

METROWEST
COMMUNITY
HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION



*Results of the
2006 MetroWest
Adolescent Health Survey*

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
MetroWest Regional
High School Report*

Funded by:

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2006 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MetroWest Regional High School Data

INTRODUCTION

The MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS) is a ten-year initiative of the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation to provide school districts with timely, local data on the health and risk behaviors of middle and high school students. The survey focuses on behaviors and attitudes related to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the adolescent population, as well as on issues of particular interest to the MetroWest communities. The MWAHS will be conducted every other year for the next decade so that changes can be measured over time, allowing communities to monitor trends, identify new priorities, and measure progress towards achieving a healthier adolescent population.

During the first year of the initiative, 18 of 25 MetroWest communities participated in the MWAHS at the high school level. This high level of district participation shows a strong commitment to the use of data to drive community-level decision-making, programming, and policy change. It also allows for the creation of a regional MetroWest data set to which individual school districts can compare their results.

The MWAHS development, coordination of survey administration, analysis, and reporting were carried out by the Division of Health and Human Development Programs at Education Development Center, Inc. The results described here reflect the first administration of the MWAHS, which took place in the Fall of 2006.

METHODS

Students in 18 high schools in the MetroWest region participated in the 2006 MWAHS. Rather than surveying a sample of students, a census was conducted of all students in grades 9 through 12 who were present on the days of the survey administration. This allows us to conclude that the results described in this report truly reflect the range of behaviors of students in the MetroWest region.

The MWAHS is an anonymous and voluntary survey. Parents/guardians were informed of the survey in advance and given the opportunity to opt their child(ren) out if desired. Students were also informed of the voluntary nature of the survey and could decide on their own whether or not to participate. Very few students (1.8%) did not participate for these reasons.

The survey administration protocol took numerous steps to protect students' anonymity and to provide an environment in which they could complete their surveys privately. Such steps have been shown to result in valid and reliable data collection from youth.

In total, 16,680 high school students in the MetroWest region participated in the MWAHS, representing 88.8% of students in the 18 school districts.

The MWAHS is largely based on the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ The YRBSS monitors national and state trends in the prevalence of risk behaviors contributing to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among adolescents, including:

- ◆ *Tobacco use*
- ◆ *Alcohol and other drug use*
- ◆ *Unhealthy dietary behaviors*
- ◆ *Inadequate physical activity*
- ◆ *Sexual behaviors*
- ◆ *Suicide*
- ◆ *Violence.*

In addition, the MWAHS incorporates topics of particular interest to the MetroWest communities. Based on feedback from school district personnel, the MWAHS assesses:

- ◆ *Illegal prescription drug use*
- ◆ *Stress and mental health*
- ◆ *School attachment*
- ◆ *Dating violence*
- ◆ *Bullying.*

Throughout this report, national, state, and MetroWest regional data will be presented.

RESULTS

SUBSTANCE USE

Similar to reports from adolescents nationwide, alcohol is the most prevalent substance used by high school students in the MetroWest region, with 66.5% having used alcohol in their lifetime and 42.2% reporting drinking in the past 30 days. The percentages of students who report lifetime cigarette smoking and marijuana use are lower, with 35.3% having smoked in their lifetime and nearly the same percentage, 33.2%, having ever used marijuana. Illegal use of prescription drugs was reported by 11.0% of students.

Tobacco Use

- ◆ 35.3% of students in the MetroWest region have ever smoked a cigarette, and 14.7% of students have smoked cigarettes on one or more of the past 30 days.
- ◆ 6.7% of students report smoking a cigarette before age 13 years (5.5% of females and 7.9% of males).
- ◆ Cigarette smoking is somewhat higher among males than females. For example, 38.8% of males and 31.8% of females report lifetime smoking, and 16.1% of males and 13.1% of females have smoked on one or more of the past 30 days.
- ◆ Smoking increases with grade. 21.6% of 9th grade students report ever smoking; by 12th grade, nearly half (48.9%) have smoked a cigarette.
- ◆ 9.3% of students report having smoked cigarettes daily (at least one cigarette per day for 30 days) at some point in their lifetime (8.2% of females and 10.3% of males). Three times as many 12th grade students report having been a daily smoker at some point in their lifetime as 9th grade students (15.1% compared to 5.3%).
- ◆ Of those students who reported smoking in the past 30 days, only 13.8% smoked more than 10 cigarettes per day on the days that they smoked. Male smokers are much more likely to report this level of cigarette smoking than females (17.7% vs. 8.5%).
- ◆ 5.3% of students report smoking on school property in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Smokeless tobacco use and cigar use are substantially higher for males. For example, 9.2% of males and only 1.0% of females report smokeless tobacco use in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Overall, nearly twice as many males as females report some kind of tobacco use (cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and/or cigars) in the past 30 days (28.4% of males vs. 15.0% of females).
- ◆ Of the 14.3% of students who tried to obtain cigarettes in the past 30 days, 26.8% borrowed/bummed them, 25.1% bought them in a store, 22.3% gave someone else money to buy them, 10.2% were given them by an adult, 4.9% took them from a store or family member, and 10.8% got them some other way.

Nationally, 74% of youth report alcohol use in their lifetime, 54% report lifetime cigarette smoking, and 38% report lifetime marijuana use.

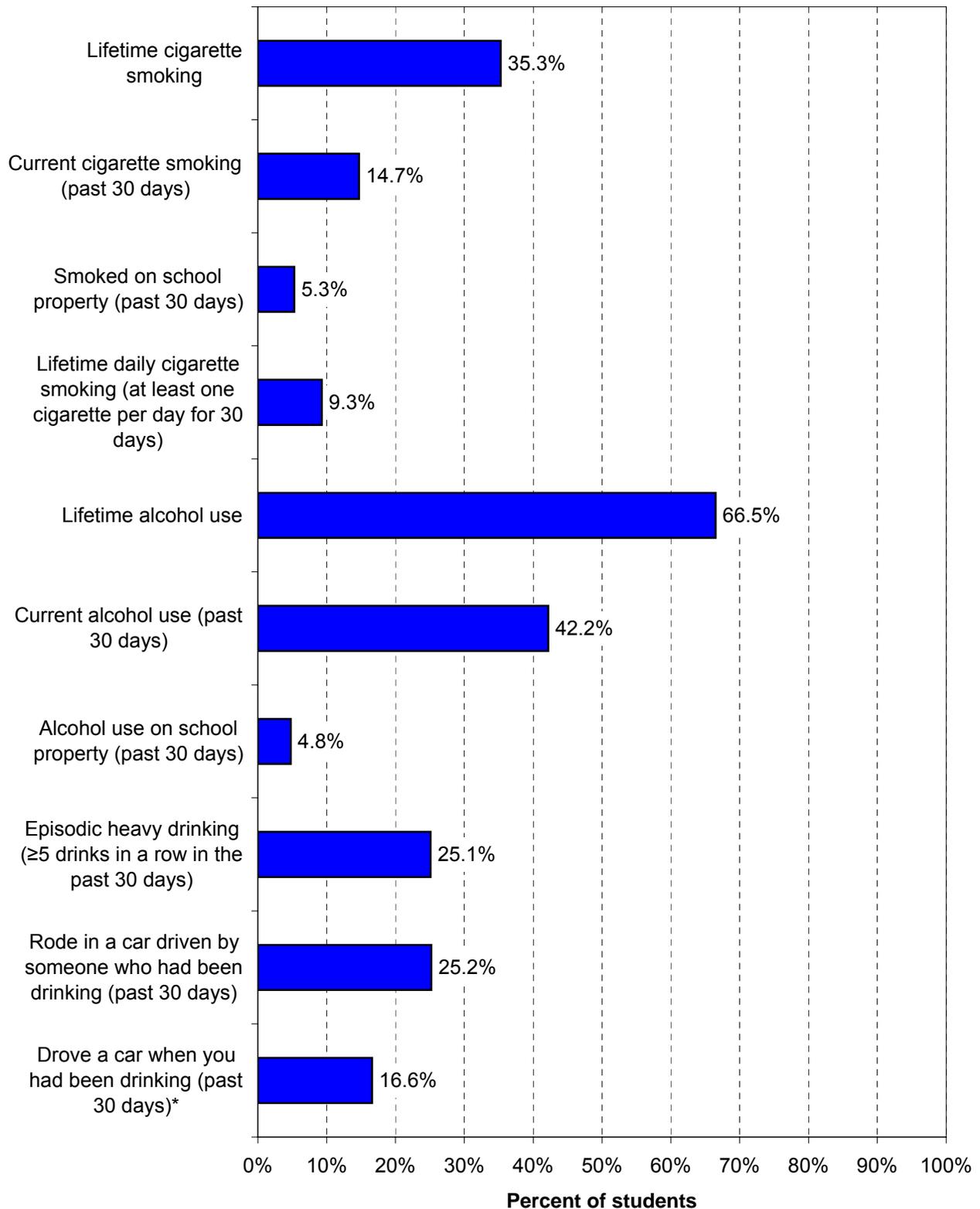
In the MetroWest region, fewer students report cigarette smoking, resulting in similar proportions reporting lifetime cigarette and marijuana use.

Current (30-day) cigarette smoking is lower among MetroWest youth (15%) than among United States (23%) and Massachusetts youth (21%).

Yet, lifetime daily cigarette use in MetroWest (9%) is higher than the Massachusetts prevalence of 6%.

Among current smokers, daily consumption is still relatively low, with only 14% smoking more than 10 cigarettes per day. This pattern of early smoking may call for tailored prevention and intervention programs.

**Tobacco Use, Alcohol Use, and Impaired Driving among High School Students
MetroWest Region (n=16,680)
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006**



*Among students who drove a car in the past 30 days

Alcohol Use

- ◆ 66.5% of youth in the MetroWest region have used alcohol in their lifetime. In contrast to tobacco, alcohol use is similar among females and males for both lifetime use (67.3% of females, 65.7% of males) and current use in the past 30 days (42.4% of females, 42.0% of males).
- ◆ 15.5% of youth had their first drink of alcohol before age 13 years (13.3% of females and 17.5% of males).
- ◆ Alcohol use increases with grade. For example, 24.1% of students report current use in 9th grade. By 12th grade, 58.9% of students report current use.
- ◆ 25.1% of students report episodic heavy drinking (or “binge” drinking). This is defined as having 5 or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours on at least one occasion in the past 30 days. Episodic heavy drinking is slightly higher for males (27.0%) than females (23.1%).
- ◆ 4.8% of students report using alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.
- ◆ 7.3% of students report that drinking alcohol interfered with school, work, or other responsibilities in the past 12 months. Reports of alcohol impairment are similar among males and females, and increase from 3.9% in 9th grade to 11.5% in 12th grade.
- ◆ 25.2% of students reported riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol in the past 30 days. 16.6% of students who drive report having driven a car after drinking in the past 30 days.

Current use of alcohol in the MetroWest region (42%) is similar to the national prevalence of 43%, and somewhat lower than the Massachusetts prevalence of 48%.

Heavy episodic drinking is similar among United States (26%), Massachusetts (27%), and MetroWest youth (25%). Reports of this potentially serious behavior in MetroWest are similar for both males and females, affecting one in four students within each gender.

Marijuana Use

- ◆ Lifetime marijuana use (33.2%) is slightly lower than lifetime cigarette smoking (35.3%), and current marijuana use (20.2%) is higher than current cigarette smoking (14.7%).
- ◆ 5.9% of youth report first trying marijuana before age 13 years, with twice as many males reporting this (7.9%) as females (3.8%).
- ◆ Marijuana use is higher among males than females: 36.5% of males and 29.8% of females have used marijuana in their lifetime. In the past 30 days, 23.9% of males and 16.5% of females used marijuana.
- ◆ By 12th grade, half (50.6%) of all students report having used marijuana in their lifetime. Experimentation starts early: 14.7% of 9th grade students report lifetime use. Current (30-day) use increases from 9.4% in 9th grade to 30.7% in 12th grade.
- ◆ 4.4% of youth report using marijuana on school property in the past 30 days.

Fewer MetroWest youth (33%) have used marijuana in their lifetime relative to the state (45%) and nation (38%).

Current marijuana use in the MetroWest region is the same as the national percentage (20%), but lower than in Massachusetts (26%).

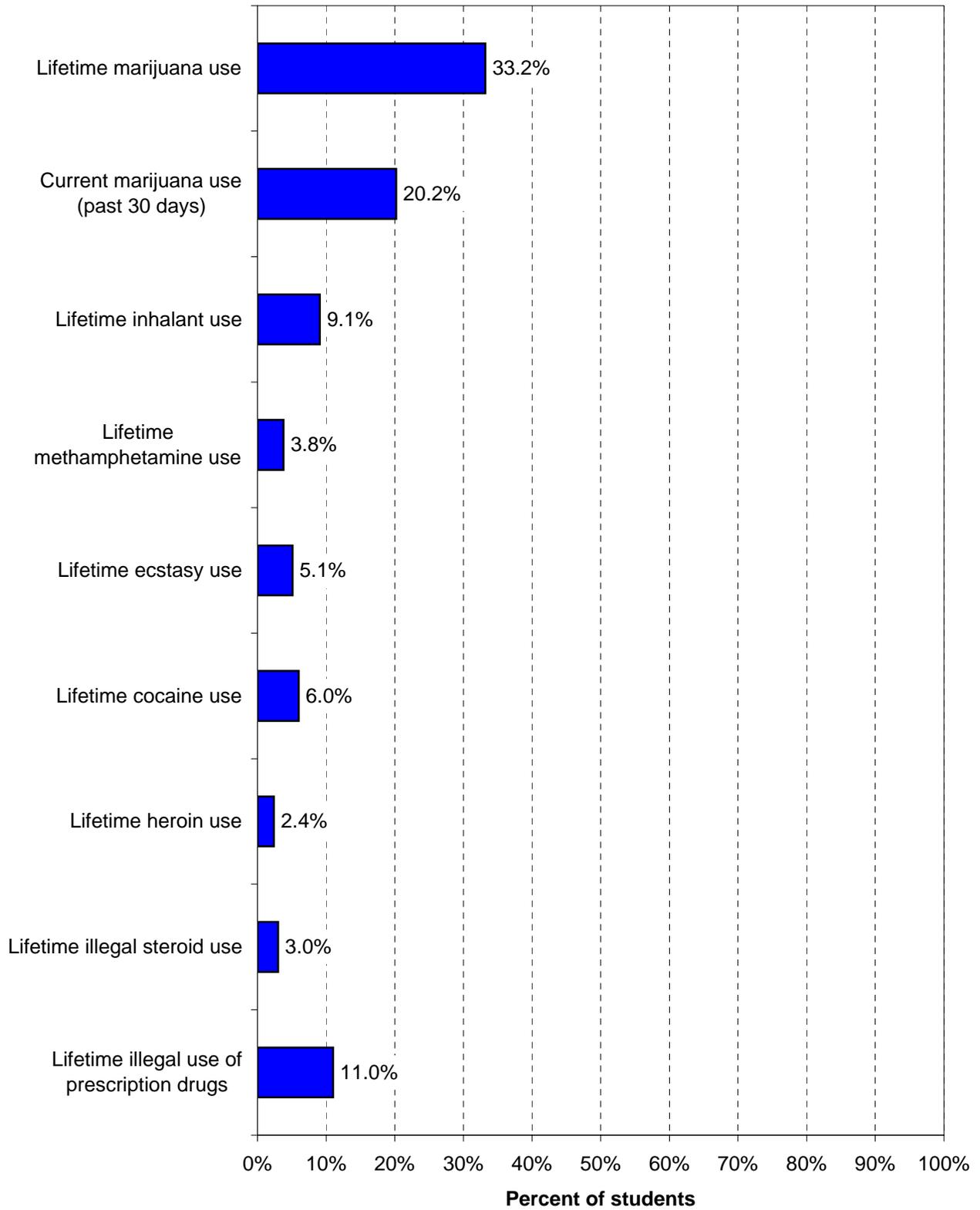
Illegal Use of Prescription Drugs

- ◆ 3.0% of youth have used steroids without a doctor’s prescription (2.2% of females and 3.8% of males).
- ◆ 11.0% of students have used prescription drugs like Ritalin, Adderall, OxyContin, or Vicodin without a doctor’s prescription (using someone else’s prescription or obtaining the drugs illegally).
- ◆ Illegal use of these prescription drugs increases substantially from 4.3% in 9th grade to 18.2% in 12th grade.
- ◆ Lifetime illegal prescription drug use is slightly higher for males (12.2%) than females (9.7%).

By 12th grade, 18% of youth in MetroWest report having misused prescription drugs. This behavior is higher for males than females, and increases substantially throughout high school. (State and national data are not available.)

Steroid use (3%) is similar to national figures (4%).

**Marijuana and Other Substance Use among High School Students
MetroWest Region (n=16,680)
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006**



Other Substance Use

- ◆ 9.1% of youth have used inhalants in their lifetime, with similar usage by males and females and at all grade levels.
- ◆ Use of other substances follows national trends. Among other drugs asked about on the survey, lifetime cocaine use is most prevalent (6.0%), followed by ecstasy (5.1%), methamphetamines (3.8%), and heroin (2.4%).
- ◆ For all substances, use among males is nearly twice as high as among females.
- ◆ Illegal substance use also increases by grade for all substances. For example, from 9th grade to 12th grade, lifetime cocaine use increases from 3.2% to 9.3% and lifetime ecstasy use increases from 3.3% to 7.1%.

The types of illicit drugs used by youth nationally, in Massachusetts, and in MetroWest follow a similar pattern: cocaine use is most prevalent, followed by ecstasy, methamphetamines, and heroin.

Availability of Substances on School Property

- ◆ 16.4% of youth said they were offered, sold, or given tobacco or alcohol, and 16.1% were offered, sold, or given marijuana or other drugs on school property in the past 12 months.
- ◆ Males and older students were more likely to say substances were available on school property. For example, 19.4% of males and 13.1% of females report being offered, sold, or given tobacco or alcohol on school property.

VIOLENCE

Violence among high school youth incorporates various types of conflict, including physical fighting, weapon carrying and threats, dating violence, and bullying. In the MetroWest region, 26.0% of students report being in a physical fight in the past 12 months and 8.2% report they carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in the past 30 days. Similar to national trends, physical fighting and weapon carrying are more common among males. Bullying is reported by 28.6% of students and is highest among 9th grade students. The emergent problem of bullying through the use of electronic media is reported by 14.6% of students.

National, state, and regional data all show substantially higher reporting of physical fighting and weapon carrying among males than females.

Personal Safety

- ◆ 3.6% of students didn't attend school in the past 30 days on at least one occasion because they felt they would be unsafe either at school or on the way to or from school (3.3% of females and 3.9% of males).
- ◆ 21.2% of students had their property (such as clothing or books) stolen or deliberately damaged in the past 12 months. More males report personal property damage or theft (24.4%) than females (17.9%).

In both MetroWest and Massachusetts, 4% of students report not attending school in the past 30 days due to safety concerns. Nationwide, this figure is slightly higher (6%).

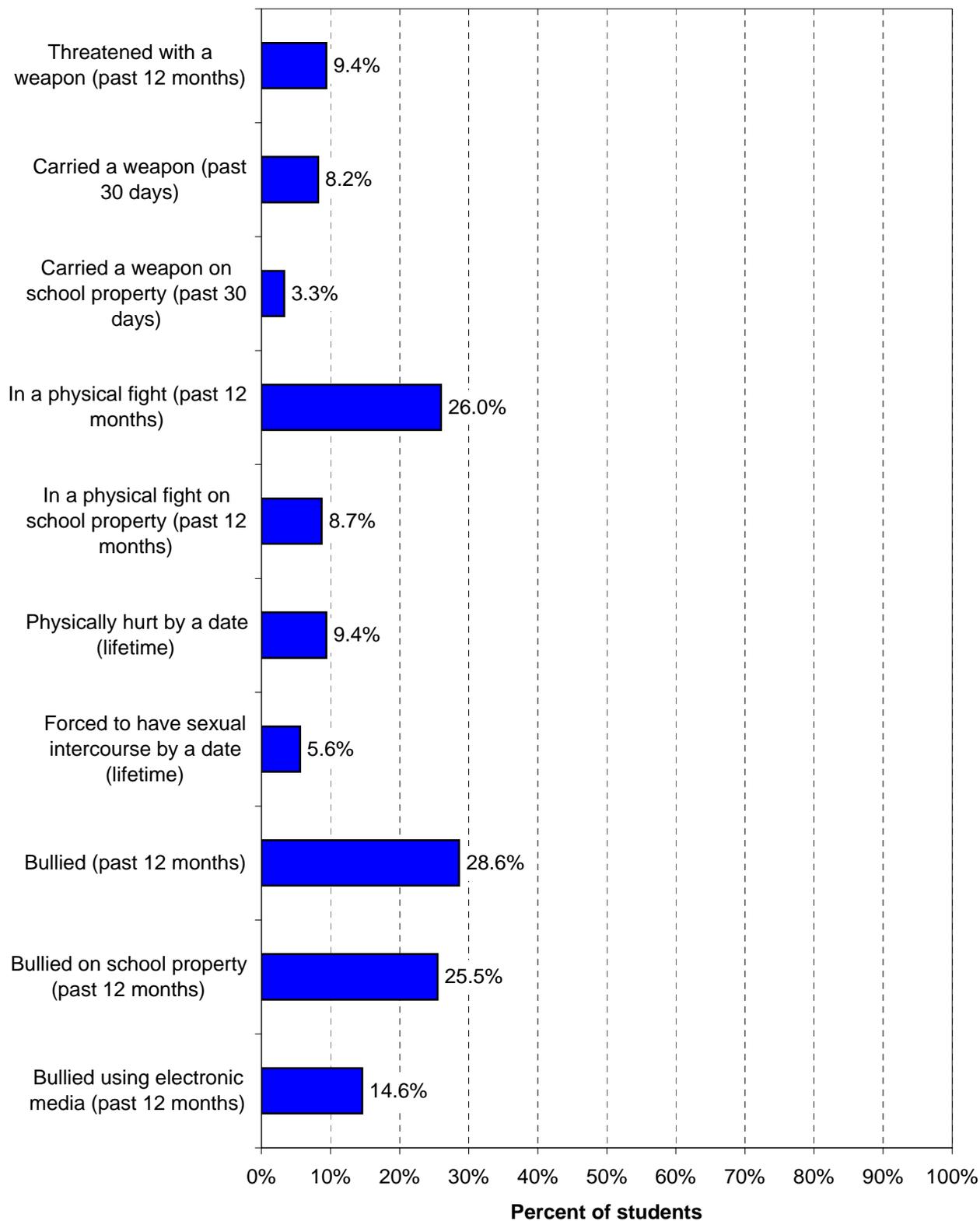
Physical Fighting

- ◆ 26.0% of high school students have been in a physical fight in the past 12 months.
- ◆ Physical fighting is much more prevalent among males, with 35.6% of males having fought in the past 12 months in comparison to 16.1% of females.
- ◆ 8.7% of students (13.0% of males and 4.2% of females) were in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months.
- ◆ Physical fighting is somewhat more prevalent among 9th grade students (29.6%) than among 12th grade students (23.0%).

The percentage of youth in a physical fight in the past 12 months is lower in the MetroWest region (26%) than in the state (29%) or nation (36%).

Weapon Carrying, Physical Fighting, Dating Violence, and Bullying among High School Students
MetroWest Region (n=16,680)

MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006



Weapons

- ◆ 9.4% of youth report having been threatened or injured with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in the past 12 months. 5.1% were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property during this time.
- ◆ Overall, 8.2% of youth report carrying a weapon in the past 30 days. The percentage of males carrying weapons (13.4%) is substantially higher than that of females (2.9%).
- ◆ 2.6% of youth carried a gun in the past 30 days.
- ◆ 3.3% of youth report carrying a weapon on school property in the past 30 days.

The percentage of youth who carried a weapon in the past 30 days in the MetroWest region (8%) is substantially lower than reported in state (15%) and national data (19%).

Bullying

- ◆ 28.6% of youth report being the victim of bullying behavior in the past 12 months; 25.5% report being the victim of bullying on school property.
- ◆ Bullying is reported by slightly more females than males (30.4% vs. 26.8%).
- ◆ Bullying is especially an issue among younger students. 37.2% of 9th grade students report bullying, whereas only 18.9% of 12th grade students report bullying.
- ◆ Electronic bullying (use of electronic media such as Internet and phone to bully, tease, or threaten) is reported by 14.6% of students. More females than males report being the victim of this form of bullying (17.0% vs. 12.1%).
- ◆ Electronic bullying is similar across grades, though slightly lower for grade 12 (12.2%) than for grade 9 (15.9%).
- ◆ A large majority (84.6%) of youth are online at least once a day, most often at home. This suggests the importance of parental monitoring of computer use, as well as educational opportunities to support online safety and reduce misuse, including online bullying.

24% of Massachusetts youth and 26% of MetroWest youth were bullied on school property in the past 12 months. (US data is not available.)

Traditional (face-to-face) bullying in MetroWest is especially a problem during the early years of high school.

While electronic bullying is less prevalent than face-to-face bullying, the differential between females (17%) and males (12%) is greater.

Dating Violence

- ◆ 9.4% of students report being physically hurt on purpose in their lifetime by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date, and 6.3% were physically hurt in the past 12 months.
- ◆ The percentage of students physically hurt by a date is similar among males and females, though slightly higher for females (10.3% vs. 8.4%). This finding is consistent with gender patterns in national data, but does not take into account the fact that females are more often seriously injured than males.
- ◆ 5.6% of youth report being forced to have sexual intercourse by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date in their lifetime (6.6% of females and 4.5% of males).
- ◆ 8.3% of youth report being forced to do “other sexual things” in their lifetime, with substantially more females reporting this than males (12.2% vs. 4.4%).

Almost one in ten students in MetroWest report being physically hurt by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date in their lifetime. Physical dating violence in the past 12 months is reported by 9% of youth nationwide and 6% of MetroWest youth (Massachusetts data is not available.)

While some males report being the victims of sexual dating violence, females are about three times as likely to report being forced to do “other sexual things.”

BEHAVIORS RELATED TO UNINTENTIONAL INJURY

In addition to violent behaviors related to intentional injury, students were asked about behaviors related to the leading causes of unintentional injury: lack of seatbelt use, lack of helmet use on bicycles, and impaired driving.

Seatbelt Use

- ◆ 7.1% of students never/rarely wear a seatbelt when riding in a car driven by someone else.
- ◆ Males are more likely than females to never/rarely wear a seatbelt (9.0% vs. 5.2%).

Helmet Use

- ◆ Of the 70.3% of students who rode a bicycle in the past 12 months, 60.8% never/rarely wore a helmet. More males than females report never/rarely wearing a helmet (66.7% vs. 52.8%).
- ◆ 12th grade students are more likely to never/rarely wear a helmet (66.2%) than 9th grade students (53.8%).

Impaired Driving

- ◆ As noted earlier, 25.2% of students report riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Riding in a car with an impaired driver does not vary by gender, but does increase substantially by grade, from 18.5% in 9th grade to 34.1% in 12th grade.
- ◆ Overall, 9.7% of youth have driven a car after drinking in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Among the 58.3% of students who drove a car, 16.6% of students report driving after drinking on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Male drivers are more likely than female drivers to report impaired driving (19.2% vs. 13.8%).
- ◆ The percentage of students reporting driving while impaired increases by grade. By 12th grade, 23.9% of youth who drive report driving after they had been drinking alcohol in the past 30 days.

MetroWest youth wear seatbelts more often than their state or national peers. Only 7% of MetroWest youth, compared with 15% of Massachusetts youth and 10% of youth nationally, never/rarely wear a seatbelt.

MetroWest youth are also more likely to wear helmets when riding bicycles. However, helmet use is still low: 61% of MetroWest youth and 83% of youth nationally who ride a bicycle never/rarely wear a helmet. (State data is not available).

Reports of riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking are similar in MetroWest (25%) in Massachusetts (27%) and in the US (28%).

About one in ten youth in the MetroWest region, in the state, and in the US report driving a car after drinking in the past 30 days.

STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUICIDE

A strong interest in student mental health was expressed by the MetroWest community. Several questions addressed student stress and depression; other items asked students about suicidal ideation and behaviors. Following national trends, reports of stress, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts in the MetroWest region are higher among females than males.

Stress

- ◆ 72.6% of youth rate their own health as “very good” or “excellent,” 22.8% rate their health as “good,” and 4.6% rate their health as “fair” or “poor.” These figures are similar for males and females, and across grades.
- ◆ 27.9% of youth report that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days. More females than males (35.2% vs. 20.5%) report stress. Reports of high levels of stress double from 9th grade (19.9%) to 12th grade (38.7%).
- ◆ School issues are the source of stress reported by the highest percentage of students (58.0%), followed by social issues (28.9%), appearance issues (27.3%), and family issues (26.9%).
- ◆ Females report substantially higher levels of stress on these issues than males. The most notable differences are with respect to school issues (68.6% vs. 47.4%) and appearance issues (41.0% vs. 13.6%).
- ◆ Stress about school issues peaks among 11th grade students (62.3%).

Mental Health and Suicide

- ◆ 20.1% of students report having felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks during the past 12 months. This symptom of depression is reported more often by females than males (25.9% vs. 14.2%), and increases from 9th grade (17.7%) to 12th grade (22.4%).
- ◆ 13.2% of youth (18.2% of females and 8.2% of males) have cut, burned, or tried to hurt themselves on purpose in the past 12 months.
- ◆ 10.0% of students have seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months. Females report suicidal ideation more often than males (11.7% vs. 8.2%).
- ◆ 7.5% of youth have made a plan about attempting suicide in the past 12 months (8.9% of females and 6.1% of males).
- ◆ Attempted suicide in the past 12 months is reported by 4.1% of students.
- ◆ Despite substantial gender differences in considering and planning suicide attempts, reports of actual attempts are more similar among females (4.5%) and males (3.7%).
- ◆ 1.6% of youth report a suicide attempt requiring medical treatment in the past 12 months, with no notable difference among females (1.6%) and males (1.5%).

Nationally, females are more likely than males to consider suicide, to plan a suicide attempt, and to attempt suicide in the past 12 months. Yet, rates of completed suicide continue to be higher among males.

In MetroWest, reports of high stress levels double from 20% in 9th grade to 39% in 12th grade. At all grade levels, females are more likely to report high stress than males. (State and national data on stress are not available.)

Fewer MetroWest youth (20%) report feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks during the past year compared with Massachusetts (27%) and the nation (29%). While this depressive symptom increases from 9th to 12th grade, it does not parallel the doubling of stress levels.

19% of Massachusetts youth and 13% of MetroWest youth report having cut, burned, or tried to hurt themselves in the past 12 months. (National data is not available.)

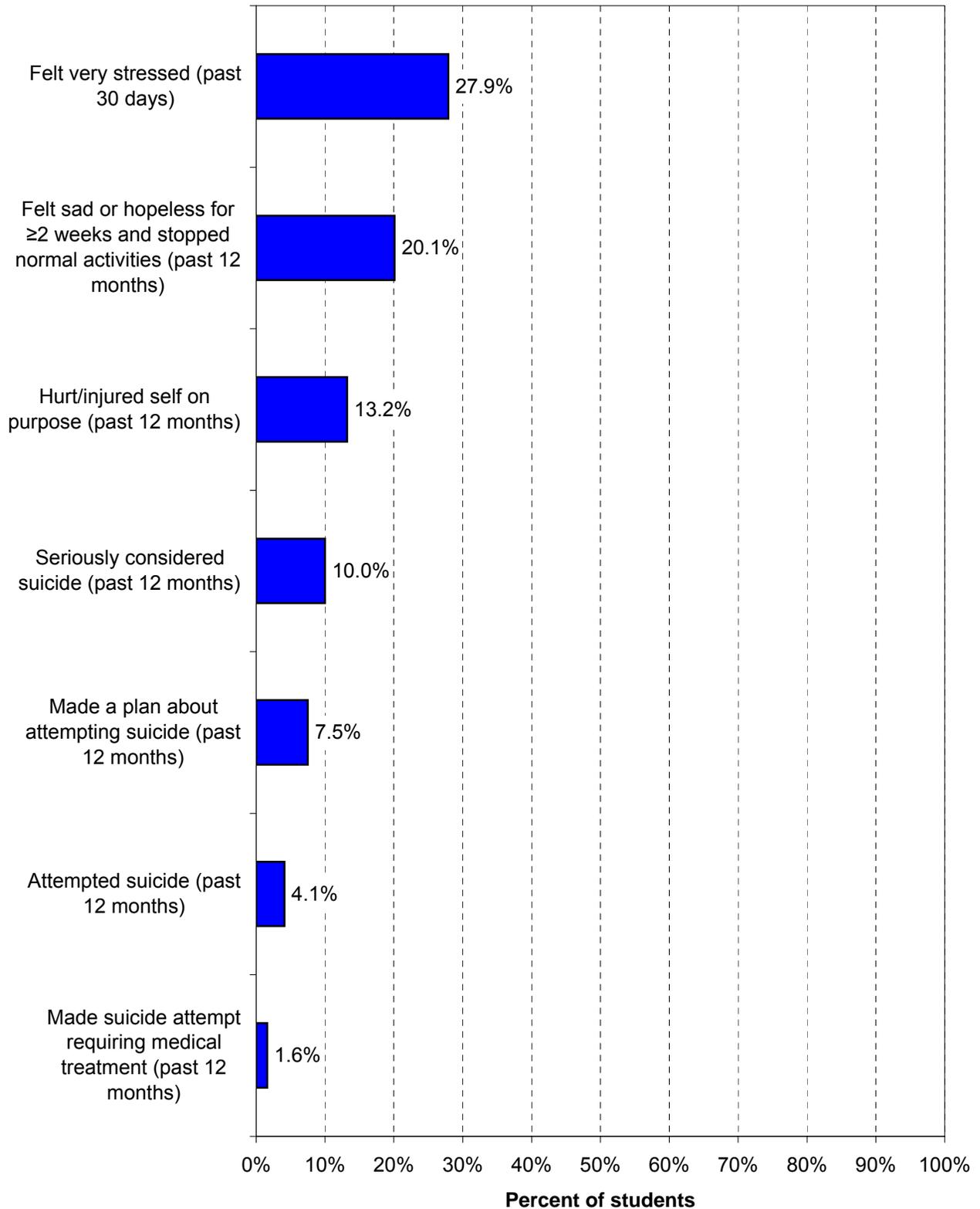
Fewer (10%) MetroWest youth say they have considered suicide in the past 12 months than youth in Massachusetts (13%) or the nation (17%).

Nationally, 8% of youth report attempting suicide in the past 12 months. Attempted suicide is slightly lower in Massachusetts (6%) and MetroWest (4%), though still affects a concerning percentage of students.

Stress, Mental Health, and Suicide among High School Students

MetroWest Region (n=16,680)

MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006



SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

In the MetroWest region, lifetime sexual intercourse is reported by 28.9% of students, increasing from 13.9% in 9th grade to 50.2% in 12th grade. Although these figures overall are lower than state and national reports, of particular concern is the fact that 26.5% of sexually active students used alcohol/drugs before having sexual intercourse the last time, and one third (33.4%) did not use a condom to prevent pregnancy or the transmission of sexually transmitted disease.

Lifetime and Current Sexual Activity

- ◆ 28.9% of youth report having had sexual intercourse in their lifetime (27.1% of females and 30.5% of males).
- ◆ 3.8% of youth had sexual intercourse for the first time prior to age 13. Similar to national patterns, early sexual intercourse is reported more often by males (5.8%) than females (1.7%).
- ◆ By 12th grade, half of all students (50.2%) have had sexual intercourse.
- ◆ 8.0% of youth have had intercourse with four or more people in their lifetime (6.0% of females and 9.8% of males). By 12th grade, 12.7% of students have had intercourse with four or more people.
- ◆ 22.3% of youth are currently sexually active (had sexual intercourse in the past 3 months). There is little difference in current sexual activity between males (22.7%) and females (21.9%).
- ◆ The percentage of youth who are currently sexually active increases from 10.0% of 9th grade students to 40.7% of 12th grade students.

Behaviors Associated with Sexual Activity

- ◆ Among the 22.3% of youth who are currently sexually active, 26.5% used alcohol or drugs before they had sexual intercourse the last time. This behavior is reported more frequently by males than females (31.3% vs. 21.6%), and does not vary substantially by grade.
- ◆ 66.6% of sexually active youth used a condom the last time they had intercourse. Condom use does not differ substantially by grade.
- ◆ Use of birth control pills among currently sexually active youth increases by grade, from 24.7% in 9th grade to 50.1% in 12th grade.
- ◆ 1.6% of all youth have ever been told by a health care provider that they have a sexually transmitted disease.
- ◆ 2.9% of all youth have ever been pregnant/gotten someone pregnant.

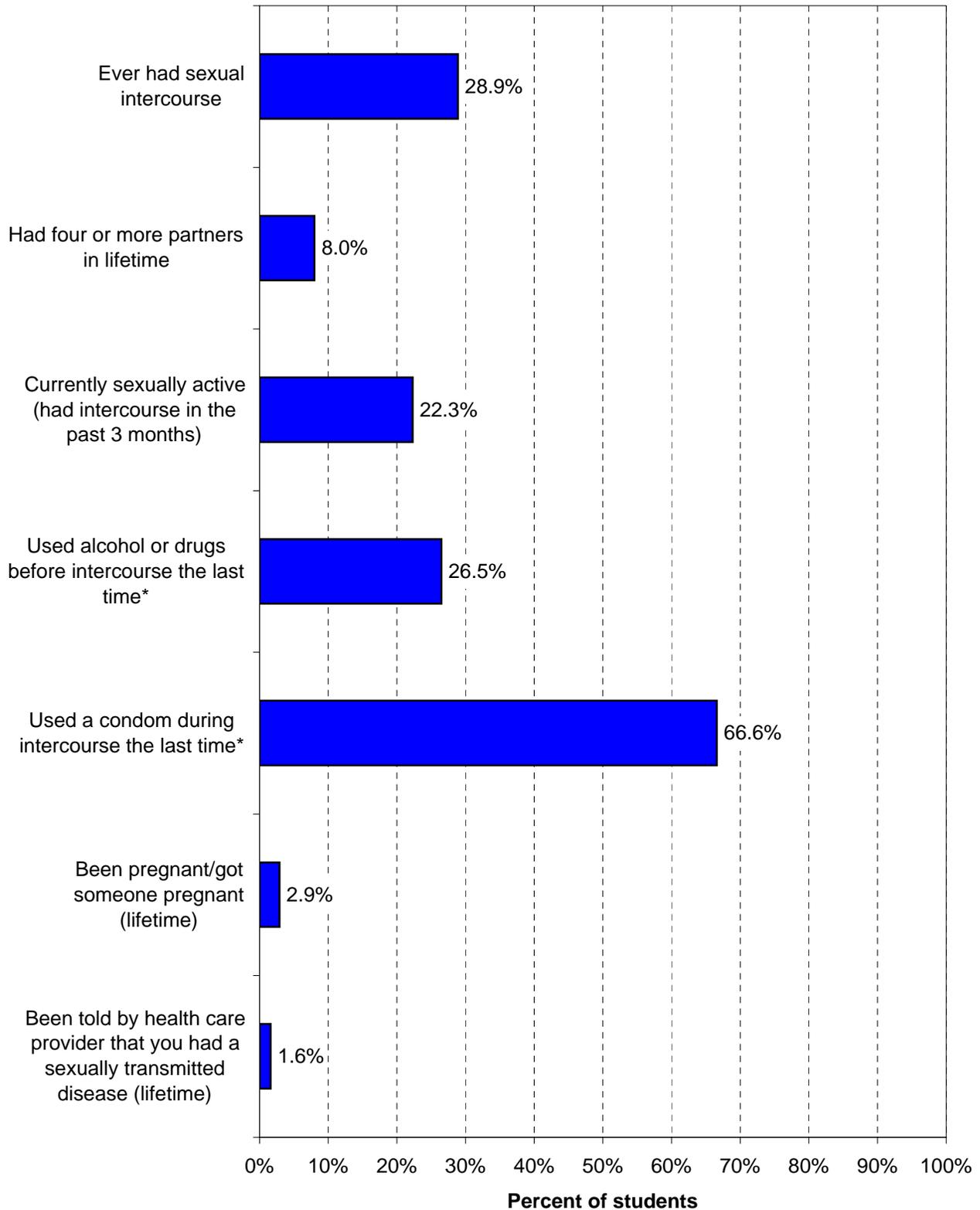
The percentage of youth in grades 9 through 12 who have ever had sexual intercourse is substantially lower for MetroWest (29%), compared with the state (45%) and the nation (47%).

About one in four (22%) MetroWest youth are currently sexually active, compared with one in three (34%) in the state and the nation.

While current sexual activity is lower in MetroWest, the proportion of sexually active students who used alcohol or drugs before their last intercourse is slightly higher for MetroWest (27%) than for the state or nation (24%).

Condom use at last intercourse in MetroWest (67%) is slightly higher than in Massachusetts (65%) and the nation (63%).

Sexual Behaviors among High School Students
MetroWest Region (n=16,680)
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006



*Among youth who are currently sexually active (had sexual intercourse in the past 3 months)

NUTRITION, WEIGHT CONTROL, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

19.9% of youth in the MetroWest Region are either at risk for becoming overweight or overweight based on their body mass index (BMI). BMI was calculated from information students provided on their height and weight. 66.3% of youth did not attain the recommended level of physical activity during the past 7 days, and 89.8% did not eat the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. While 19.9% of youth are either overweight or at risk for becoming overweight, nearly twice as many youth (39.3%) are currently trying to lose weight.

Overweight, Weight Perception, and Weight Control

- ◆ 12.2% of youth in the MetroWest Region are at risk for becoming overweight and 7.7% are overweight, based on self-reported height and weight data used to calculate body mass index.
- ◆ Using self-reported height and weight, more males than females are at risk for becoming overweight (14.0% vs. 9.8%) and overweight (10.9% vs. 4.5%).
- ◆ However, more females (27.8%) than males (22.3%) describe themselves as slightly or very overweight.
- ◆ Compared with the percentage of students describing themselves as overweight (25.1%), substantially more students report that they are currently trying to lose weight (39.3%). The proportion of students trying to lose weight is over twice as high among females (54.6%) as males (24.0%).
- ◆ 54.4% report exercising to lose weight/keep from gaining weight (64.8% of females and 44.0% of males), and 35.8% report dieting (50.3% of females and 21.3% of males) in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Females were also much more likely than males to report fasting for more than 24 hours (12.1% vs. 4.0%).
- ◆ 3.6% of youth report taking diet pills, liquids, or powders, and 3.6% report vomiting/taking laxatives to lose weight/keep from gaining weight.

Nutrition

- ◆ Only 9.7% of youth ate the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day in the 7 days preceding the survey (9.5% of males and 9.9% of females)
- ◆ 21.8% drank three or more glasses of milk per day in the 7 days preceding the survey (27.3% of males and 16.3% of females). 55.1% of youth consumed other milk/dairy products one or more times per day in the past 7 days.
- ◆ 8.0% of youth ate fast food one or more times a day in the past 7 days.
- ◆ 24.4% of youth drank soda/soft drinks at least once a day in the past 7 days.

Physical Activity

- ◆ Only 33.7% of youth meet the current recommended level of physical activity (physically active for 60 minutes per day on five or more of the past 7 days).
- ◆ More males (39.8%) than females (27.7%) meet this physical activity standard.
- ◆ 67.8% of youth (65.2% of females and 70.4% of males) played on one or more sports teams in the past 12 months.
- ◆ 61.9% of youth participate in Physical Education (PE) class on one or more days in the average school week. Of these students, 80.7% exercise or play sports for 20 or more minutes during PE class.
- ◆ 8.9% of students report no vigorous or moderate physical activity in the past 7 days. The proportion of youth reporting this increases from 5.5% in 9th grade to 13.5% in 12th grade.

Nationally, 29% of youth are either overweight or at risk for becoming overweight. The proportion of youth who are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight is lower for Massachusetts (27%), and the MetroWest region (20%).

Fewer students in MetroWest describe themselves as slightly/very overweight (25%) in comparison with Massachusetts (31%) and the nation (32%).

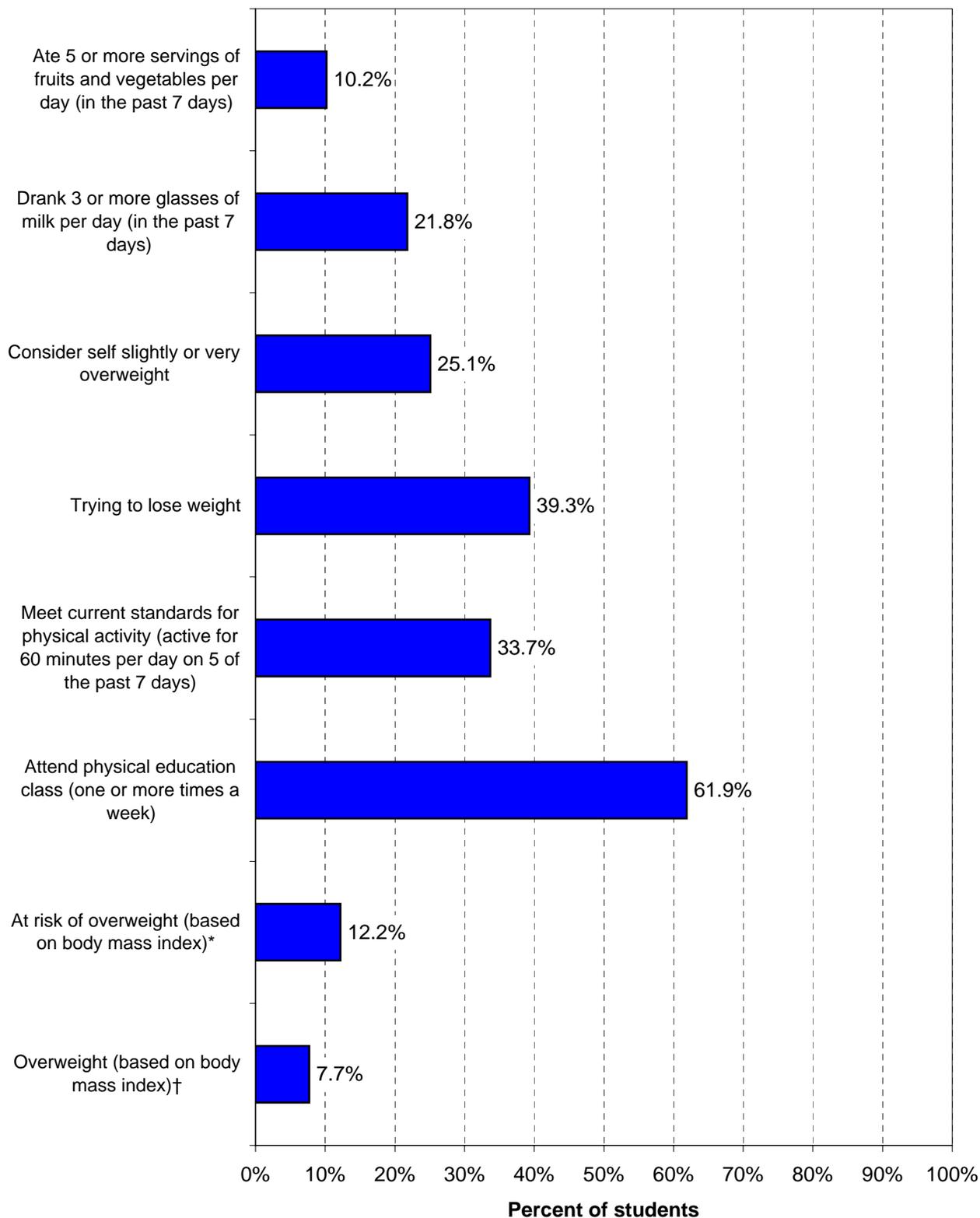
Similarly, fewer MetroWest students are trying to lose weight (39%) than in the state (47%) or nation (46%).

More MetroWest students (22%) are getting the recommended daily calcium by drinking three glasses of milk, in comparison with the state (15%) and nation (16%). (Comparable national and state data on other nutrition items are not available.)

36% of youth in the United States and 34% of youth in MetroWest meet the current recommended level of physical activity. (Massachusetts data is not available.)

The proportion of youth who attend Physical Education class in MetroWest (62%) is higher than in Massachusetts (59%) and the nation (54%).

**Nutrition, Weight Control, Physical Activity, and Overweight among High School Students
MetroWest Region (n=16,680)
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2006**



*Students who were ≥ 85 th percentile but ≤ 95 th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data

†Students who were ≥ 95 th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data

SCHOOL ATTACHMENT AND ADULT SUPPORT

School attachment reflects a student's sense of connection with the school community, and has been identified as one factor that can promote academic success and healthy behaviors.²⁻⁷ Having a stable and supportive relationship with a caring adult has also been shown to be a protective factor for positive youth development.²⁻⁷ Due to a strong interest in both of these factors from multiple school districts in the MetroWest community, questions on school attachment and adult support were added to the survey.

School Attachment

The results of the regional MWAHS show that school attachment is significantly associated with lower engagement in risk behaviors across a range of categories including violence (physical fighting and weapon carrying), substance use (tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana), and suicide-related thoughts and behavior.

- ◆ A majority of students in the MetroWest Region agreed with each of five statements reflecting elements of school attachment:
 - 82.2% of students feel safe in their school.
 - 70.9% of students feel like they are a part of their school.
 - 70.5% of students are happy to be at their school.
 - 70.3% of students feel close to people at school.
 - 61.1% of students feel that teachers treat students fairly.
- ◆ Overall school attachment does not differ substantially by gender or grade.

Adult Support

The availability of a trusted adult at school students can talk with when they have a problem has also been identified as a potential protective factor,²⁻⁷ reducing risk behaviors and contributing to school success. In the MetroWest region, students who report they could talk with an adult at school about problems are significantly less likely to engage in such behaviors as physical fighting, weapon carrying, substance use (tobacco, alcohol and other drugs), and suicide-related thoughts and behaviors. The vast majority of students report there is an adult they can talk with outside of school; however, the minority that do not have this adult support are more likely to engage in risks.

- ◆ In the MetroWest Region, 66.3% of students have at least one teacher or adult at school that they can talk to if they have a problem (69.2% of females and 63.5% of males).
- ◆ From 9th grade to 12th grade, the percentage of students reporting that they have a supportive adult at school increases from 57.9% to 76.4%.
- ◆ 88.1% of students have at least one adult outside of school to talk to about things that are important (89.6% of females and 86.7% of males).
- ◆ 45.8% of youth say the adult they can talk to outside of school is a parent/adult family member, 5.8% have a non-family adult they can talk to, and 36.6% have both a family and non-family adult they can talk to about things that are important.

The majority of MetroWest youth report strong school attachment. However, about 18% do not feel safe at school and about 30% report they do not feel a part of their school or are not happy or close to people at school. (State and national data on school attachment are not available.)

9th grade students are less likely than older students to report they have a trusted adult at school that they can turn to if they have a problem.

About one in ten students report they do not have an adult outside of school to talk to about things that are important to them.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2006 MWAHS data is an invaluable resource in determining priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of youth. Whether examined at the district level, or in the context of regional, state, and national data, the information in this report provides a strong foundation for decision-making regarding health education, policy-making, prevention programs, and treatment services. As the MWAHS initiative continues over the next decade, school and community personnel will be equipped with the data they need to work towards improving the health and safety of the MetroWest communities.

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