were not significant.

Data on marijuana use is available from 2006 through 2009 and these data show a decrease over time from 12.9% in 2006 to 10.8% in 2009, although the change was not significant. Data have also been collected on age of first use for cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana over the past 3 years (Figure 2). These results show a general trend toward the initiation of all substances at an earlier age, with an increase of 15.7% between 2006 and 2009 in students who reported initiating tobacco use by age 12, an increase of 18.1% in the proportion of students who reported initiating alcohol use by age 12, and an increase of 42.6% in the proportion of students who reported initiating marijuana use by age 12.

It is concerning to note that that over 50% of students completing the survey in 2008-2009 who smoke began doing so by age 15. Of students who have used alcohol, nearly 2/5ths began drinking before age 12 and more than ¾ did so by age 15. Especially alarming is the finding that of students who have used marijuana, over 60% did so by age 12 and over 90% did so by age 15.

Figure 1: Tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use in the past six months, 2003-2009.

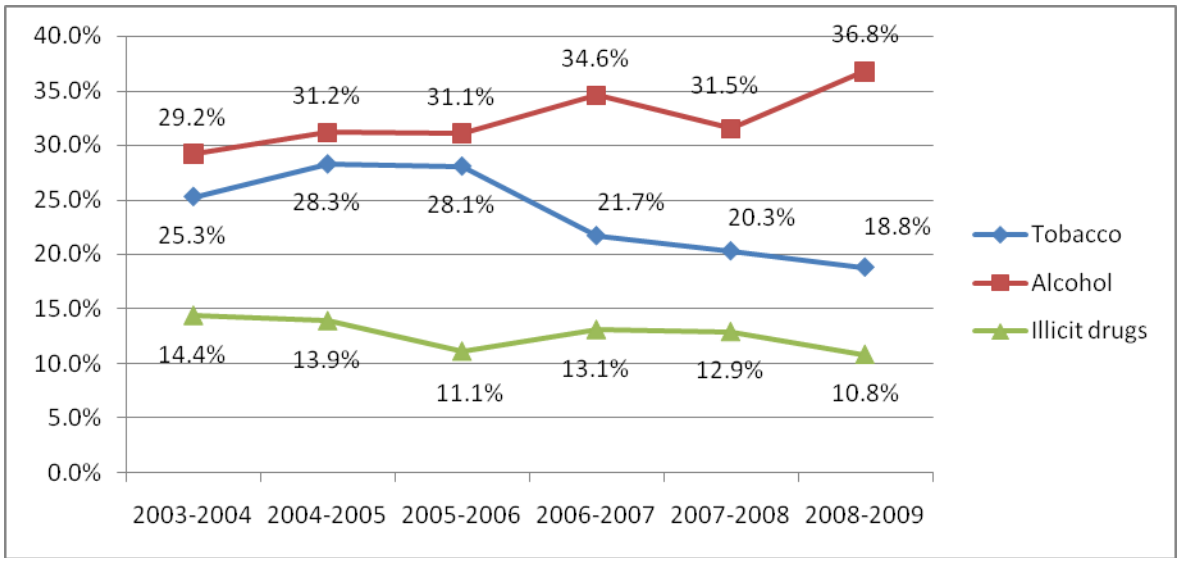
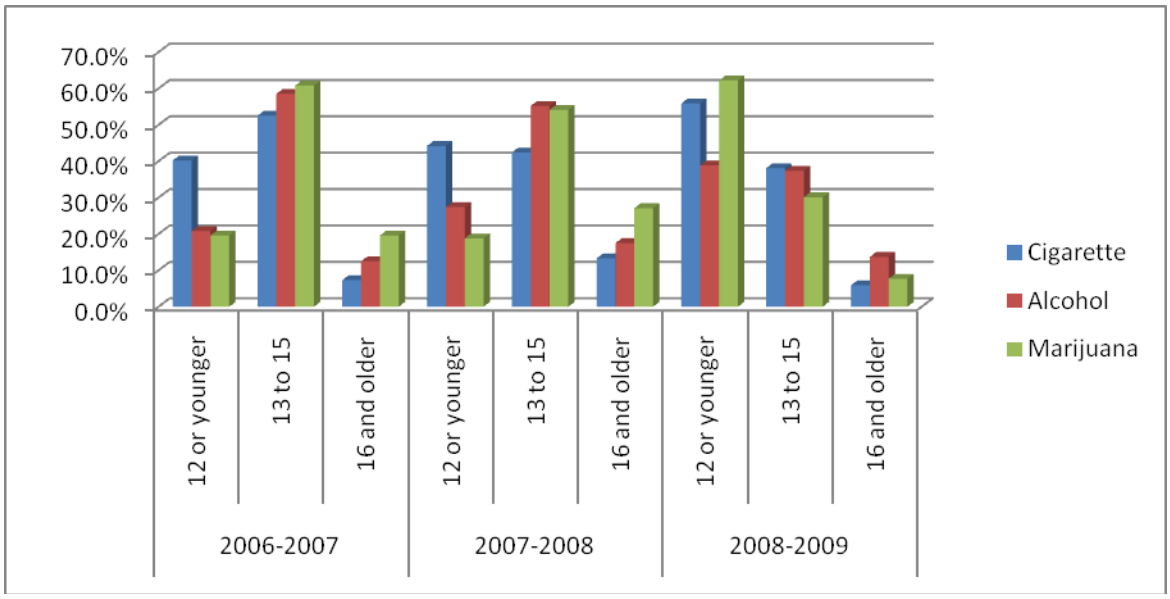



Figure 2: Age of first use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana, 2006-2009




Data on the frequency of past month cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use have also been collected over the past three years. These results show that the trend toward less tobacco use has increased, with about 90% of students who smoke indicating smoking five or fewer cigarettes per day, up from 76.6% the year before; about 7% smoking half a pack per day, down from 14.1% the year before; and 2.4% smoking a pack or more per day, down from 9.4% the year before. The change across the past three years is significant, $X^2(4) = 16.3$, $p < .01$.

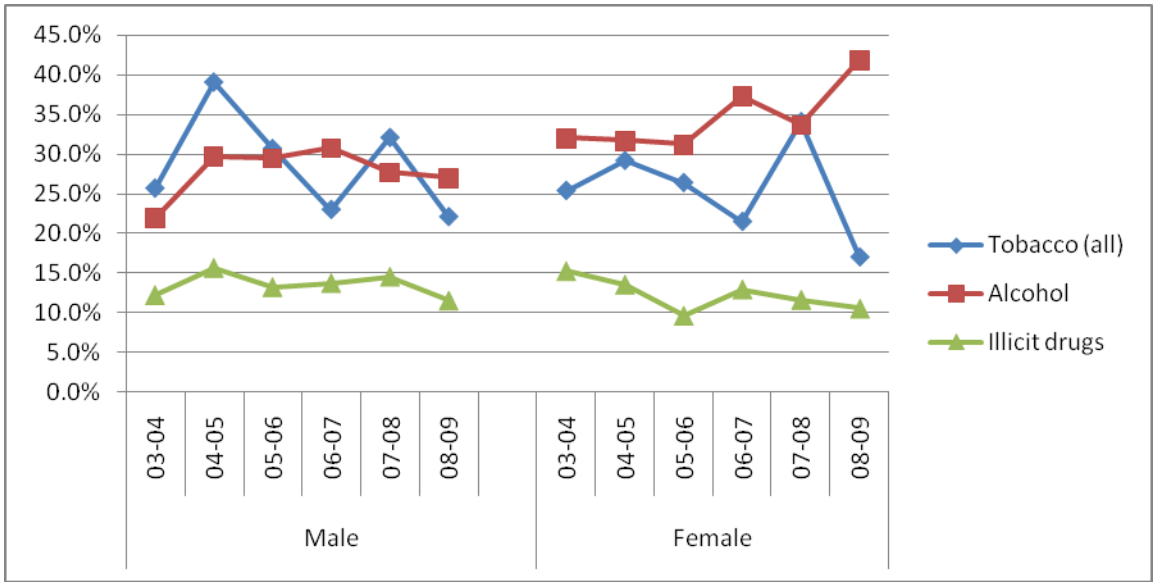
There is also a trend toward less alcohol use with 65.3% of students indicating drinking 1 to 2 times in the past 30 days, up from 40.8% the year before; 28.2% drinking 3 to 9 times, down from 44.9% the year before; and 6.5% indicating drinking 10 or more times in the past 30 days, down from 14.3% the year before. The change across time is significant, $X^2(4) = 21.2$, $p < .001$. Finally, there is also a trend toward less frequent marijuana use with 83.3% of students indicating use 1 or 2 times in the past 30 days, up from 29.2% the year before; 12.0% indicating use 3 to 9 times in the past 30 days, down from 20.8% the previous year; and 4.3% indicating use 10 or more times in the past 30 days, down from 50.0% the year before. This change across years is significant, $X^2(4) = 67.1$, $p < .001$.

*Substance use by gender*

The percent of males and females reporting tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use by year are shown in Figure 3. As may be seen, tobacco use declined dramatically for males in 2008-2009 after rising significantly the year before. The change in male tobacco use across time is significant, $X^2(5) = 11.3$, $p < .05$. The proportion of males indicating alcohol use remained nearly the same over the past two years but there was a small but non-significant decrease in illicit drug use.

Tobacco use among females declined by half between 2008 and 2009 but the change was not statistically significant. Over the same period, alcohol use rose by nearly 10 percentage points but this change, too, was non-significant. Finally, illicit drug use declined for females between 2008 and 2009 but not to a significant extent.

Figure 3: Substance use by gender, 2003-2009.

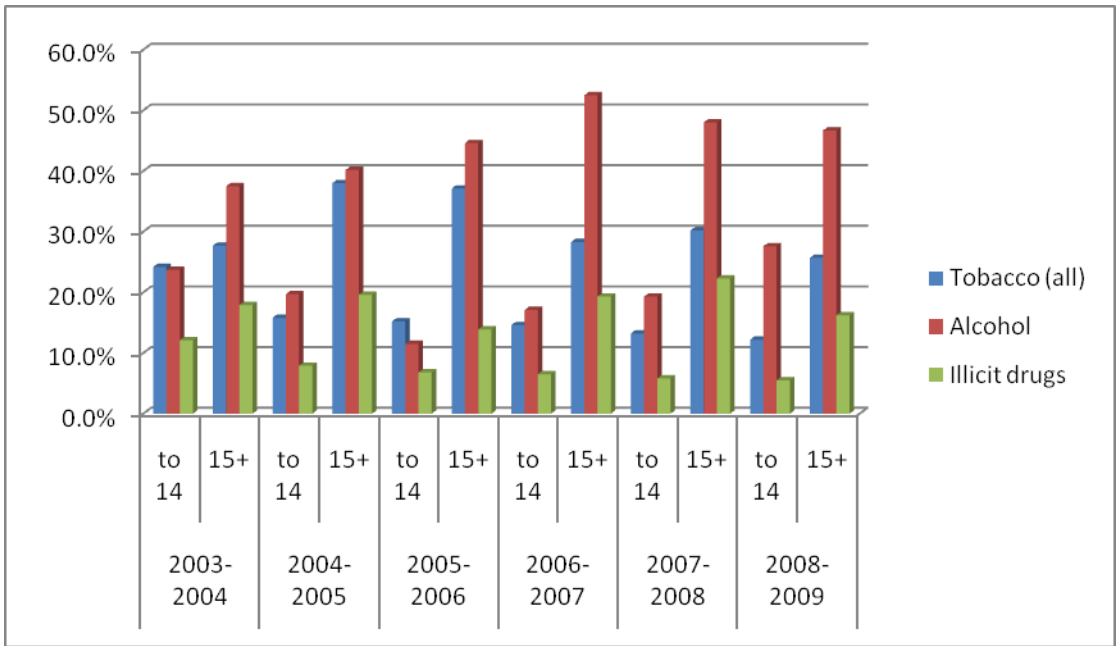


*Substance use by age*

The percent of students ages 14 and younger and students age 15 and older who reported using tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs are shown in Figure 4. As may be seen, tobacco use has declined across time for students age 14 and younger and this change is significant, $X^2(5) = 11.8$, $p < .05$. Alcohol use also increased significantly between 2003 and 2008 for students in this age group, $X^2(5) = 15.3$, $p < .01$ while illicit drug use decreased, although to a non-significant extent.

Tobacco use showed a modest and non-significant decrease across all years for students age 15 and older. Alcohol use has increased over time for students in this age group, although not to a significant extent. It is concerning, however, that nearly half of students age 15 and older reported alcohol use. Finally, illicit drug use has fluctuated slightly across time but in a very narrow range, with a decrease in 2008-2009 over the year before. This decrease was not significant.

Figure 4: Percent of students ages 14 and young and 15 and older reporting tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use, 2003-2009.




*Attitudes toward substance use*

Beginning in 2006-2007, the survey included items asking students how much harm they saw in substance use at various levels. The trend in student beliefs about the harm of smoking a pack of cigarettes a day is consistent across time, with 81% of students in 2008-2009 indicating moderate to great harm, an increase of 1.6% over the previous year. There is a trend toward students believing that drinking one or two times per week is not harmful or slightly harmful, with 57.8% of students so indicating in 2008-2009, up 3.5% over the previous year. This is not the case,

Table 2: Perceived harm of substance use, 2006-2009

| Type and level of use | 2006-2007 | | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Level | | Level | | Level | |
| | None or slight | Mod. or great | None or slight | Mod. or great | None or slight | Mod. or great |
| 1 pack of cigarettes a day | 18.2% | 81.9% | 20.6% | 79.4% | 19.0% | 81.0% |
| 1-2 drinks 1 or 2 times a week | 52.4% | 47.6% | 54.1% | 45.9% | 57.8% | 42.2% |
| 1-2 drinks nearly every day | 20.5% | 79.5% | 23.6% | 76.4% | 23.8% | 76.2% |
| Smoke marijuana once or twice a month | 38.6% | 61.4% | 38.0% | 62.0% | 45.5% | 54.5% |
| Smoke marijuana once or twice a week | 21.6% | 78.4% | 21.2% | 78.8% | 23.3% | 76.7% |

however, for beliefs in the risk of harm in daily drinking, with 76.2% of students indicating moderate to great harm in daily drinking, about the same level as the previous year. Finally, there is a slight upward trend in student beliefs that smoking marijuana is not harmful or slightly harmful, with 45.5% of students indicating no or slight harm in monthly use, up by 7.5% from the previous year, and 23.3% of students indicating no or slight harm in weekly use, up 2.1% over the previous year. These changes across time are not significant.

Students were also asked their perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward substance use. These results are shown in Table 3. As may be seen, in 2008-2009, students generally believe that their parents find it wrong to engage in substance use, with 88% indicating that their parents believe it fairly or very wrong to smoke, a slight decrease over the previous year. In addition, 86.3% of students indicated that their parents believe it is fairly or very wrong to drink, a slight increase over the previous year, and 96.3% indicated their parent's belief that it is fairly or very wrong to smoke marijuana, also a slight increase over the previous year. The differences across time were not significant.

Table 3: Perceived parental attitudes toward substance use, 2006-2009

| How wrong do your parents think it would be for you to… | 2006-2007 | | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all or a little | Fairly or very | Not at all or a little | Fairly or very | Not at all or a little | Fairly or very |
| Smoke? | 12.5% | 87.5% | 10.1% | 89.9% | 12.0% | 88.0% |
| Drink beer, wine, or hard liquor? | 15.5% | 84.5% | 15.6% | 84.4% | 13.7% | 86.3% |
| Smoke marijuana? | 6.8% | 93.2% | 5.2% | 94.8% | 3.7% | 96.3% |

The individual perceived risk of harm items and the perceived parental attitude items may be meaningfully combined to form two indices. Each index produces a score between 1 and 4 with higher scores indicating greater perceived risk of harm for substance use in general and greater perceived disapproval by parents for substance use in general. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations by year for the two indices.

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation for perceived risk of harm and parental attitudes toward substance use, 2006-2007 to 2008-2009

| | **2006-2007** | | **2007-2008** | | **2008-2009** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Perceived risk of harm index | 3.0 | 0.8 | 3.0 | 0.9 | 2.9 | 0.8 |
| Parental attitudes toward substance use index | 3.6 | 0.7 | 3.6 | 0.7 | 3.7 | 0.6 |

As may be seen, there is a slight downward trend in the perceived risk of harm of substance use across time and a slight upward trend in perceptions of parental attitudes towards substance use across time. The values shown indicate that students believe that substance use poses a moderate risk of harm and that students generally believe that their parents believe that substance use is very wrong.

These indices were analyzed to see if there were differences by gender and age. The results showed that across the last three years females were significantly more likely than were males to perceive greater risk of harm from substance use, $F(1, 1269) = 29.7$, $p < .001$. There was no significant gender difference for perceived parental attitudes toward substance use.

There was a significant difference by age for the perceived risks of harm from substance use, $F(2, 1251) = 6.4$, $p < .01$, with older students perceiving a greater risk of harm than younger students. There was also a significant age difference across years for perceived parental attitudes, $F(2, 1249) = 11.8$, $p < .001$, with younger students perceiving higher levels of parental disapproval of substance use than older students.

*Student estimates of alcohol use and reports of offers of substances*

In 2008-2009 students were asked to estimate the proportion of students at their school who used alcohol in the past 30 days, providing an average estimate of 47.8%. Middle school students estimated an average of 28.7% while high school students estimated that an average of 63.9% of students drank alcohol in the past 30 day. Students ages 14 and younger estimated an average of 30.2% while students age 15 and older estimated an average of 66.8%. Males estimated an average of 38.6% while females estimated an average of 52.5%. This latter result is consistent with findings that females report higher rates of drinking than do males.

Also for the first time in 2008-2009, students were asked to indicate the frequency with which they and other students in their grade had been approached with offers of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Table 5 shows these results for all students and for students by grade level, age, and gender. As may be seen, students generally report that other students are approached with offers of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs far more frequently than they themselves are approached. This is a consistent pattern for all students, and students by grade level, age, and gender. Interestingly, middle school students reported being approached at all more frequently did high school students, males more frequently than females, and older students more frequently than younger students. Older students and females tended to say that other students were approached more frequently than did younger and male students.

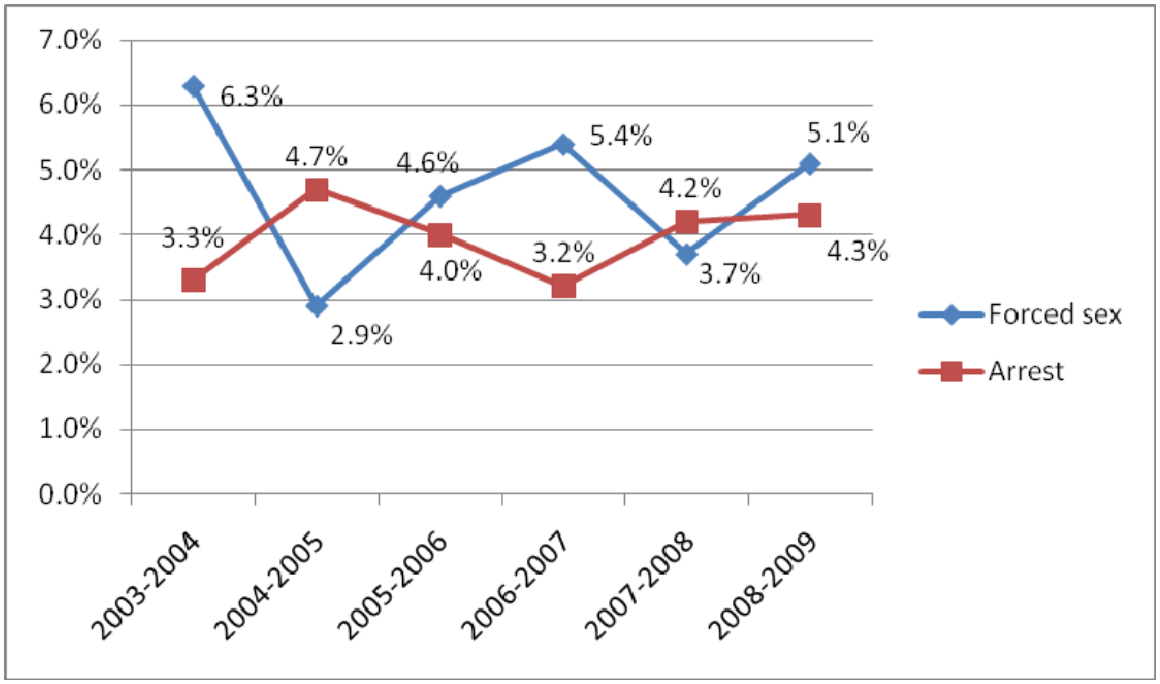
Table 5: Frequency of student reports of self and others being approached with offers of various substances, 2008-2009

| Item | Category | None | 1-2 year | 1-2 month | 1-2 week | Daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frequency self | All students | 51.9 | 27.4 | 12.2 | 6.4 | 2.0 |
| | Middle school | 44.3 | 40.5 | 10.8 | 2.5 | 1.9 |
| | High School | 58.2 | 16.3 | 13.6 | 9.8 | 2.2 |
| | 14 and younger | 48.3 | 36.5 | 9.6 | 3.4 | 2.2 |
| | 15 and older | 54.9 | 17.9 | 15.4 | 9.9 | 1.9 |
| | Male | 45.4 | 34.5 | 10.1 | 5.9 | 4.2 |
| | Female | 55.4 | 23.7 | 13.4 | 6.7 | .9 |
| | | | | | | |
| Frequency others | All students | 9.7 | 23.3 | 28.1 | 18.7 | 20.2 |
| | Middle school | 14.6 | 35.8 | 31.8 | 9.3 | 8.6 |
| | High School | 5.6 | 12.3 | 25.1 | 26.8 | 30.2 |
| | 14 and younger | 13.3 | 32.9 | 31.2 | 13.3 | 9.2 |
| | 15 and older | 5.8 | 12.2 | 25.0 | 24.4 | 32.7 |
| | Male | 9.7 | 31.0 | 24.8 | 15.9 | 18.6 |
| | Female | 9.6 | 19.3 | 29.8 | 20.2 | 21.1 |

*Other risk behavior*

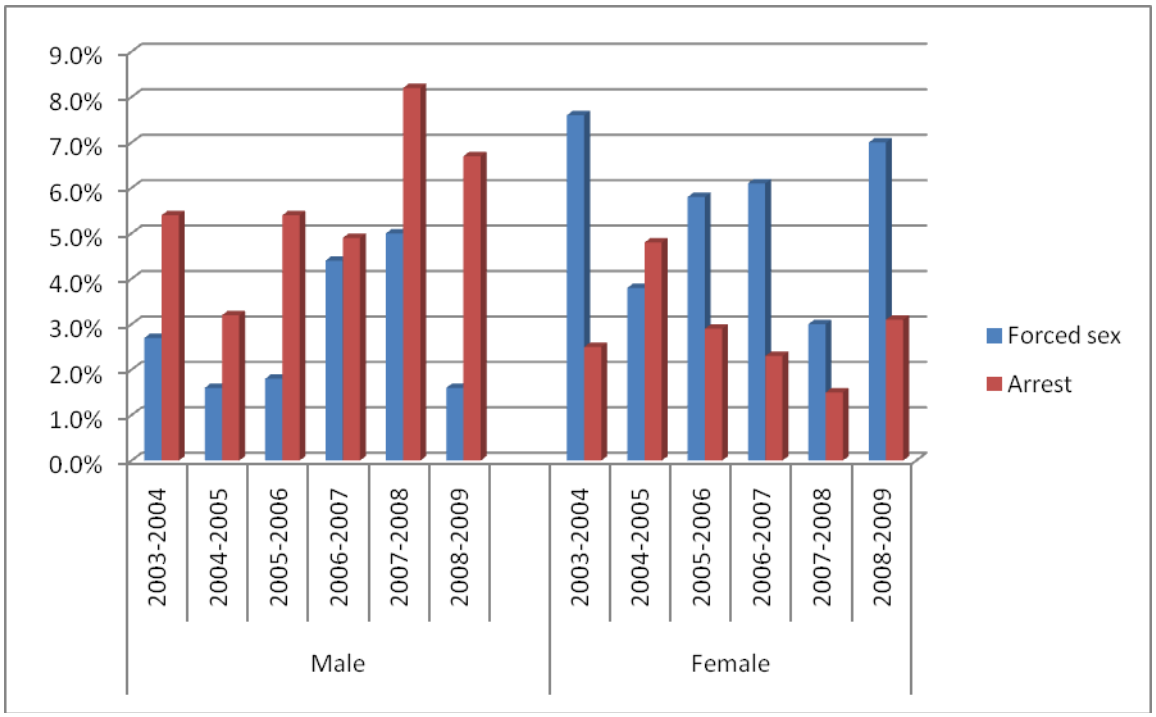
Students were asked whether they had been forced to have sex when they did not want to in the past 6 months and whether they had been arrested by the police over the same time period. These results for all students are shown in Figure 5. As may be seen, after a year of decline, the percent of students who say they were forced to have sex in the past 6 months increased from 3.7% in 2007-2008 to 5.1% in 2008-2009. The percent of students who reported having been arrested by the police remained about the same from 2007-2008 to 2008-2009. Differences across years are not significant.

Figure 5: Percent of students reporting forced sex or arrest in the past 6 months, 2003-2009




The percent of males and females indicating they had been forced to have sex or had been arrested is shown by year in Figure 6. Following several years of increase, the percentage of males indicating forced sex declined in 2008-2009 to 1.6%. However, this change is not significant. Similarly, the percent of males indicating an arrest in the past 6 months decreased from 8.2% in 2007-2008 to 6.7% in 2008-2009. Again, this change is not significant. Following a substantial decline the year before, the percent of females indicating forced sex in the past 6 months increased from 3.0% in 2007-2008 to 7.0% in 2008-2009. This change is significant, $X^2(1) = 4.26$, $p < .05$. Arrests among females increased from 1.5% in 2007-2008 to 3.1% in 2008-2009 but the difference was not significant.

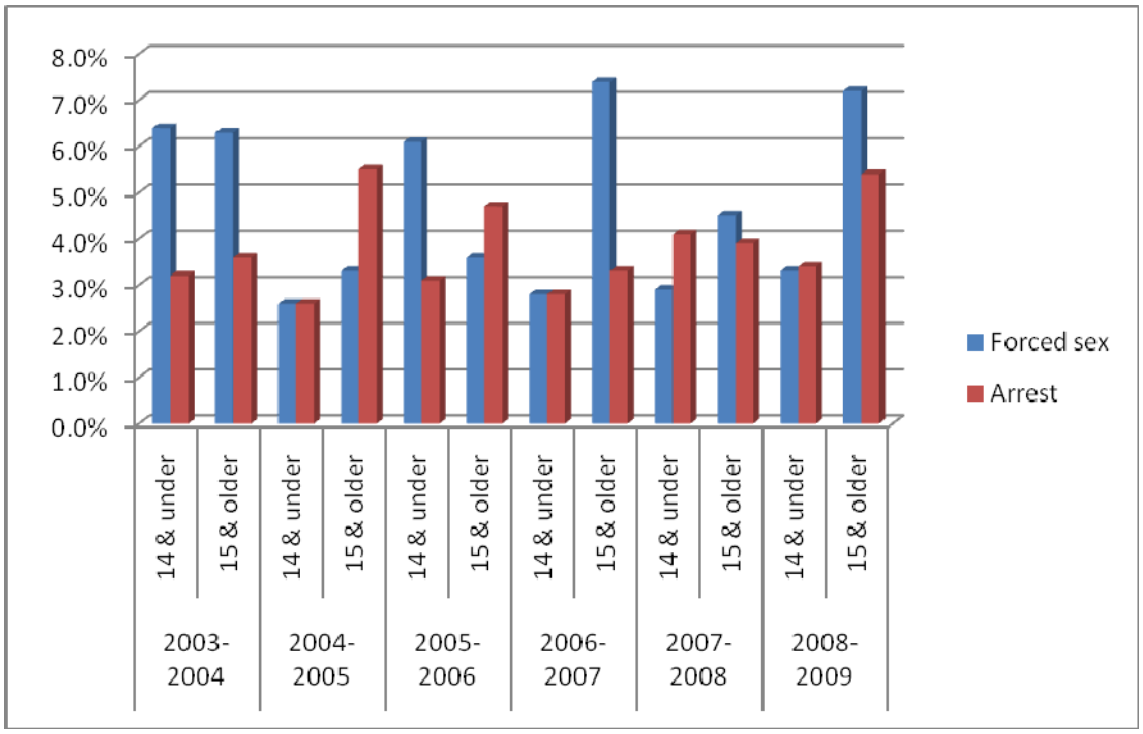
Figure 6: Percent of students reporting forced sex and arrest by gender, 2003-2009




Forced sex and arrests by age are shown in Figure 7. With the exception of the anomalous year of 2004-2005, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of students ages 14 and younger who reported having been forced to have sex until 2008-2009 when the rate increased slightly from 2.9% to 3.3%. This change, however, is not significant. Following a decline the previous year, the rate of forced sex among students ages 15 and older increased in the 2008-2009 school year from 4.5% to 7.2%. The increase is not significant.

The proportion of students ages 14 and younger indicating having been arrested decreased by slightly less than 1% between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, a non-significant difference. There was also an increase for students age 15 and older between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 from 3.9% to 5.4%, a non-significant change.

Figure 7: Percent of students reporting forced sex and arrest by age, 2003-2009

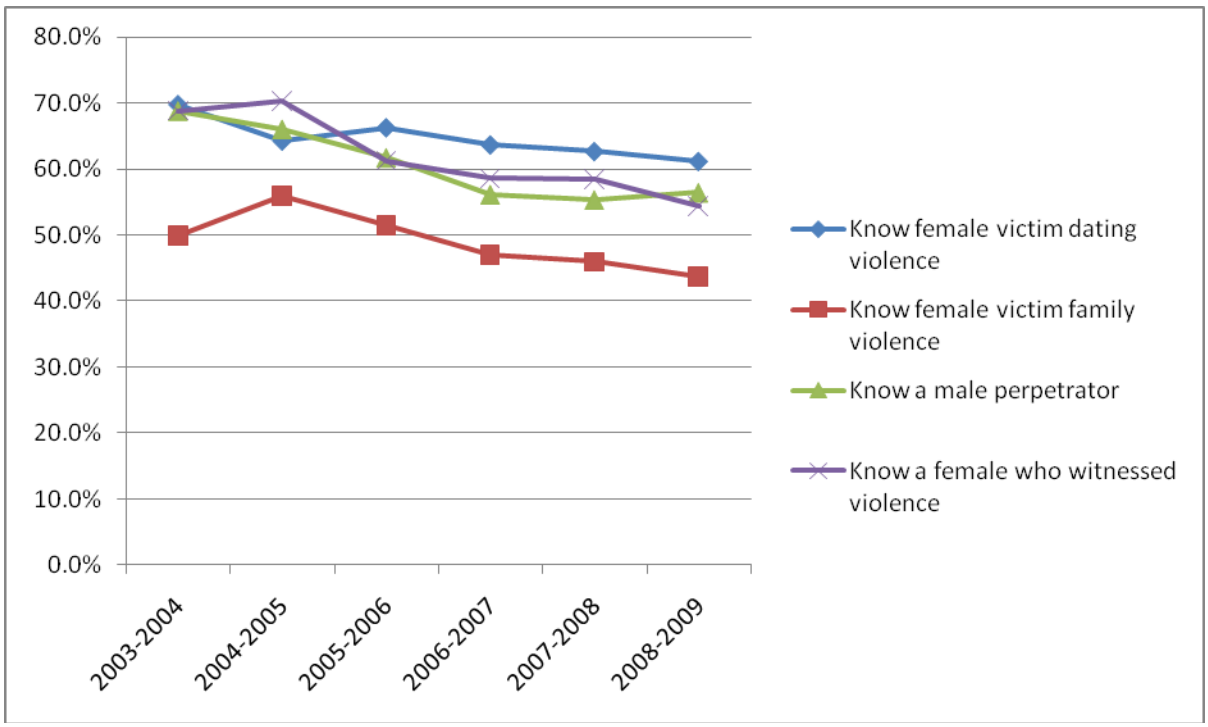



Experience of violence

*Knowledge of girl who experienced or witnessed violence or male who perpetrated violence*

The survey asks students whether or not they know a girl who experienced violence in a dating relationship and at the hands of a family member, if they know a male who has perpetrated violence, and whether or not they know a girl who has witnessed violence[3]. Figure 8 shows the results for all students by year. There has been a steady decline across all six years for each of these indicators, with a six year decrease of 8.6% in knowing a girl who was a victim of dating violence, 6.3% in knowing a girl who was a victim of family violence, 12.4% in knowing a male perpetrator, and 14.5% in knowing a girl who has witnessed violence. These differences across time are significant for knowing a male perpetrator, $X^2(5) = 16.9$, $p < .01$, and for knowing a girl who has witnessed violence, $X^2(5) = 14.4$, $p < .05$.

Figure 8: Knowledge of victims, perpetrators, and victims of violence among all students, 2003-2009.




Females were far more likely to know a girl who had experienced or witnessed violence, and to know a male who had perpetrated violence, as shown in Table 6. Across all data collection periods these differences are highly significant for knowing a girl who experienced violence in a dating relationship, $X^2(1) = 85.8$, $p < .001$, knowing a girl who experienced violence in a family relationship, $X^2(1) = 97.0$, $p < .001$, knowing a male who perpetrated violence, $X^2(1) = 77.6$, $p < .001$, and knowing a girl who witnessed violence, $X^2(1) = 52.1$, $p < .001$.

Table 7 shows the percent of students by age category who knew a girl who had experienced or witnessed violence or a male who had perpetrated violence. For ease of display, only two age categories are used, denoting students ages 14 and under and 15 and older. As may be seen, older girls were more likely to know a girl who experienced or witnessed violence and a male who had perpetrated violence. Across all data collection periods these differences are significant for knowing a girl who experienced violence in a dating relationship, $X^2(1) = 34.0$, $p < .001$, knowing a girl who experienced violence in a family relationship, $X^2(1) = 67.3$, $p < .001$, knowing a male who perpetrated violence, $X^2(1) = 79.0$, $p < .001$, and knowing a girl who witnessed violence, $X^2(1) = 28.0$, $p < .001$.

Table 6: Percent of male and female students who said they knew a victim, perpetrator, or witness of violence, 2003-2009

| **Know victims, perpetrators, or witness** | **Percent yes** | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **03-04** | | **04-05** | | **05-06** | | **06-07** | | **07-08** | | **08-09** | |
| | **M** | **F** | **M** | **F** | **M** | **F** | **M** | **F** | **M** | **F** | **M** | **F** |
| Female who experienced dating violence | 51.9 | 75.5 | 45.5 | 74.4 | 47.6 | 75.2 | 50.4 | 70.7 | 46.4 | 72.4 | 44.9 | 68.6 |
| Female who experienced family violence | 38.9 | 53.7 | 37.2 | 67.1 | 30.0 | 60.0 | 26.1 | 58.4 | 30.3 | 54.1 | 26.2 | 52.4 |
| Male perpetrator of dating violence | 60.7 | 71.4 | 53.1 | 72.7 | 47.3 | 68.4 | 41.6 | 64.4 | 36.9 | 66.5 | 43.8 | 63.0 |
| Female who witnessed violence | 54.5 | 73.4 | 58.5 | 77.1 | 43.5 | 67.6 | 46.7 | 64.7 | 45.3 | 65.7 | 36.4 | 62.3 |

Table 7: Knowledge of victimization by age, 2003-2009

| **Know Victims, Perpetrators, or Witnesses** | **Percent yes** | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2003-2004** | | **2004-2005** | | **2005-2006** | | **2006-2007** | | **2007-2008** | | **2008-2009** | |
| | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** | **Up to 14** | **15 and up** |
| Girl who experienced dating violence | 62.9 | 78.6 | 57.4 | 68.0 | 56.5 | 71.3 | 52.5 | 73.4 | 55.8 | 71.1 | 57.1 | 65.2 |
| Girl who experienced family violence | 40.2 | 63.2 | 43.2 | 63.8 | 37.4 | 59.7 | 32.5 | 62.2 | 36.6 | 58.0 | 41.7 | 46.0 |
| Male perpetrator | 59.8 | 79.6 | 47.3 | 78.0 | 53.5 | 67.1 | 41.2 | 70.7 | 47.3 | 63.6 | 46.2 | 66.2 |
| Girl who witnessed violence | 61.2 | 78.5 | 55.0 | 78.9 | 54.1 | 65.1 | 46.5 | 68.0 | 55.0 | 62.8 | 49.5 | 59.3 |

*Personal experience of violence*

Figure 9 shows the percent of all students who have experienced dating violence only, violence in another relationship only, or in both a dating and another relationship. Overall, 18.9% of students experienced some form of relationship violence in 2008-2009, up slightly over the previous year. As may be seen, the percent of students who experienced dating violence only has declined steadily from 2004-2005 through 2006-2007, and rose by 2.1% in 2007-2008 before falling by 1.6% in 2008-2009. The percent of students having experienced violence in another relationship only has shown a fairly consistent decline to its current 2.5%, the lowest level since data collection began. The percent of students having experienced violence in multiple relationships reached a low of 5.5% in 2007-2008 before increasing by 3.6% in 2008-2009. Across all years, the differences seen are not significant.

The experience of dating and other relationship violence by gender is shown in Figure 10. Females experience dating and other forms of violence at higher rates than do males. In 2007-2008, 22.7% of female students had experienced relationship violence, down slightly from the previous year, while 10.9% of males had experienced such violence, a decline of more than 4% over the previous year. The experience of dating violence only declined steadily for females until 2007-2008 when it rose by 3.2% to stand at 10.5%. The experience of violence in other relationships declined since the survey was begun to stand at 3.8% in 2007-2008. The experience of violence in multiple relationships rose for females in 2006-2007 but declined to 8.4% in 2007-2008. These changes are not statistically significant.

Figure 9: Percent of students reporting dating violence only, violence in another relationship only, and violence in multiple relationships, 2003-2009.

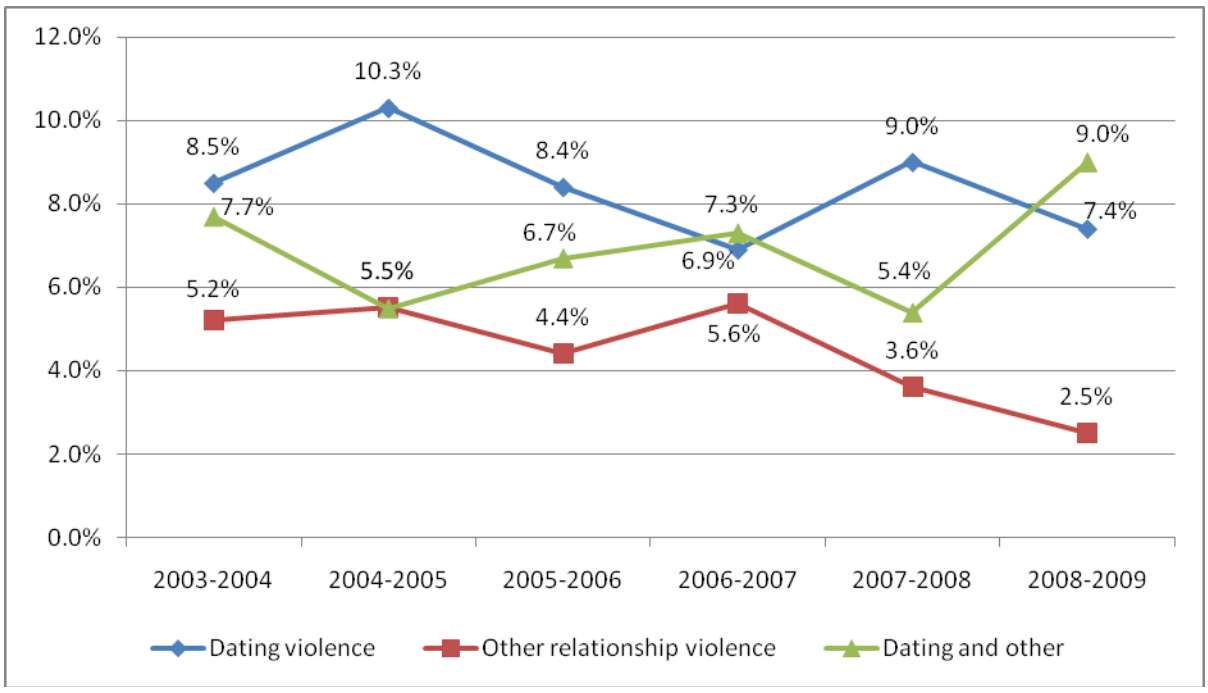
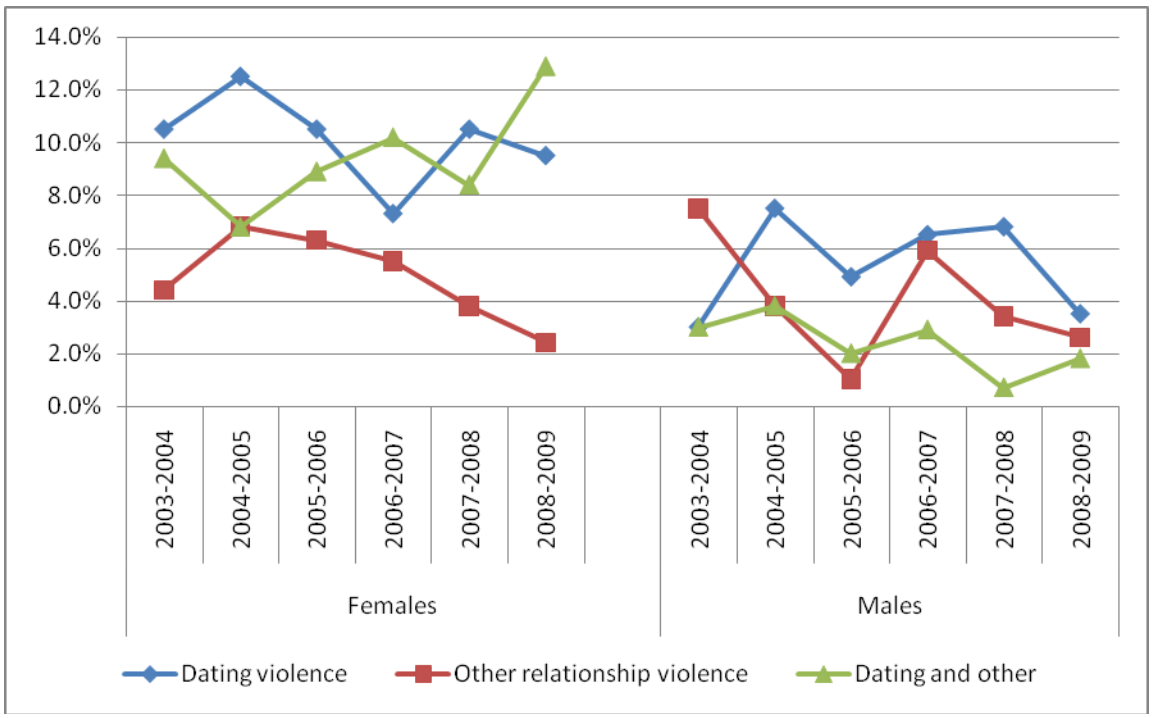


Figure 10: Percent of female and male students reporting dating violence only, violence in another relationship only, and violence in multiple relationships, 2003-2009.



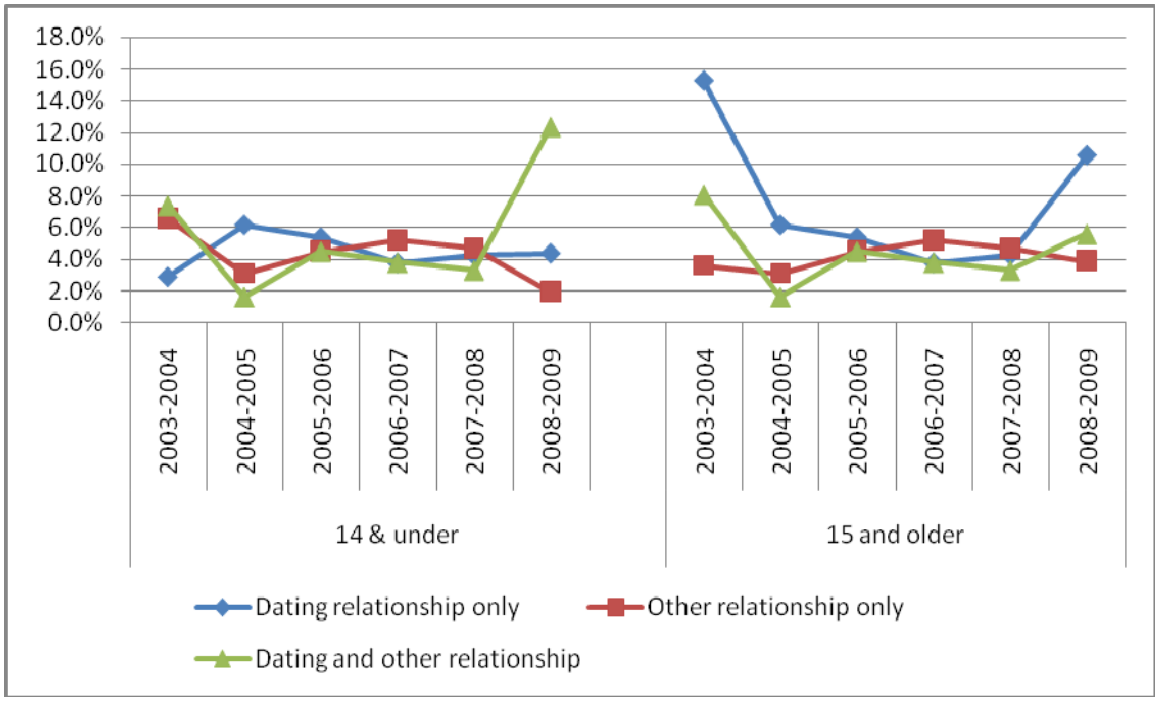

For females, the experience of dating violence declined slightly between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 from 10.5% to 9.5%. There was also a slight decrease in the experience of other relationship violence only from 3.8% to 2.4%. However, females who experienced both dating and other relationship violence increased over the past year from 8.4% to 12.9%, the highest proportion since data collection began in 2003. These differences, however, were not significant.

As with females, rates of dating violence only decreased among males from 6.8% in 2007-2008 to 3.5% in 2008-2009. The rate of other violence only also decreased by .8% over the past year while the rate of dating and other relationship violence increased by 1.1%. These differences were not significant.

The experience of violence by all students age 14 and younger and those 15 and older are shown in Figure 11. In general, older students experience violence at higher rates than do younger students. In 2008-2009, 18.7% of students ages 14 and younger had experienced relationship violence, an increase of 6.4% over the past year and, while 20.1`% of students ages 15 and older had experienced violence, a one year decrease of 5.4%. The rate of relationship violence among younger students is the highest level since data collection began in 2003.

The rate of dating violence only remained about the same for younger students while decreasing among older students. Other relationship violence only increased for older students while

Figure 11: Percent of students ages 14 and younger and 15 and older reporting dating violence only, violence in another relationship only, and violence in multiple relationships, 2003-2008.




decreasing for younger students. Finally, rates of dating and other relationship violence increased sharply for younger students while declining for older students. None of the changes reported were significant.

Starting in 2004-2005 the survey contained questions asking students to indicate whether or not they had been victimized in a dating relationship, whether or not they had been a perpetrator in a dating relationship, and if so, for each, whether this had occurred in the past three months. These results are shown in Table 8. The rate of dating violence victimization has remained relatively constant over the past three years and was 23.1% in 2008-2009. Following several years of decline, the rate of dating violence perpetration increased slightly to 16.2%. The rate of recency of dating violence victimization increased over the past year with data showing that 57.3% of victims of dating violence had been victimized in the previous three months. Although decreasing slightly, the data show that 61.2% of those who perpetrated dating violence had done so in the last three months. It should be noted that the rates of victimization reported here and those reported above most likely differ because of the way the questions are asked.

Table 8: Students' experience or perpetration of dating violence, 2004-2009

| Item | Percent Yes | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2004-2005** | **2005-2006** | **2006-2007** | **2007-2008** | **2008-2009** |
| Any victimization in a dating relationship | 22.4% | 31.2% | 23.7% | 23.7% | 23.8% |
| If yes, has this happened in the last three months? | 53.1% | 43.9% | 48.5% | 50.0% | 57.3% |
| Any perpetration in a dating relationship. | 22.0% | 19.1% | 17.0% | 16.0% | 16.2% |
| If yes, has this happened in the last three months? | 54.5% | 52.9% | 55.3% | 62.7% | 61.2% |

*Violence as a community problem*

The survey contains a single item asking students their perceptions of the extent to which dating and other relationship violence is a problem in the community. As seen in Figure 12, after a slight decline in 2008-2008, the proportion of students who believe that violence is not a significant problem in the community increased to 59.5% in 2008-2009. This difference is not statistically significant.

Students were also asked whether or not they believed the community does a good job of responding to relationship violence. As shown in Figure 13, there has been a slight upward shift in the percent of students who believe the community does a good job of responding to relationship violence, from 58.0% in 2007-2008 to 60.0% in 2007-2008. This difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 12: Students' perceptions of the significance of dating and other relationship violence as a problem in the community, 2003-2009

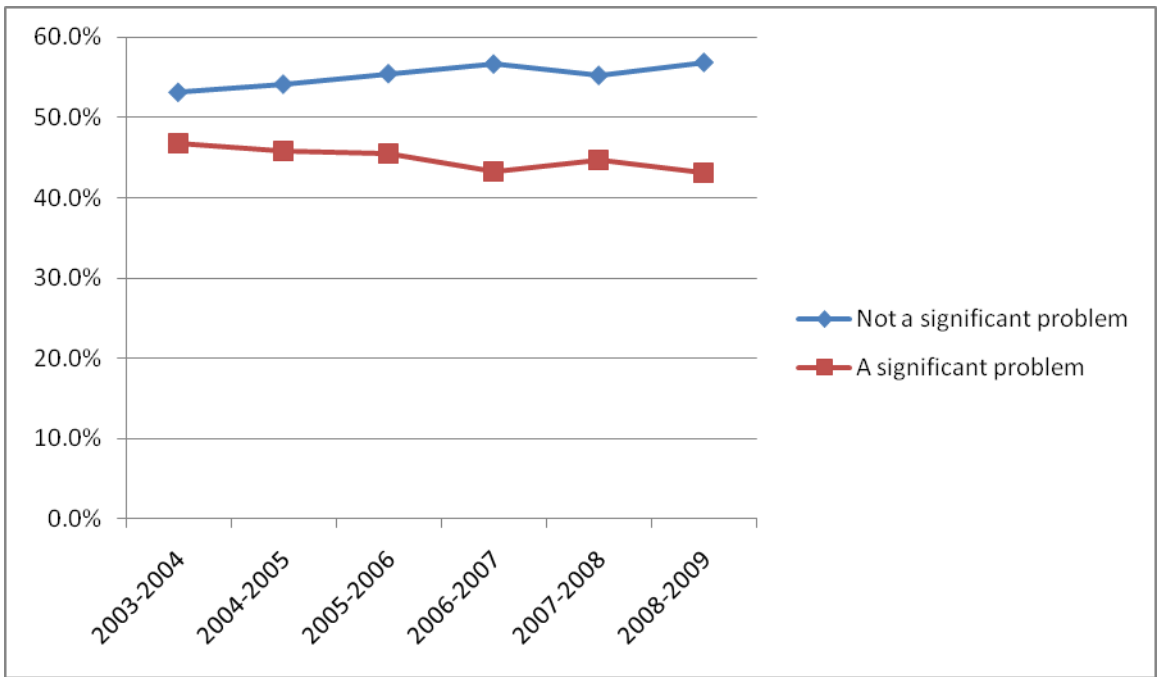
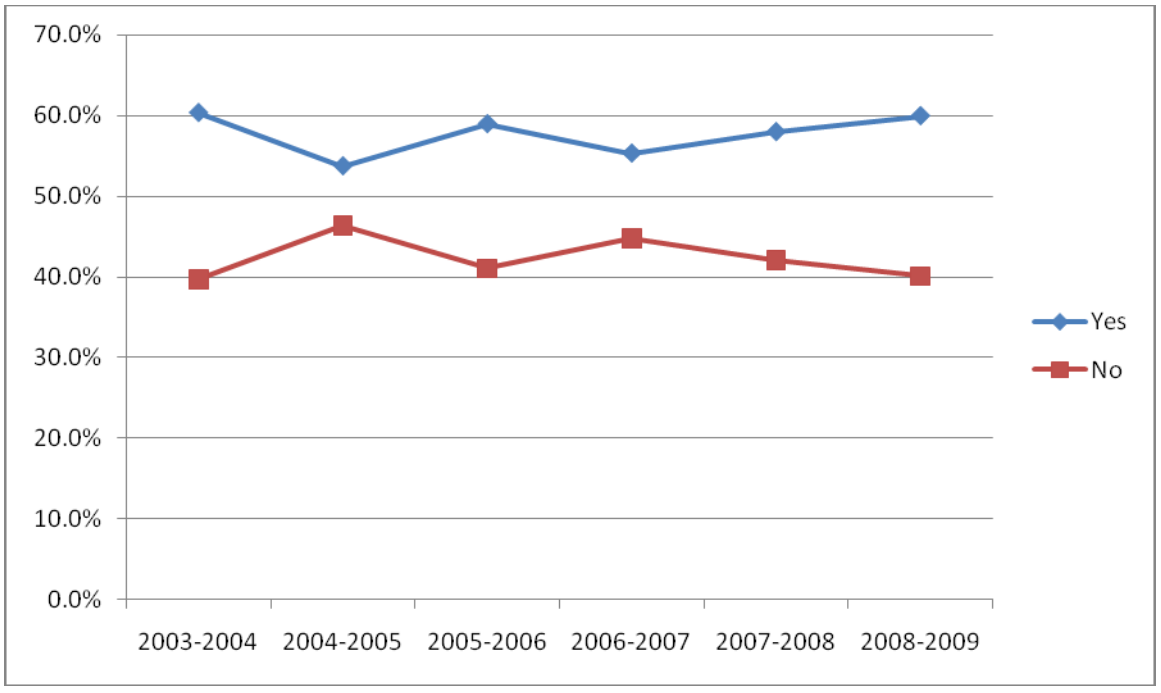



Figure 13: Students' perceptions of the community's response to dating and other relationship violence, 2003-2009



Attitudes and Beliefs

*Attitudes toward violence*

Students were asked about their general attitudes toward violence in a series of 13 items. These items were not reliable when taken as a whole, so are examined individually. Response choices for the items ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and each item produced a score from 1 to 4 with higher scores showing greater agreement with the items. Though the items do not form scales, they still may be logically grouped into two broad categories of causal factors and justification for violence factors, with one item on feeling safe in one's neighborhood standing on its own. Table 9 shows the scores and standard deviations for the causally related items while Table 10 shows the justification items.

Table 9: Attitude toward violence: Causal factors

| Item | 2003-2004 | | 2004-2005 | | 2005-2006 | | 2006-2007 | | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| Most violence is caused by drugs or alcohol. | 2.9 | .8 | 2.8 | .8 | 2.9 | .8 | 2.8 | .8 | 2.9 | .8 | 2.9 | .8 |
| Violence is learned. | 2.8 | .9 | 2.8 | .9 | 2.7 | .9 | 2.7 | .9 | 2.6 | .9 | 2.7 | .9 |
| A lot of violence against girls and young women comes from boy's sexist attitudes and beliefs. | 3.0 | .8 | 3.0 | .9 | 3.0 | .7 | 2.8 | .8 | 2.9 | .8 | 2.9 | .8 |
| Most acts of violence are committed by people who are mentally ill. | 1.9 | .8 | 1.9 | .8 | 2.0 | .8 | 1.9 | .8 | 2.0 | .8 | 2.0 | .9 |
| Racist attitudes and beliefs are a major cause of violence in our society. | 2.9 | .8 | 3.0 | .9 | 2.9 | .8 | 2.8 | .9 | 2.9 | .9 | 2.9 | .8 |
| Violence is usually caused by people watching too many violent movies, music videos, or T.V. shows, or playing violent video games. | 2.6 | 1.0 | 2.6 | 1.0 | 2.6 | 1.0 | 2.6 | 1.1 | 2.6 | 1.0 | 2.6 | 1.0 |

Table 10: Attitudes toward violence: Justification factors

| Item | 2003-2004 | | 2004-2005 | | 2005-2006 | | 2006-2007 | | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| Violence may be the only way for people to get what they want in life. | 1.7 | .8 | 1.7 | .8 | 1.6 | .8 | 1.7 | .9 | 1.6 | .8 | 1.7 | .8 |
| It's okay to use violence to defend yourself from attack. | 3.2 | .9 | 3.2 | .8 | 3.2 | .8 | 3.1 | .8 | 3.2 | .8 | 3.2 | .8 |
| Gang members have to act violently in order to survive. | 2.3 | 1.7 | 2.3 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 1.1 | 2.1 | 1.1 |
| Using violence may be necessary in order to get back at someone who disrespects you. | 1.9 | .9 | 2.0 | .9 | 1.9 | .9 | 1.8 | .9 | 1.9 | .9 | 1.9 | .9 |
| Using violence against another person is never justified. | 2.6 | .9 | 2.5 | .9 | 2.6 | .8 | 2.6 | .9 | 2.5 | .8 | 2.5 | .8 |
| Some people invite violence by showing off their differences. | 2.8 | .8 | 2.9 | .7 | 2.8 | .7 | 2.7 | .8 | 2.8 | .7 | 2.8 | .8 |

Overall, care must be taken to interpret responses in light of the directionality of the item. That is, in some cases a higher score, or greater agreement, reflects the "positive" or more valued direction while for other items a lower score, or greater disagreement, is the "positive" or more valued direction.

In general, responses have remained consistent across all six years. On the items concerning the "causes" of violence, students showed moderately strong agreement that drugs and alcohol, sexist attitudes and beliefs, racist attitudes and beliefs, and exposure to violence in the media are contributing factors. They also showed moderately strong agreement on violence as a learned response. On average, students showed moderately strong disagreement on mental illness as a causal factor.

On the justification items, students strongly disagreed that violence was the only way for people to get what they want. Interestingly, they showed moderately strong agreement that violence against another person is never justified but also showed moderately strong agreement that violence is acceptable to defend oneself from attack. They also showed moderate agreement that gang members have to behave violently in order to survive. There was also moderately strong agreement that some people invite violence by being different. Finally, students showed moderate disagreement on using violence to get even with someone who has shown disrespect. None of the differences seen were statistically significant.

*Violence in dating and family relationships*

Students were given a set of 13 items asking about the acceptability of violence-related behaviors. The same items were presented twice and students were asked, in the first instance, to respond as the items applied to a dating relationship and, in the second instance, as applied to a family relationship. The response choices ranged from "never okay" to "always okay" and the items could be reliably scaled to produce a single score for each relationship area. The scores for the scales ranged from one to five with lower scores indicating less acceptability of the behaviors in either a dating or a family relationship. The items are shown in Table 11.

The average scores for beliefs about violence-related behaviors in dating and family relationships have remained fairly constant across years, generally showing that students find the behaviors to be never to rarely okay for each context (Figure 14). However, there was an increase in the acceptability of both dating and family behaviors suggesting violence over the past year. The differences across years are not statistically significant.

Table 11: Items for the acceptability of dating and family relationship behavior scales

| | |
|---|---|
| Calling someone names or putting them down. | Ignoring someone or refusing to talk to them. |
| Making fun of how someone dresses or looks. | Yelling at someone in private. |
| Telling someone who they can and cannot spend time with. | Yelling at someone in public. |
| Damaging someone's belongings. | Deliberately and repeatedly following and harassing someone. |
| Telling someone what to do | Pressuring someone to perform a sexual act. |
| Shoving, grabbing, or pushing someone. | Forcing someone to perform a sexual act. |
| Slapping or hitting someone. | |

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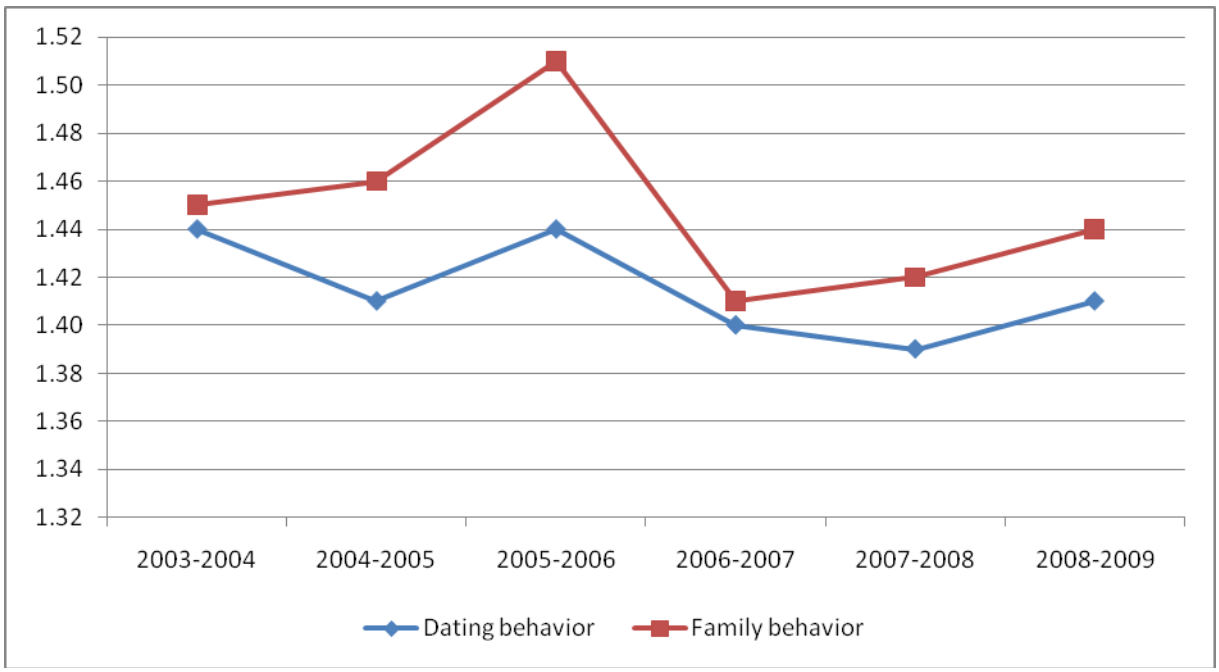
Figure 14. Average values for beliefs about dating relationships and family relationships by year, 2003-2009.




*Qualities of dating relationships*

Students were given a series of seven items on the qualities of a dating relationship and were asked to indicate how much importance they placed on each. The response choices ranged from "not at all important" to "very important." The items did not reliably form a scale, so the individual item scores are presented. Scores ranged from 1 to 3 with higher scores showing greater importance. The direction of the items was mixed; that is, for some items a higher score is the more "positive" direction while for others a lower score is more positive. The items and average scores are shown in Table 12.

As may be seen, students in each year placed a good deal of importance on listening, honesty, and feeling free to be oneself. Interestingly, students thought it moderately important to spend all free time together. Students placed moderately low importance on getting one's partner to do one's bidding and on having sex. There was an increase in the proportion of students who indicated that having sex was not important in a dating relationship and the difference in scores across all six years was significant, $X^2(10) = 21.60$, $p < .05$. The change in the proportion of students who believe honesty in a relationship is important was also significant, $X^2(10) = 29.67$, $p < .01$. Possessiveness was given low importance.

Table 12: Average scores and standard deviations for quality of dating relationship items

| Item | 2003-2004 | | 2004-2005 | | 2005-2006 | | 2006-2007 | | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| Listening to one another. | 2.9 | .4 | 2.8 | .5 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .4 |
| Getting your partner to do what you want. | 1.6 | .6 | 1.6 | .6 | 1.5 | .6 | 1.6 | .6 | 1.6 | .6 | 1.5 | .6 |
| Spending all your free time together. | 2.2 | .7 | 2.1 | .7 | 2.2 | .6 | 2.2 | .6 | 2.2 | .7 | 2.2 | .6 |
| Having sex. | 1.5 | .7 | 1.6 | .7 | 1.4 | .6 | 1.4 | .6 | 1.4 | .6 | 1.3 | .6 |
| Being honest with one another. | 2.9 | .3 | 2.8 | .6 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .4 | 2.9 | .3 |
| Being possessive or jealous of one another. | 1.2 | .5 | 1.4 | .7 | 1.3 | .5 | 1.2 | .5 | 1.3 | .5 | 1.2 | .5 |
| Feeling free to be yourself. | 2.9 | .3 | 2.8 | .5 | 2.8 | .4 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 2.8 | .5 | 2.8 | .5 |

*Individual action to reduce or stop violence*

Students were given nine items showing individual actions that might be taken in order to reduce or stop violence. Students were asked to show how likely they would be to engage in each of the behaviors shown with response choices ranging from "not at all likely" to "very likely." These items could be reliably scaled, producing a single score showing the degree of likelihood of taking action across all of the items as a whole. Scores, then, ranged from one to four with higher scores indicating a greater likelihood of taking action. The items forming the scale are shown in Table 13.

The average score ranged from 2.7 to 2.9 in each year showing that students are fairly likely to take individual action to reduce or stop violence, on average. An examination of the individual items shows that students were least likely to take part in a school rally against violence, take part in a community rally against violence, write a letter to a public official, or urge their friends to stop buying music and other items in which women are exploited.

Table 13: Items measuring the likelihood of taking individual action to reduce or stop violence

| |
|---|
| Ask male friends to stop calling girls names that put them down. |
| Take part in an after school meeting to talk about dating violence. |
| Stop a male friend from verbally abusing his girlfriend. |
| Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper to protest sexist advertising. |
| Take part in a rally against violence in your community. |
| Urge your friends to stop buying CD's or videos that show women being exploited. |
| Ask friends or family for help if someone you were dating became violent. |
| Help find support for a friend who had been abused. |
| Do something to stop a group of boys from harassing girls who walked by. |

*Community response to violence*

Finally, students were presented with a series of eight items showing the kinds of things their community could do to reduce the incidence and prevalence of violence against girls and young women. These items could be reliably scaled and students were asked how much importance they placed on each. Response choices ranged from "not at all important" to "very important" with higher scores showing greater value for the item. The items included in the measure are shown in Table 14. Scores ranged from 2.6 to 2.7 across all years showing that, on average, students place moderately high importance on the responses contained in the items.

Table 14: Community response items

| |
|---|
| Make sure that victims of violence have a safe place to go. |
| Increase the services available to victims of violence. |
| Make sure that girls who have been victims of violence have a say in planning programs. |
| Make sure that services are relevant to girls of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. |
| Develop leadership among girls who have been victims of violence. |
| Educate people who make laws and policies so they are better informed about violence against girls. |
| See that community groups and organizations work together to help end violence against girls. |
| Make sure that domestic violence and sexual assault programs get the funding they need. |

There were few differences when the items were examined individually although students generally placed the least importance on increasing services and assuring that victims are involved in planning programs. The greatest importance was given to assuring that victims have a safe place to go, collaboration among community groups and organizations, and assuring that programs have the funding they need.

**Discussion**

As has been the case in previous years, the survey findings are a mix of good and bad news. On the positive side, tobacco, marijuana, and illicit drug use rates have decreased, with tobacco use rates falling to their lowest level since the survey began. Alcohol use, however, is on the rise, especially among females. Reported alcohol use is at the highest level since the survey began, with more than 1/3 of students reporting having used alcohol in the six months prior to the survey.

The increase in alcohol use is gender related with males reporting a modest but steady decrease in reported alcohol use while females report a steady increase in use, with a substantial increase in reported use over the past year. Alcohol use has increased among younger students and, again, this is largely a function of increased use among females.

It is also disheartening to note that the age of initiation for all substances has been decreasing with sizable proportions of students who use substances indicating having begun doing so by age 12.

Finally, there appears to be little change is students' attitudes towards substance use or perceived parental attitudes towards substance use, with most students believing substance use carries some risk and indicating beliefs that their parents believe substance use is wrong.

Interestingly, students report infrequent offers of various substances at school, with about 12% of older students reporting being approached at least weekly and less than 6% of younger students reporting being approached at least weekly. However, students generally report that other students at their grade level are being offered substances more frequently, with nearly 60% of older students reporting their classmates being approached at least weekly and nearly ¼ of young students so reporting.

Overall rates of forced sex and arrests increased slightly over the past year. This largely reflects an increase in reported rates of both risk factors for females while rates for both risk factors decreased for males. Rates of forced sex also increased for older students, while decreasing slightly for younger students.

There is also mixed news with respect to students' experience of dating violence. While knowledge of victims and perpetrators has declined steadily over the six years of the survey, students continue to experience dating violence at relatively high rates. In the most recent year, nearly ¼ of students reported having been victimized in a dating relationship and 16% reported having perpetrated violence in a dating relationship.

Of concern is the recency of dating violence victimization and perpetration. Of those reporting having been victimized, nearly 60% report its occurrence in the three months prior to completing the survey. Of those reporting having perpetrated dating violence, over 60% report its occurrence in the three months prior to the survey.

Not surprisingly, females are victims of dating violence at much higher rates than are males, although in some years the difference has not been great. For the most recent year, however, the rate of victimization among males decreased slightly to 17.8% while the rate increased slightly among females to 27%.

It is also not surprising that victimization and perpetration is higher among older than younger students, given the greater freedom to date among older students. Still, victimization increased slightly for younger students to 18.9% of those ages 14 and younger while decreasing slightly for older students to 29.4% of those ages 15 and older. Perpetration also increased slightly for younger students to 9.4% of those ages 14 and younger while decreasing for older students to 23.9% of those ages 15 and older.

There has been little change in students' attitudes towards violence or in students' beliefs about the qualities of dating relationships they find desirable. Students also continue to say that they will take action to stop violence and value what their community is doing to stop violence.

**Conclusions**

While rates of dating violence did not change significantly over the past year, this belies the fact that rates of dating violence have increased among females, while decreasing among males, and increased among younger students while decreasing among older students. In addition, irrespective of how dating violence is understood, the data continue to show unacceptably high rates of dating violence victimization and perpetration. By self-report, nearly 1 in 4 students has been the victim of dating violence and 1 in 6 students have perpetrated dating violence.

The recency of dating violence is alarming. About 3 in 5 students who reported dating violence were victimized or perpetrated in the three months prior to the survey. Dating violence has profound consequences for young people, including depression and anxiety (Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008); physical health problems (Munõs-Rivas, Graña, O'leary, & Gonzáez, 2007); increased risk of HIV, STDs, and pregnancy (Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2009); eating disorders (Acker, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002); substance use (Buzy, et al., 2004; Howard & Wang, 2003); and poor academic performance (Craigen, Sikes, Healey, & Hays, 2009).

Unless decisive action is taken to prevent dating violence, a generation of Chesterfield County youth are likely to face extraordinary challenges to their health and well-being.

It is clear that students have a good sense of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in dating relationships, suggesting a wide gap between what students value and the reality of their relationship experiences. It is reasonable to assume that over time students' beliefs will change to match their experiences. These attitudes will, in turn, affect younger siblings, the students'

own children, their dating partners, and others, perpetuating a cycle in which young people will learn to expect very little beyond violence from those who purport to care for them.

In addition, the lack of adult intervention to disrupt the cycle of violence will only teach young people that adults cannot be counted on to keep them safe from harm. There are already indications from the survey that young people are less likely to turn to adults for help in circumstances in which they or a peer is being victimized.

Clearly there is a need for effective programs targeting violence, especially dating violence, in the lives of these young people. This is a matter of the highest priority. Young people need to learn skills in recognizing and countering violent behaviors in dating relationships and need to know that the adults in their lives care deeply about their safety and well-being.

Substance use is also a continuing concern, especially the increase in alcohol use among females and the increasing initiation of substance use at an early age. There are indications that students are beginning to view substance use as less risky than in years past, a dangerous development for their health and well-being.

Early intervention is critical in this regard. Given increasing evidence that substance use begins before age 12 for many students, there is a pressing need to begin teaching very young students about the risks associated with substance use and to help them develop the kinds of resilience skills that will help them make decisions regarding substance use before reaching their teen years.

This is also true with respect to relationship violence. While useful to intervene with students in middle and high school who experience dating violence, it is also critical to help very young students learn how to deal with violence and violence-related behaviors, especially the kinds of peer to peer violence characterized by bullying and other forms of interpersonal interaction.

Students are all too aware of the state of things and are likely to welcome prevention and intervention programs. The risk in not responding to students' experience of dating violence and substance use is in consigning them to a life with little hope for the promising future they so richly deserve.

Endnotes

[1] Caution is needed in interpreting these results. In the first three years of data collection, items on past six month use of tobacco, alcohol, alcohol to excess, and illicit drug use included an option for "does not apply." Since 2006-2007, a change in funding sources led to changes in survey items, including deleting "does not apply" as a response option. For this analysis, "does not apply" was re-coded as "no" since, presumably, the item does not apply because the individual responding did not use that substance in the previous six months. It is possible, however, that the response in question may have been endorsed for other reasons.

[2] Illicit drugs are all substances of abuse excluding tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana.

[3]These questions are specific to girls and young women because the project for which the survey was originally designed was intended to reduce violence among girls and young women. While these questions could now be broadened to include male victims and female perpetrators, they have been kept as is for ease of comparisons across years.