



## *Fact Sheet: 2004 Boston Youth Survey Highlights*

The Boston Youth Survey (BYS), the product of a partnership between Boston's Office of Human Services and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center, is an in-depth examination of the lives of youth attending public high schools in Boston. This survey is conducted every two years. The following are findings from the 2004 BYB, the first year the survey was designed to draw a representative sample of Boston youth. The 2004 survey was taken by 1079 students. For more information, including limitations, or to download a copy of the 2004 BYB report, visit our website at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hyvpc/>.

### **Demographics**

- Boston youths are a diverse and heterogeneous group, with no racial or ethnic group representing as much as one-quarter of the student population in this sample of youth in the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Twenty-three percent (23%) of the sample was bi- or multi-racial.
- Over half (52%) of youth lived either in two-parent households (32%) or their parents shared joint custody (20%). Forty percent (40%) lived in a one-parent household: 34% with single mothers.
- One-third of respondents were born outside the U.S., with 15% living in the U.S. for four years or less and 18% living in the U.S. for over four years.

### **School Performance and Education Plans**

- Nearly one-third of the sample (31%) reported receiving mostly As and Bs in the year prior to the survey. However, nearly one-third (29%) reported receiving mostly Cs, Ds, or Fs.
- Nearly half (48%) of younger students (ages 13-14) reporting they received mostly As and Bs, compared to less than one-third (29%) of students older than age 14 reporting this.
- More than half (57%) reported that they spent less than an hour per school day on homework.
- Nearly three-fourths (71%) of students responding reported that they had been truant at least one day in the previous four months. Nearly one-third (30%) reported being truant four or more days during this time.
- Nearly all (94%) reported that they had tried to do well on the MCAS.
- Most respondents (71%) stated that grades were very important to them.
- Nearly all youth (95%) aspired to continue their education after high school.

### **Feelings about Self and Future**

- The majority of both girls and boys reported fairly high self-esteem (70%) and optimism (61%). However, over 40% of both *also* scored in the top half of the depression scale.
- Boys had higher scores than girls on aggression; girls had higher scores on depression.
- Nearly half (49%) of the sample reported that they had trouble getting along with their peers at least once in the previous month, with 43% reporting they had gotten into a yelling argument at school.
- Thirty-five percent of respondents said they felt hopeful most or all of the time. Boys were more likely than girls to feel hopeful about the future (67% vs. 57%).

### **Out-of-School Time**

- Over half of the total sample (59%) reported playing on a sports team during the previous year and about one-third reported participating in after-school activities or being employed after-school.
- Over one-third (38%) gave lack of interest in available after-school programs as their reason for non-participation. Nearly one-third (31%) of the entire sample said they would be interested in after-school music programs. However, only 19% said such programs were available in their neighborhoods. Gaps were also seen in photography (18% vs. 5%) and web design (15% vs. 8%).
- Over one-third (36%) of respondents performed volunteer or community service in the past year.
- Almost half (49%) reported that they watched three or more hours of television on average.



(continued from previous page)

### Health and Physical Activity

- Overall, almost 9 out of 10 students (87%) reported that they had a physical exam in the previous year.
- Slightly over one-third (39%) of youth reported exercising four or more days per week. Nearly half (48%) were either overweight or at risk for overweight, based on their body mass index. U.S. born teens were significantly more likely than non-U.S. born teens to report that they exercised regularly.

### Violence, Victimization, and Safety

- Over three-quarters (87%) of respondents reported witnessing one or more acts of violence in the past year; nearly half (44%) reported personally experiencing one or more types of victimization.
- Over 80% of respondents reported that they had seen someone hit, slapped, punched, kicked or beaten up in the past year, and over two-thirds reported seeing another person threatened or chased in the past year when they believed someone could be seriously hurt.
- Over half of the students reported witnessing or being victimized by at least one type of violence: at their school (58%), in their neighborhood (58%), or on the street (54%). Nearly half reported witnessing or experiencing at least one type of violence: one the way to and from school (49%) and/or on the MBTA (47%). Nearly a fifth (18%) reported these experiences at home.
- Forty-one percent of students reported feeling unsafe on the MBTA. Nearly one-third (32%) reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhood. Over one-quarter felt unsafe on their way to and from school (27%) or on their street (26%). Twenty-one percent felt unsafe at school, and 18% felt unsafe at their local youth center.
- Boys were more likely than girls to report being victimized by violence in the past year (53% vs. 36%); over half of boys were victimized by violence.
- Immigrants were less likely than those born in the U.S. to report being victimized by violence (39% vs. 46%), but also were less likely to report that they felt safe in all or most places (42%) vs. 60%).
- Over half (52%) felt that gangs in their school were somewhat or very dangerous, and more than two-thirds (70%) felt that gangs in their neighborhoods were somewhat or very dangerous.
- Forty-one percent (41%) reported that it would be either *very* or *fairly easy* to get a gun. Boys were more likely than girls to believe that getting a gun would be *very* or *fairly easy* (50% vs. 33%), as were youth who had been *born* in the U.S.

### Resources for Youth

- Over three-quarters (79%) of the sample indicated they *would* use (57% *have* used) at least one of fourteen resources (see report for list) if they witnessed violence or were themselves threatened/assaulted.
- Over one-third of respondents (39%) said they trust the police a lot or some. Youth who were born in the U.S. were *least* likely to trust the police (35%), while those living in the U.S. less than five years were *most* likely to trust them (49%).
- Nearly half (48%) of the respondents reported having contact with the police during the previous year, with boys more likely than girls to have contact (53% vs. 39%).

### Relationships with Others

- Nearly half (45%) of respondents indicated that they thought that more people would try to take advantage of them if they could.
- Three-quarters (75%) of respondents stated that they are able to talk to at least one of their parents/guardians about most things. Youth who reported that they did not feel able to talk to a parent/guardian about most things were more likely than those who did to report being depressed (55% vs. 35%) and aggressive (20% vs. 11%).
- Over half (54%) of respondents reported that they trusted teachers and counselors some or a lot.