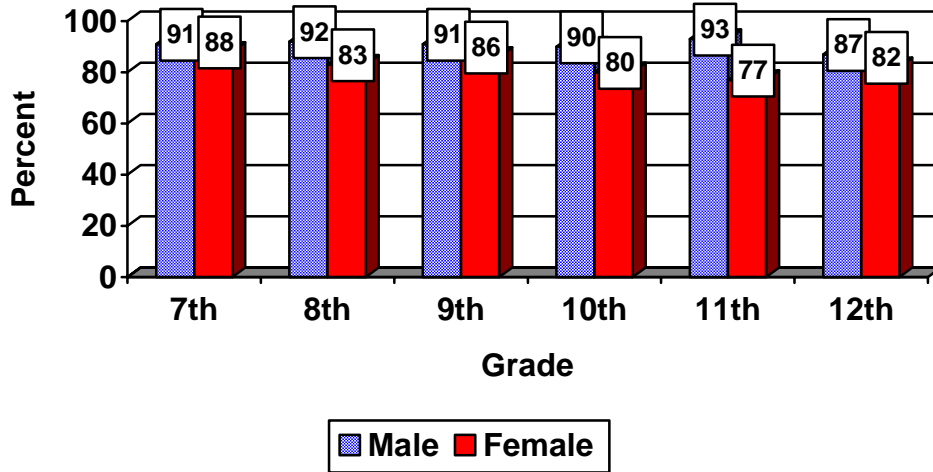


Teens Have High Self Esteem, Depression Still a Concern

Southwest Wisconsin teens who are satisfied with themselves



More than 86% of teens in southwest Wisconsin are satisfied with themselves and have a positive attitude most of the time. One in ten teens say they would not talk to anyone if they were having a serious personal problem. Sadness and depression is something many teens wrestle with and this leads to thoughts of suicide. Fifteen percent (15%) of teens reported that they have engaged in cutting or self-mutilation.

These are among the findings of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) conducted by 15 school districts in the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) District 3 as reported by UW-Extension. The school districts of Argyle, Belmont, Benton, Black Hawk, Cassville, Cuba City, Darlington, Fennimore, Iowa-Grant, Ithaca, Lancaster, Platteville, Potosi, River Ridge, and Seneca, surveyed more than 3,700 students in September of 2005. UW-Extension faculty and academic staff in Crawford, Grant, Lafayette, and Richland counties are involved in processing and presenting the findings. The survey was funded by participating school districts and the Grant County Drug-Free Coalition.

"When asked about being satisfied with myself and taking a positive attitude toward myself, male students were more likely to strongly agree with the statement, regardless of the grade level, than their female counterparts," according to Richland County 4-H Youth Development Agent, Pam Hobson. "Although 82% of the female students agreed with the statement, 91% of the males felt more confident about their self image. The eleventh grade girls were the least confident about their self image."

Grant County Family Living Agent Bev Doll reports that most students had someone to talk to about personal problems. "The students had many people to choose from in the

survey and friends topped the list of whom teens would most likely talk to with slightly over 40% of the males and 56% of the females choosing friends first. The second most common choice was parents with about 24% of the teens choosing them. The third highest response reported was 10% of the students saying they wouldn't talk to anyone."

The survey presented several questions related to depression and males tended to report feeling less depressed than females. "While 49% of males report never feeling sad or depressed in the month before the survey, only 29% of females never had that feeling", says Jessie Potterton, Lafayette County 4-H Youth Development Agent. "Forty-five percent (45%) of females in seventh grade report not feeling sad or depressed, but more than 70% of eighth through twelfth grade females report feeling depressed or very sad anywhere from once in the past month to all of the time in the past month. Over half of the 7th thru 9th grade males did not feel sad or depressed in the month prior to the survey while about 55% of the older males did feel some sadness or depression."

Tom Schmitz, Grant County Youth Development Educator reviewed the suicide questions in the survey. "Overall, over 80% of female and 88% of male teens reported they had not thought about suicide in the month prior to the survey," according to Schmitz. "Of the students who thought about suicide, most did not talk about it to another person and those that did talk about it, chose to talk to a friend. Of the students surveyed, 14% have made a plan at some point to commit suicide and 8% report that they have tried to kill themselves." Though these numbers are troubling, they are in line with national data. Although the survey did not ask about the suicide methods or how serious the attempt was, all attempts need to be taken seriously.

"Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students responded they have never engaged in cutting or self-mutilation," according to Amy Mitchell, Crawford County 4-H Youth Development Agent. Mitchell said, "Over 10% more of the female teens reported cutting or self-mutilation than the male respondents. Seventh and eighth grade students report a higher tendency to cut or self-mutilate themselves than students in the upper grades."

A full report on the SWYS survey results is due out this fall. Hobson, Schmitz, Doll, Mitchell, and Potterton are also giving community presentations on the data. For more information on the survey contact your local school district, Schmitz and Doll at 608-723-2125, Potterton at 608-776-4820, Mitchell at 608-326-0223, or Hobson at 608-647-6148.