

# The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile

## THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**T**he *Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition*, is based on a comprehensive review of national and provincial data sources and extensive consultations with experts from many fields. The *CICH Profile* contains ten chapters and 398 charts pertaining to the health and well-being of children and youth. It provides a relevant and clear picture of children today, and gives some direction for assisting them as they explore their futures.

This fact sheet presents information from the *CICH Profile* that address mental health issues. The primary sources of data are the 1994-95 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), the 1996-97 National Population Health Survey (NPHS), the 1998 Health Behaviours of School Age Children Survey (HBSC) and the Adolescent Health Survey of British Columbia (AHS). Currently, there is little data available on the mental health services received by children and youth (for example, through the school system).

### Some good news:

- Prosocial behaviour is much more common among children 10-11 years of age than anti-social behaviour. Prosocial behaviour is characterized by caring and sympathetic social interactions.
- Far more children 10-11 years of age report parental acceptance than parental rejection. A healthy bond with a parent is an important building block of resiliency.
- The majority of children aged 10-11 report getting along well with others. Peers are a source of acceptance and support, contributing to the development of a child's self-esteem and increased independence.
- The majority of youth aged 12-19 report moderate to high levels of self-esteem.

### Mental health is the "New Morbidity" for children and youth:

- The rates of emotional and behavioural problems for children between the ages of 4 to 11 years are high. According to their parents, 51% of boys and 35% of girls aged 4-11 years cannot concentrate or pay attention for long. Parents also indicate that 51% of boys and 37% of girls aged 4-11 years cannot sit still or are restless/hyperactive. Parents report that 30% of boys and 27% of girls are high strung, nervous or tense.
- Parents report that 71% of boys and 68% of girls argue a lot and that 52% of boys and 48% of girls are stubborn, sullen or irritable.
- 24% of boys and 17% of girls have one or more emotional or behavioural disorder.
- In the case of older children, the prevalence of depressive disorder is high. 5% of male youth 12-19 years of age and 12% of female youth of the same age have experienced a major depressive episode.

### Aggressive behaviour in children and youth:

- As children age direct aggression becomes less frequent and indirect aggression becomes more frequent. Approximately 14% of children 4-7 years of age employ direct aggression and 10% employ indirect aggression. For children between the ages of 8 and 11 years, 11% employ direct aggression and 14% employ indirect aggression.
- 23% of boys and 10% of girls get into many fights and 16% of boys and 11% of girls are cruel or mean to others or bully others.
- Parents are more likely to report that boys engage in bullying behaviours than that girls do. According to parental reports, among children 7-9 years of age, 15% of boys and 8% of girls bully. According to parental reports, 4% of boys 7-9 years of age have been victims of bullying behaviours.

- More students in grades 6, 8 and 10 reported being bullied in 1998 than in 1994. This was true of both boys and girls. For example, 36% of boys in grade 8 reported being bullied in 1994 whereas 43% reported being bullied in 1998. 29% of girls reported being bullied in 1994 compared to 35% in 1998. Significantly fewer grade ten students reported being bullied than younger students.
- Higher levels of family connectedness are associated with lower levels of certain risky behaviours. Among children aged 12 to 18 years of age, 12% of those reporting low levels of family connectedness reported early sexual activity (before the age of 14 years) compared with 3% of those reporting high levels of family connectedness.

### “Connectedness” and mental health

- The 1998 AHS of British Columbia asked students questions about “connectedness”. Youth who feel that they have close, caring relationships with others and who feel that they belong are deemed to have high levels of connectedness. Among students between the ages of 12 and 18 years of age, the highest level of family connectedness was reported by children 12 years of age. After that, reported connectedness drops off steeply with 9% of students 17 years of age reporting high levels of family connectedness.



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For further information about the sources of the data, please refer to *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition*. To order your copy of the *CICH Profile*, please contact:



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