



Arkansas Department
of Health
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Hometown Health pilot project:

Survey, Center for Health Statistics help Boone County find problems, strategies

*by John Hofheimer
Health Writer*

Thirty-six percent of Boone County girls in grades seven through 12 think they are overweight.

That's nearly three times the actual prevalence of overweight—13 percent, according to the 1999 Boone County Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

By contrast, 24 percent of the boys described themselves as overweight—and 24 percent actually were overweight.

That those girls mistakenly think of themselves as overweight is among the useful information collected and compiled by the Youth and Adolescent Health Committee of the state Health Department's Boone County Hometown Health Improvement Project.

That information was collected from 1,808 students at Harrison, Bergman, Valley Springs, Alpena, Omaha and Lead Hill public schools--all in Boone County--who voluntarily took the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The survey was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at Atlanta.

The Arkansas Center for Health Statistics compiled and analyzed the data and provided support services.

"The whole concept behind the Hometown Health Improvement Project is to turn much of the assessment and decision making back to those who see the problems first hand at the local level," says Dr. Fay W. Boozman, M.D., director of the state Health Department.

The survey will help Boone County identify students' current health and safety habits.

Because of the success so far of the Boone County pilot program, similar projects are under consideration in Baxter, Fulton, Scott and Montgomery counties.

Measures for evaluation

Healthy lifestyles for Boone County students mean longer, more productive lives. The survey also provides the county with measures for evaluating future trends in health habits of youth. Results can now serve as a valuable tool, particularly for legislators, policy makers, county and city officials, school administrators and teachers as they make decisions about new disease-



Tools like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey help Boone County health officials and educators penetrate the fog shrouding local teenage behavior

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prevention and health-promotion policies, services, programs and educational activities.

For instance, the information about perceptions of obesity will be useful to educators to help young women get a more accurate and positive body image and head off eating disorders. Fifty-eight percent of those girls reported they were trying to lose weight and 6 percent had vomited or taken laxatives to lose weight within the previous 30 days.

Classes result

Because of those findings, a seminar on eating disorders is among those North Arkansas Community College at Harrison will conduct on troubling issues identified by the survey. That's according to Debbie Johnson, R.N., administrator of the Boone County Health Unit and coordinator of its Hometown Health Initiative. This is an example of the kinds of partnerships possible on the local level.

Implementing programs

"We've started implementing programs based on the numbers," says Johnson. "We've purchased electronic babies to put in schools because of high sexual activity." Such babies can give youngsters a glimpse of some of the less romantic, harsher realities of parenthood.

The survey showed a lot of smokeless tobacco use among the students, so other topics will include smokeless tobacco.

Other classes spurred by the survey include parenting classes and one on developing coping mechanisms for anxiety and depression, says Johnson.

Survey answers constitute a snapshot in time of public school students during spring, 1999. Stu-

dents reported about safety, diet, exercise, alcohol, tobacco and other risky behaviors.

Findings:

- Ten percent of the students indicated they had been forced to have sexual intercourse at least once during their lives. That included 8 percent of seventh graders.

- Nearly half of those who had ridden a motorcycle during the previous 12 months said they rarely or never wore a helmet. Nine out of 10 bicycle riders rarely or never wore a helmet.

- During the year prior to the survey, 17 percent of the students said they had seriously considered attempting suicide, 13 percent had made a plan and 7 percent said they had attempted suicide.

- Twenty-six percent said they had carried a weapon during the past 30 days and 32 percent had been in a physical fight during the previous 12 months.

- More than two-thirds had smoked a cigarette and two-thirds also said they had drunk alcohol. Twenty-seven percent said they had used marijuana, 9 percent had used methamphetamines and nearly a third had had sexual intercourse. Of those, 58 percent said they had used a condom during the most recent intercourse.

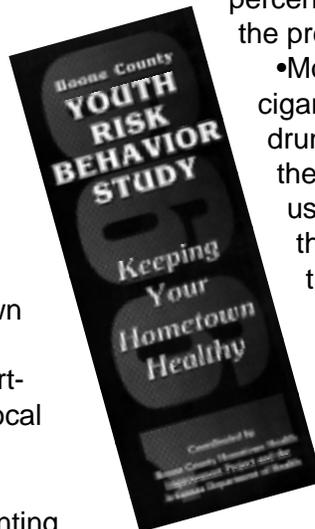
In addition to the Youth and Adolescent Health committee, the Hometown Health project includes a community workforce committee, an adult health committee and an environmental health committee, according to Johnson.

Johnson, the local unit administrator, said the community workforce committee is looking at workforce wellness issues via a survey that also includes questions from the Transitional Employment Assistance program.

"We're just getting results of the community work force survey, asking personnel directors 'What are the barriers to hiring and promoting people?'," she says.

The adult health committee is identifying barriers to county health care, the largest health problems and possible wellness programs. Johnson said survey results still were being tabulated.

The environmental committee invited experts and made assessments that resulted in a household hazardous waste disposal program. About 130 volunteers helped sort and dispose of such waste 300 residents dropped off, she said. ❖



The greater the number of limitations, the worse persons with disabilities say their health is

by Greg Potts
Arkansas BRFFS Coordinator

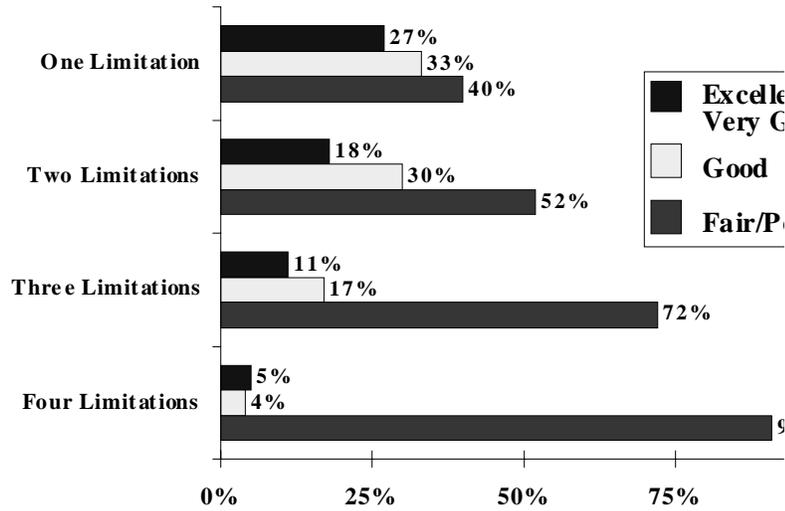
Between 34 and 43 million people in the United States have chronic disabilities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Persons with disabilities experience a variety of health problems. As a result, quality of life tends to be affected as well.

The more limitations persons with disabilities had, the more likely they were to rate their general health as "poor," according to the 1998 Arkansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey.

For example, four in 10 persons with disabilities who had only one limitation indicated they were in "fair" or "poor" health (*graph above right*) whereas 91 percent of those with four limitations rated their general health as fair or poor.

Not surprisingly, as the number of limitations increases, so does the proportion of

General Health Status by Number of Limitations

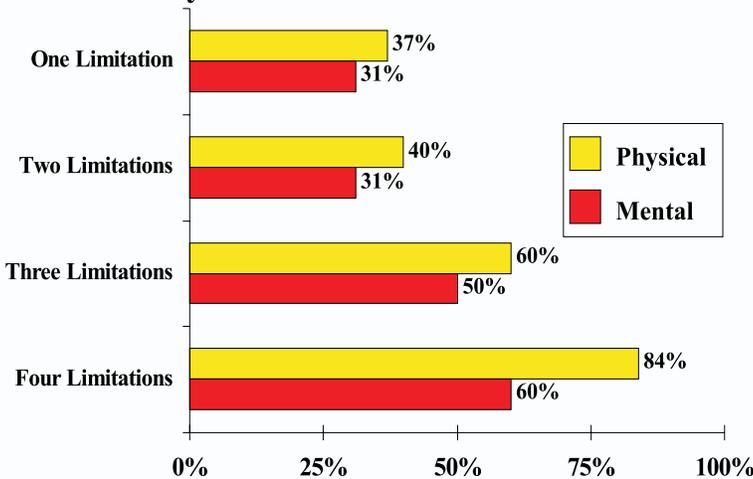


persons with disabilities indicating one or more days in which their health is affected. The graph below shows the percentages of respondents with disabilities (by number of limitations) who say they had one or more days in which their physical or mental health was not good. Overall, they were more likely

to indicate one or more days in which their *physical* health was not good, compared to mental health.

Finally, a closer examination of individual areas related to quality of life also supports the conclusion that as the number of limitations increases, quality of life tends to decrease. The graph (*next page*) shows the percentages of respondents with disabilities (by number of limitations) who indicate they had one or more days in which they felt a certain way.

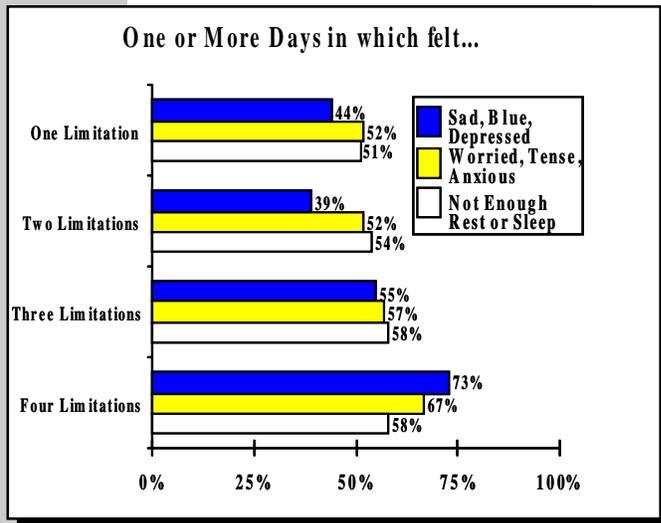
One or More Days in which Physical/Mental Health Not Good



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Limitation/health perception relationship

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Although the graph supports the conclusion, a couple of points are noteworthy. For instance, the percentage of respondents with disabilities who reported they had one or more days in which they did not get enough rest or sleep was fairly consistent, regardless of the number of limitations. In other words, sleeping problems appear to be an issue among disabled persons as a whole. Also, respondents with four or more limitations appeared to be more likely to have one or more days in which they were: 1) sad, blue, or depressed, or 2) worried, tense, or anxious, compared to those with fewer limitations.



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